

JENNIFER DELESKIE
(NOT) A METAPHOR

THE SECOND SIGN OF TROUBLE was when Anna texted to say she wasn't free for lunch. Lee Morin had been having lunch with Anna Donald at Stuart House every Thursday for the last two years, since Lee started her master's degree and Anna found out she was from a town only forty kilometres away from hers. Lee first noticed Anna looking at the still-healing infinity sign tattooed on her wrist—the Métis emblem—and saw the recognition in her eyes. Us *neechies* need to stick together, Anna said, catching her by the arm and squiring her across campus to the grad club. The word *neechie*—friend—glowed like a warm little ember in Lee's chest, making her feel, at last, as if she were home.

They sat drinking sangria and eating sticky buffalo wings and carrot sticks, and Anna started in right away with the questions, naming all the other Morins she knew and asking if they were Lee's relations. Lee made it clear pretty quick that she didn't like talking about her family—too much trauma—and Anna backed down just as quickly. I didn't mean to trigger anything, she said. She knew plenty of fucked-up families.

Lee's reticence didn't deter Anna. On the contrary, it seemed to elicit an immediate intimacy between them, as if Lee were entrusting her with a secret. Anna was ten years older and had been at the academia game longer. She even had a tenure-track position waiting for her at the University of Saskatchewan as soon as she defended her dissertation. She explained her research over their first lunch—something about resource pressure north of the Red Deer River during the Late Archaic—and Lee listened politely, asking one or two questions that she hoped weren't stupid. Anna was Cree.

R u ok? Lee texted back, adding a double pink heart emoji that she immediately regretted. She had abused emojis in high school, when she was a different person, and now she only allowed herself to use them ironically. The ease with which she slipped back into the habits of another life gave her gut a twist, and for a moment she felt as if her present-day self were only a

flickering hologram laid thinly over her true, monstrous form.

Anna didn't respond right away. Lee lay in bed with the phone on her chest and stared up at the ceiling. She felt as if she were floating on the sea of empty boxes that lay scattered around her floor. She thought about Anna's bedroom, which was painted a warm cinnamon brown and decorated with framed prints and wall hangings. She practically moved in with Anna during her program, preferring her cozy and orderly apartment to her own. It amazed Lee to think that Anna would still be there, cooking dinner and playing with her cat Shinji, after she, herself, was gone.

The first sign of trouble was on Saturday, which was the last time she saw Anna. They ate vegetarian chili and watched a Miyazaki film. Normally they shared the couch, with Lee's legs flung over Anna's lap or Anna's head resting casually on Lee's shoulder, but that evening Anna chose to sit on the floor. When the movie ended, she brought up Lee's family again. She'd done it once or twice since their first lunch, asking gentle, leading questions about people she might know from Lee's hometown, but this time she paced the carpet and hectored Lee, scaring Shinji into hiding under the coffee table. Lee said she was being disrespectful, but she refused to back down, so Lee finally left. They'd only exchanged a few texts since then, but it never occurred to Lee that Anna would cancel lunch the day before her thesis defence and five days before she moved away forever.

Lee was her middle name. Her first name was Kaitlynn, which she hated. It was a gauche and unremarkable name, dragging a trail of associations behind it like tin cans: bible camp, music lessons, a boyfriend named Cory, whiteness. As soon as Lee left home for undergrad, moving to a big eastern city where she didn't speak the language, made no lasting friends, and was too scared to venture more than three or four blocks from campus, she jettisoned Kaitlynn like a used-up tube of lip gloss. She liked Lee. The name evoked a certain ruggedness and suggested a different kind of upbringing from the one she'd had. People assumed she was outdoorsy.

