

ATIKAMEKW

Tracya Awashish Chachai

My name is Tracya Awashish Chachai and I come from the community of Obedjiwan. I am a curious and creative person. I am a student at the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi (UQAC) in art education. I started writing stories when I was in grade six. My dream was to be a writer. Why do I like to write? Because I feel good when I let out my imagination and it feels good to write a story or a poem. Even if I go into art education, I won't stop writing.

SOULS

According to the 700-year-old legend of a vanished people, the chief of an Indigenous tribe had arranged a marriage for his daughter. The chief's daughter was already in love with a boy from the tribe. According to the chief, if two people from the same tribe married, one of them would die and the other one's family would be cursed. The chief's daughter decided to marry her beloved in secret. The chief tried to find the girl and found her far from the village. He found out that they were getting married. The chief wanted to interrupt the wedding, but it was too late. His daughter died right after the two kissed. After crying for his daughter, the chief decided to banish the boy and his entire family from his tribe and told him never to return to the village. The legend says that one day the souls of the girl and the boy will come together, and everything will depend on them: will they succeed in breaking the curse?

In a village a five-hour drive away from the nearest town, Logan, a 17-year-old girl, prepares to go to school with her boyfriend, Alaric. Logan feels weird and she

doesn't know what's going on, so she decides not to go to school. Alaric says, "You haven't felt well for a few days. Do you want me to take you to the hospital?" She says, "No, I'm fine. I'm just going to lie down in my room." Alaric goes to school alone. Logan returns to her room, and she rests on her bed for a few hours. She hears a truck backing up next to her house and sees her new neighbours. She notices a rebellious-looking boy the same age as her looking at her house.

The boy sees Logan through his bedroom window. She hides and tries to go back to sleep.

The next day, Logan returns to school. It's the new neighbour's first day of school, and Logan's boyfriend pushes him. Logan helps the boy to his feet. The boy says, "Thank you! Are you Logan? I'm Samuel. I just moved next door to you." Logan says, "Hi, Samuel. Yes, I'm Logan." Samuel continues to walk to his locker, but he keeps turning his head to look at Logan. The bell rings and class begins. Samuel enters his classroom and sees Logan in the back. The teacher tells him to sit next to her. The teacher asks all students to write a love poem or a sad poem, and they have to read it before the bell rings. Forty-five minutes later, the teacher asks Samuel to read his poem in front of the class. He is embarrassed, but he still proceeds with the reading.

*The smell of flowers reminds me of your perfume
Smooth hair passes by my face
I can feel your warmth next to me
Your cheerful face comforts me*

*I feel like I've known you before
But in another time or in a dream
Now, you are here in front of me and I feel complete*

All the students look at Samuel and they applaud his beautiful poem. The bell rings and Samuel rushes out of the classroom. He avoids Logan for the rest of the day. Logan runs to Samuel. "Samuel! Hi! I wanted to know if you wanted to come to a party organized by one of my friends?" He accepts the invitation and runs home.

When he gets home, he wonders what to put on for the evening. He tries on all the clothes in his closet and ends up putting on only jeans and a sweater. His mother calls him to tell him that dinner is ready. He goes down to eat and his mother asks him why he's in a hurry. Samuel tells her what happened at school with Logan. His mother is happy that he made a friend on his first day of school, and she gives him advice on girls, but Samuel doesn't listen to his mother. After dinner, he rushes to his room to get ready. As he's ready to leave, his mother gives him the keys to the car to go to the party. He leaves with the car and goes to the party at the address Logan gave him.

At the party, Samuel is nervous about seeing Logan again. He sees her near the stairs with Alaric. She sees Samuel and says hi. Alaric is jealous; he doesn't really like the new guy. Alaric pushes Samuel so that he knows that his girlfriend is already taken. Logan asks Alaric to calm down and she goes outside with Samuel. She

brings Samuel to the beach. They take off their shoes and walk quietly around, chatting.

Samuel asks, "So who is Logan?"

"My family has lived here for generations. What my grandfather told me was that, in the past, my tribe lived with a people that no longer exists today and they left to come here. My family is traditional, and has always told me legends about our culture. How about you?"

"My family is unlucky. It seems like we have been cursed. My grandparents had a car accident. My father died before I was born. There's just me and my mother left."

"When you talk about a curse, what exactly do you mean?"

"I don't know... My whole family is affected by it, and it's been going on for a very long time."

A few minutes later, they quietly return to the party. Suddenly, they feel bad. Their heads turn and they both faint. They stand up and they look straight into each other's eyes. Samuel runs to the car, and he quickly goes back home. Logan still is lightheaded, and she asks Alaric to take her home. When she gets home, she sees Samuel's car. She wants to go see him, but she decides to go back to sleep. She looks at the window of Samuel's room: the light is off, so she gets ready to sleep. Tomorrow, she will go talk to Samuel.

The next day, Logan can't stop thinking about her dream. She dreamed of an ancient time. She saw a girl and a boy getting married, but the girl died after they kissed. Logan tells her grandmother about her dream.

