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I was raised in the oldest Cree community in northern Quebec, Waskaganish First Nation, where I currently still reside. At a young age, I developed an interest in reading. I loved how books could offer me a view of the outside world. I remember reading William Golding's *The Lord of the Flies* at 14, just astounded that something like it could be written. A feeling that would continue through the years. It was this interest that led me to study Literature at Dawson College and Creative Writing at Concordia University, earning a diploma in 2009, and a B.A. in 2017. I'm currently working as an elementary school teacher in my home community. Aside from writing short stories, I also write poetry, fiction and non-fiction, and I'm currently working on a collection of poetry. Finally, family is a key aspect of my life. I am the youngest of five children. I am an auntie to three nephews, and maintaining a close relationship with my mother and siblings is important to me. I am a single mother to an awesome, hilarious, mischievous, and most loving son, Conner.

AFTER

The father came back just before it got dark, out of breath and shaking.

“Brrr, it’s so cold out there, buddy,” he said, messing up his youngest son’s hair.

“Jim, are you all right?” asked his wife, Molly. She sensed something in him, how he looked. Despite his warm parka and the layers of clothing, she could see his towering body was trembling. He whispered something he thought the others wouldn’t hear: *Wolves*. It wasn’t the cold Jim was shaking from, it was fear.

“How’s everybody?”

Their two daughters, Robyn and Jadis, without putting down the books they were reading, said they were fine.

Molly was sewing.

“Alton, get the container from the sled, please,” said Jim.

Alton dropped the book he was reading and went outside. After some time, he brought in a container and placed it in front of Jim. Connor sat by his side.

“What did you get, Dad?”

“Well, let’s see. I got two rabbits. And look at this big one.” He lifted an enormous fish from the bin.

“Whoa,” said Connor, amazed. It was a sturgeon. “You can help Alton clean it when it defrosts.” “Dad, can I go with you next time?”

“Sure, when I finish making your snowshoes.”

“Jim, no,” pleaded Molly.

Jim looked at Connor, who seemed disappointed. He realized she was right, remembering what he had seen not long before.

“When it’s summer, all right?” said Jim.

After they had finished eating the rabbit, they lay down to rest. Oil lamps lit the cabin. It had taken Jim so long to find those and they used them sparingly since they no longer had batteries, and they only lit one candle in the evenings. Tonight, the lamp was beside Robyn, who was reading.

“What are you reading, Robyn?”

“*Harry Potter*,” she replied with a smile.

“Which one?”

“The third one.”

“Oh, I remember that one. The prisoner one, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Daniel Radcliffe was so heartbreaking when Sirius died.”

“Who, Dad?”

Jim realized what he had said. He felt awful for bringing it up. “No one. Why don’t you read us a little, honey?”

Robyn read from the book. Everyone was quiet, listening. Molly was beside Jim, her body pressed against his. Robyn and Jadis shared a bed, while the boys slept on bunks, with Connor on the top and Alton on the bottom.

Jim fell asleep to the sound of his daughter’s voice, describing a world so unlike their own.

They were young when it happened. Too young to remember. Too young to grieve for a world they wouldn’t remember. What happened seemed like a great adventure to them. Connor wasn’t even born then. Alton was five, Robyn and Jadis just three and two.

Jim promised he would keep us safe. He promised he would keep us alive. And he has. He kept his promise.

I’m grateful he was able to provide. I’m grateful he was the kind of man who still hunted. Because if it hadn’t been for him, we would’ve all gone the way of everyone else around us.

We would’ve been lost too.

Jim woke in the dead of night. He quietly got out of bed to check the woodstove. The fire had almost gone out. Alton must've put the last logs in to keep warm, just like Jim had taught him to. After getting the fire going again, he checked on Connor. He had a tendency to push his blanket away but he was fine, and everyone else was, too.

He slipped back into bed with Molly and fell asleep with her long hair brushing against his face.