Lee's text was marked read at 8:35, but Anna still hadn't responded at 9:45. Lee concentrated on her phone, willing it to chime. When it finally did, relief rushed through her like a sedative, and Lee chastised herself for being paranoid. But the text wasn't from Anna; it was from Ernie, her advisor, asking her to drop by his office that day. The sick, hollow feeling returned. Lee's roommate Colin woke up and began moving around the apartment, showering, and banging drawers in the kitchen. Now she was trapped in her

room until he left. When she tried to explain her thesis to him, shortly after he moved in, she ended up crying in the bathroom. He kept redefining the parameters of what she was saying, forcing her nuanced and complex ideas into tiny little positivist strictures where they suffocated and died. Over the last ten months she'd spent an inordinate amount of energy avoiding him at home and in the department—a thankless and exhausting task that was rendered even more impossible by the fact that they'd been assigned a shared office space.

Lee's thesis was titled "Decolonization *Is* a Metaphor: Toward a New Semiotics of Plains Prehistory." At first the title had been a joke—a cheeky riff on a famous paper by Tuck and Yang that was the starting point for anyone interested in writing about Indigeneity and decolonization. But the further Lee travelled along the theoretical pathways laid out by de Saussure, Kristeva, and van Leeuwen, the more apt the title seemed, and it stuck. Her central premise was that the past was always a construction of the present, created by the very words used to describe and analyze it. The title itself gave Lee a little thrill every time she thought about it. It was validating in a recursive sort of way; only someone entitled to mess with Tuck and Yang would ever dare do so. It would be even better if she could find an Indigenous advisor to sign off on it.

Anna told Lee about Ernie during their second or third lunch. He was wrapping up a heritage program close to the rez he grew up on, which was why Lee never met him at any of the beginning-of-the-year events. Ernie was intense, Anna said. They had a thing for a while, but neither of them was ready to commit, and his sense of humour was shit anyway. Lee finally met him at an alternative-to-Thanksgiving feast put on by the First People's House. She noticed him before Anna pointed him out. Narrow-faced, deeply tanned, with small oval glasses perched low on the bridge of his nose like John Lennon. Anna brought her over to say hello, and Lee stood over him awkwardly, balancing her bannock taco on a paper plate while Anna explained who she was and where she was from. Even though Ernie was seated, it seemed like he was looking down his nose at her. For a few weeks after that, Lee actively avoided Ernie as she worked up the courage to approach him about supervising her thesis. His office was right next to Anna's, so Lee began walking the long way around the department to avoid passing his open door.

At first he said no. He was only a sessional, and he didn't really su-

pervise grad students. But my thesis is on Plains archaeology, and you're a Plains archaeologist, she said. Plus, it doesn't make sense for my advisory committee to be all white. She stared down at her hands when she said it, acutely conscious of how pale and boneless they looked in comparison to his hands, which were large-knuckled, brown, and calloused. This sounds too heavy on theory for me, he said. Find someone in philosophy or anthropology. The last bit stung. Anthropology was a colonizer discipline. But Anna must have talked to him because a few days later he sent a terse message requesting her proposal and bibliography.

When she went to his office a few days later to talk about her proposal, Lee saw a copy of her bibliography marked up in red. There were a few question marks on it, and, scrawled in the margin beside *Anti-Oedipus*, a big red *seriously?* There's no Yellowhorn on here, he said, frowning. Lee's cheeks started to burn, and she knew her scalp had to be practically fluorescent under the translucent stubble of her undercut. I think I accidentally gave you the wrong file, she said. Before she could rush back to her office to google Yellowhorn, Ernie stopped her, saying, This is going to be a hard sell for me. If I thought the past was just some kind of projection of the present, I wouldn't be in this line of work.

She met Anna for lunch afterward. You weren't joking about Ernie being intense, she said, and Anna grinned, as in, what did he do this time? But Anna, too, seemed uncomfortable when Lee articulated her ideas about the past being a social construct. I mean, sure, Anna said, we have to keep our implicit biases in mind at every stage of our work—from deciding where to survey, to what material we think is worthy of documenting, to how we treat cultural material in the lab—but that doesn't mean it's all made up. Lee, hurt that Anna wasn't taking her side, persisted. The entire discipline of archaeology is based on settler ideology, she said. If we can't tell different stories, then how are we supposed to decolonize the past? Anna looked at Lee with her head cocked and said, Just what is it you think I'm doing?