Her grandmother says, "My dear girl, your dream is special. In fact, it is not a dream, but an inner life. When I was young, my mother told me a legend, about a girl and a boy who marry without their tribe knowing, because at one time marrying a person from the same tribe was forbidden." Without saying anything, Logan goes to see Samuel, because things have been happening to her since he arrived. Logan rings and Samuel opens the door. He is surprised to see Logan. Logan enters the house uninvited. She says, "I have to talk to you, it's urgent!"

"What's the matter?"

"Since you've been here, something has been happening to me, and I don't know what it is. I need to know if you had a dream like me. A girl and a boy get married and the girl dies after they kiss."

"Actually, yes, I had that dream last night. And it's not just that. Logan, I'm starting to have feelings for you. When I saw you at school, at first sight, my heart was beating so hard that I thought it was going to stop. When you spoke to me, your voice seemed as sweet as a bird's song. Not to mention your pale eyes and curly dark brown hair. Logan, I love you."

Logan looks at Samuel. She is speechless, only her heartbeats can be heard. She goes to Samuel and kisses him. Suddenly, Alaric comes into the house, and he hits Samuel. Samuel is on the ground and Alaric continues to hit him. Logan tries to stop the fight, but she loses consciousness. Samuel and Alaric help Logan, but she doesn't wake up. Alaric takes her back home.

Days go by and Logan doesn't wake up. Samuel stays next to her, waiting for her to wake up. He remains silent, and sometimes he talks to Logan. One afternoon, he visits Logan with a book in his hand. He says, "Hi, Logan, I brought a book for you. It's a collection of poems and I'd like to read you one that I really like. It is by Louis-Karl Picard-Siouï."

*my fingers caress the keys
I fill up on memories
let myself be tossed by the voices
I skim yesterday's headlines
three thoughts to ground myself:*

*time that never stops ending
with an immaculate perfection
of what remains of me*

*a deserved return
a familiar land*

After Samuel finishes reading the poem, Logan's grandmother enters the room. She explains Logan's dream. She suggests that Samuel go to a shaman in the village to ask him what is going on. The grandmother says, "Be careful! The shaman that I'm talking about, he's powerful. When I was young, he warned me that something would happen to my little girl and that a young boy would come to save her." Samuel is surprised by this story. He decides to go to the shaman's place at the

address that the grandmother gave him, but before he leaves, he gives Logan a kiss, and whispers in her ear, “I will save you, I will do anything to make you wake up.”

He takes his mother’s car to go meet the shaman, because the shaman lives off the reserve. On the highway, the scenery is beautiful. You see mountains and there are a lot of fir trees. He turns left, the road ends, and he needs to walk a good kilometre to reach the shaman’s house. When he gets there, he knocks on the door, but no one answers. He goes around and sees him there. He walks slowly because the shaman is praying.

Before Samuel gets to say a word, the shaman speaks to him. “Hi, Samuel. I guess you came here for the girl? And for the dream you both had?”

Samuel replies, “How did you know?”

The shaman looks at Samuel and smiles at him. With a wave, he asks him to join him and sit in front of him. He purifies him with sage to push away evil spirits. Then he does a ritual to show him what he needs to know. Samuel begins to feel bad and suddenly he loses consciousness. While the shaman waits for him to wake up, Samuel has a vision like the one in his dreams. He sees what his great-great-great-grandfather did.

Samuel wakes up and says, “It’s because of my ancestor, everything that happened to my family. I knew it was a curse, but what about Logan? The girl that my ancestor wanted to marry, was she the chief’s daughter?”

The shaman says, “Yes, your path was to break your family’s current curse and the only thing left to do is a

sacrifice. Not just any sacrifice: the death of a person, of a soulmate.”

Samuel catches his breath and says, “If I understand correctly, either Logan or I have to make a sacrifice, but Logan is in a coma.” Without adding anything, Samuel knows what to do. The shaman tells Samuel to leave now, and he wishes him good luck. Samuel returns to his car and goes back to the village to say goodbye to Logan.

Before going to see Logan, he approaches his mother, who is sitting in the living room, and kisses her. “I love you, Mom, and I hope one day you’ll pull through without me.” His mother looks strange, she doesn’t understand what’s happening. He goes to see Logan, who’s still in bed in her room. He looks at her one last time to remember her face, and puts a letter in her hand so she can read it once she wakes up. He leaves the house and runs to the beach where they walked together. Samuel stands for a long time watching the sunset. He rushes toward the big waves that carry him to the bottom.

Logan wakes up. She doesn’t know what happened. She feels the envelope in her hand, and she begins to read.

*The smell of flowers reminds me of your perfume
Smooth hair passes by my face
I can feel your warmth next to me
Your cheerful face comforts me
I feel like I've known you before
But in another time or in a dream
Now, you are here in front of me and I feel complete*

That poem I wrote at school was for you. I'm sorry, but I hope you understand why I did this. Your grandmother will explain everything. Know that I love you with all my heart. I'll see you soon, but in another world.

Logan understood. She cries and screams so loudly that Samuel's mother hears her. A few days later, the police find Samuel's body, and the next day, the funeral takes place at his home. Logan feels so sad, but she understands why Samuel did what he did. She has a picture in her hand, and she puts it in Samuel's motionless hand. It's not just a picture, it's a print-out of an ultrasound image.