In the morning, Molly made a small breakfast with the fish guts from the fish the boys had cleaned, mixed with some berries they had gathered and stored from the summer. They also drank broth made from rabbit bones. The fish they would have for lunch.

While they ate, Jadis asked her father if he would be checking the houses again anytime soon.

"I'm not sure, some of the houses are snowed in. I thought it would be best to wait until it got warmer," he replied.

"Oh," she said.

Jim glanced at Molly.

"Why are you asking?"

"I was just hoping you could look for more books."
"Oh," said Jim.

"Dad can't just look for more books, dummy. He needs to look for other stuff too," said Alton.

“Now, Alton, there’s no need to call anyone dummy, here. If anyone’s a dummy, it’s me, because I don’t read as much as all of you. All of you must be smarter than me now.”

Connor giggled.

“Jadis, have you really read everything on the shelves?” asked Molly.

“Well, no, almost everything.” She glanced at the bookshelves that served as a wall, separating the parents’ bed from the children’s.

There were nearly a hundred books. The cabin was small but cozy. The table where they ate was nearer to Jim and Molly’s bed, and the woodstove was close to the door. They only kept what they needed and kept everything else in the big house during winter.

“I just feel like reading something else.”

“Hey Dad, when you go out to search the houses, can I come with you?” asked Connor.

“Uhhh,” said Jim, glancing at Molly while she shook her head no.

There was good reason to be cautious. In the beginning, when Jim searched the homes, there was an overpowering stench and he discovered it was because of the bodies. Before anyone else went inside the houses, he would wrap the bodies, take them outside and burn them. A lot of these people he had known. He made sure he took care of the bodies before he allowed any of the kids to go with him. And yet there were still some houses he hadn’t checked.

“Please, Dad, I haven’t gone with you at all,” pleaded Connor.

“All right, when it gets warmer.” Molly gave Jim an unhappy look, her brown eyes glaring at him. He smiled a little, and she did too. There was something he loved whenever she smiled at him.

“Girls, you’re both coming with me today to check the other snares. Boys, you two chop the firewood and bring some into the cabin.”

After Jim had eaten, he went outside and had a look around the yard. They lived in a cabin that he had built behind their house. He had built a fence surrounding his house long before the darkness happened. Since then, he spent a lot of time working on it, making sure it was strong. He checked the gate. In the summers, they sometimes slept in their big house but they didn’t spend much time in there.

Everyone preferred the cabin that he had built the second winter. Living in the house during the winter was just too cold.

As he walked back from the gate, he looked to the west, at the sky; he knew the sun would go down soon. Then he noticed something ahead. He thought for a moment that he saw smoke, but he looked away, shaking his head; it was not possible.

She has no idea how much she carries me. Her loving and encouraging looks push me to do what I must do to ensure

that we survive, that we live. Sometimes what I bring home isn't enough, sometimes we get hungry.

But we have survived so far.

Long before it all began, Molly had already a tendency to overstock on dry goods. I knew we would be fine for a while.

Then when it looked like the power would never turn on again, the managers of both grocery stores simply unlocked their doors and kept them that way for people to go in and take what they wanted. They emptied quickly. I took what I could. That was the last time I saw some of my friends. Some said they would go live on the land. Some said they would ride it out in their homes. Some gave up hope things would ever be the same again.

Molly kept the faith. Do what you always do: hunt, fish, set your traps. If we ration now, we'll get by for as long as we can, she said. She was right.

There was a wave of suicides. A lot of people starved. I have no idea what happened to the families who left town. And then nothing, it was just us.

Jim walked ahead of Robyn and Jadis. He pulled his sled. They had their bows slung around their shoulders. Their arrows were in a bag they had made themselves. They were becoming good hunters. They were nearly as tall as Jim, and their long braided hair fell down their backs. They were so alike they looked like twins. The three of them walked past the rows of houses, surrounded by

snow. There was no movement coming from the houses. Jim had marked with an X the ones he'd checked, and where he buried the bodies. Every now and then, they passed some he had not yet gone into.