Anna spent the summers running survey and salvage crews for the Ministry of Transportation, driving all over the province in a battered Dodge Ram with Avril Lavigne blaring from the tinny speakers. Every so often one of her crew members would uncover something special, and Anna would call up the chief of the nearest rez. That Chief Douglas? she'd say. Anna Donald here. I'm up near the oil rig on Ralston Road . . . yeah, lots of tent rings, but we're gonna make sure nobody disturbs 'em. Listen, you know we're digging

some test pits out here. One of my crew just found a fragment that looks like it's from a rattle . . . yup, that's what I'm thinking—someone probably hid it. I'm gonna take a few pictures, if it's okay with you, and tomorrow I can bring you and some elders out to have a look so we can decide what to do. Yeah, we got it protected, and only Jordon Stralight touched it. Yup, he's a good worker when he's not on his goddamn phone. Oops, excuse me. Anna made dozens of these calls and knew just about every chief in the province, or at least that's how it seemed to Lee.

Lee worked on one of Anna's crews her first summer. The days started early and ended late, and the work was physically exhausting and boring. She might not have minded if she'd been able to fall into the jokey camaraderie of the crew, but she hadn't. She told herself it was because she was a grad student, and the rest of the crew—mostly Cree and Blackfoot kids from a local college—were intimidated by her, but she knew that wasn't really the reason. The truth was that she was bad at fieldwork and was probably even a liability for the team, which had to work quickly to finish contracts on time. The rest of the crew had figured out the trick of picking out significant features in the landscape—patterns in scatterings of rocks and traces of post holes in the ground—and they were good at the technical stuff, too, like staking out grids and working the transit. Lee never got the hang of any of it, and she could never quite convince herself that the things she found in or on the ground had any meaningful connection to the people who left them there. Trying to tap into their long-vanished realities by examining wear patterns on a stone tool or counting fossilized pollen in a core sample struck Lee as both pointless and dangerous. The past was just stories and metaphors. Some stories were good because they were emancipatory, and some were bad because they were fascist. Stories that claimed their authority through science fell into the latter category; they were Procrustean beds, mercilessly weighing and measuring, stretching and trimming, until the past was transformed into a stale and predictable thing that led, inexorably, to the horrifying present.

The following spring Anna told Lee that some of her contracts had been cut, so she couldn't hire her back. She suggested Lee apply for a new summer research grant she'd heard about, which was earmarked for an Indigenous grad student in the social sciences. Lee applied and won the grant, and she spent the summer in the library where she was, in truth, happier. After that, Anna's fieldwork was always a delicate subject, like bruised skin

that couldn't be pressed on too firmly.

At 10:30, when Colin finally left, Lee got dressed, walked to the bus stop, and caught an almost empty shuttle to campus. She was planning to spend the morning preparing for her defence and then meet Anna for their last lunch together, but now her day was ruined. There was no hope of being able to concentrate on her defence, but she decided to go through the motions anyway. She wasn't sure what else to do.

The campus was an ugly confluence of concrete buildings, parking lots, and uninspiring footpaths. Lee set off in the direction of the library rather than the department because she and Colin had a tacit arrangement that she would avoid the office in the morning and that he would give it up in the afternoon. When Lee got to the library, she discovered that her carrel was occupied by an undergrad with bad skin. He'd taken the books she'd placed on it months earlier in a proprietary gesture and stacked them on a nearby cart. Lee gathered up the books, rage rising in her like a red tide, and dropped them on the carrel's upper shelf, pausing for a moment to appreciate the little shit's look of startled vexation. All the other carrels had been claimed by that late hour, so she stormed across the parched commons to the Department of Archaeology, which was located on the seventh floor of the Earth Sciences building, layered between the geologists and the atmospheric scientists.