Jim had set snares in the woods that surrounded the whole town, at different places, and he checked them every other day. He knew there would never be a shortage of rabbits. They set off in the direction where he hadn't checked for a while.

There was a rabbit in every snare he had set this time, six altogether. He was smiling as he put the rabbits in the sled and set the snares again. He was about to show his daughters how much they had when he noticed they were whispering and pointing up on the trees around them. Jim looked up. Grouse were sitting up on the branches. Jadis and Robyn placed their arrows on their bows, drew weight, aimed at two separate grouse, loosened, and the three of them watched as the birds fell while others flew away.

"Wow, pretty soon you will be able to go hunting without me," said Jim.

The girls beamed and smiled at each other, then at Jim. The girls killed some white-tailed ptarmigan they spotted before heading back home. Jim hadn't even spotted them at first. He stopped walking as soon as Robyn whispered, "Dad." Jim stood still as he watched. They dropped to their knees and once again they drew their bows together and loosened their grip. Jadis got one, while Robyn managed to kill two with one shot. They killed several more as they continued their walk home.

“Mom is going to be pleased,” said Jim as they put all the birds in the sled.

“Dad, can you sing that song? The one that played when you and Mom got married,” asked Robyn as they began walking again.

“I’m not the singer, Mom is,” he replied, laughing.

“Please,” pleaded Jadis, “I’ll sing along with you, Mom is teaching me.”

Jim grumbled but still he began to sing, and then Jadis joined in. She sounded lovely. In the small town, there was silence except their singing and the crunch of their snowshoes on the soft snow.

They were getting closer to home when Jim saw something moving toward them in the distance. He stopped. At first, he thought it was a moose. Once in a while, one would venture into town. On those occasions, everyone would help with the hunt, but he wasn’t sure if he would have enough time to get Alton and Molly. So they stood still, waiting to see which direction it would go. But as it got closer, Jim realized that it wasn’t a moose after all. It was a man.

“Robyn, Jadis, get behind me, ready your bows but do not raise them until I say,” he instructed. They did as they were told. Jim stood in front, his hand hovering over his belt where his hunting knife was. The girls stood side by side behind him, bows in hand, and they waited.

The man got closer; he was walking on his own snowshoes and pulling a longer sled than Jim had. As Jim watched closely, he realized someone was behind

the man. They stopped several feet away. The man took his hood off, revealing his face, and raised his hand.

“Watchiya,” he said. “Watchiya, we don’t mean any harm. We’ve been walking for a long time, from Eastmain. This is my son.”

Jim looked at the boy, possibly the same age as Alton. Jim took off his hood and sunglasses, and walked toward them. They shook hands.

“Watchiya, welcome. My name is Jim,” he said.

He smiled and felt amazed, he hadn’t seen anyone other than his family in so long. The man in front of him looked much older than Jim, but he was still strong.

“My name is Thomas, and this is my son, Henry. We’re so glad to see you,” he said, shaking Jim’s hand, tears forming in his eyes.

“These are my daughters. Come with us, our home is not far,” said Jim.

Thomas turned to look at Henry and they smiled at each other and hugged. They followed Jim and his daughters, and for the first time in a long time, the father felt hope for the future and for his son.

We were doing fine where we lived. We lived near the community I was raised in. Henry’s mom had passed not very long ago, and so it was just Henry and me.

One night I awoke coughing, hacking in a way that had never happened before. It was like something was trying to

come out of me. Afraid that I would wake Henry, I went outside and from the glow of the moon, I saw the blood on the snow.

Not long after, we set out walking. I hoped that we would find someone as we walked; we stopped at many camps, people whose territory I knew, but could find no one. No one alive anyway. We kept walking on, until I realized how close to Waskaganish we were. Maybe, I thought, we'd find people there.

And we did. We found that they were good people. I felt that maybe Henry would now have a chance.

And then I slept.