Most of the students were already gone for the summer, and a gloom hung over the building. Lee had a strong sense of displacement, as if she, too, should be gone, and this made her recall a recurring dream from early childhood, in which she had been abandoned by her parents in the family home with a terrifying giant, and every possible pathway to escape had vanished. Upon reaching her office, she discovered that Colin wasn't there and that the door was locked. She searched her pockets for her key, even though she knew it was at the bottom of a ceramic mug on her desk that she used as a pen holder. She eventually gave up, walked the long way to reception—avoiding both Anna and Ernie for the time being—and asked the secretary to let her in. The secretary—either Linda or Susan, she'd never been sure which was which—took a quick glance behind her toward Mark Elliott's office, as if she needed the head of the department's permission to unlock a door, and then retrieved the keys from a drawer and pushed back from her desk. She led Lee the short way through the department, past Anna and Ernie's offices. The door to Anna's office was open, but Anna wasn't inside, and Lee

heard her voice from behind Ernie's closed door.

Maybe the Ministry cut more of Anna's contracts, Lee thought, reaching for an explanation that would quell the rising panic in her chest. Ernie had government connections through his heritage work, and he and Anna knew many of the same people. Maybe that was why Anna couldn't make lunch and why she hadn't responded to her text. But this explanation did nothing to lessen her certainty that Anna and Ernie were, at that moment, talking about her. She and Anna had shared almost everything for the last two years. If her business were in trouble, then she would have said something.

Did someone contact you about tomorrow? Linda—or Susan—said after unlocking the door. Lee frowned and shook her head. I haven't really been checking my email, she said. The secretary spoke in a conspiratorial whisper. I heard Mark on the phone this morning saying your defence would have to be delayed. If you invited anybody, you should tell them. Panic inflated inside Lee's chest, and for a moment she couldn't think of anything to say. Then she said, I know. I asked for it to be delayed.

Lee listened to the secretary's footsteps fade off down the corridor, bracing herself against the doorframe. She felt as if she were on a tiny island in a storm and moving forward or backward would mean being crushed under the waves. When the feeling was mostly gone, she entered her office, closed the door, and sat at her desk. She took the phone from her pocket and checked her messages—something she hadn't allowed herself to do during the bus ride or the walk across campus. There was still nothing from Anna, and the sensation of being so near and yet so far from her filled Lee's head with static. She knew there must be a message from Ernie or Mark in her inbox explaining why her defence was delayed, but she couldn't read it yet. She checked twitter instead, her fingers opening the app by habit. Lee hadn't posted anything for almost twenty-four hours—an infinity in twitter years—but despite her inactivity, she had forty-three new notifications.

Lee tweeted under the handle @metis_nebula, shitposting about social theory, opining about policies impacting NDN folk, smacking down colonizers, and boosting Indigenous writers, artists, academics, and activists. She drew plenty of haters, but she chain blocked liberally, and her supporters far outnumbered the trolls. Her profile rose in part because of her frequent guest appearances on Anna's monthly podcast, *Go ask Aunty*, which combined Cree lessons, current affairs, and in-depth plot reviews of whatever anime they happened to be bingeing on. The podcast only had about 600

regular subscribers, but each subscriber seemed to translate into a few hundred twitter followers, and Lee eventually accumulated over 13,000. Colin was among them, which made her uneasy, and several people from her hometown also followed her, including a handful of Morins. Occasionally someone would DM her, trying to place her in their vast and intricate constellation of cousins, but Lee never answered. If they persisted, she blocked them.

She ignored her notifications for the time being, unwilling to discover what prompted them, and skimmed her feed. Her gaze snagged on a post from a well-known Anishinaabe artist. *When people can't or won't answer questions about their kinship, they've already told you who they are.* It had been posted less than two hours earlier, and it already had twenty-four comments and sixty-two likes, including one from Anna. Lee didn't open the thread. She turned off her phone, put her head on the desk, and closed her eyes.

Her mother was a Reimer. There were lots of Reimers where she was from, all of them Mennonite—at least originally. Now they were mostly just garden-variety Christians—the kind who post uplifting scripture passages on Instagram and have no qualms about late capitalism. Lee inherited her mother's fair skin and hair as well as her broad and—she thought—bland face, which could be coaxed into a sort of conventional prettiness with some effort, but she didn't like looking like a Reimer. Whenever she saw news footage of neo-Nazis, anti-choicers, or gun-rights activists, she was always struck by how closely she resembled them. In the first weeks of grad school, she shaved her head on the sides, leaving the hair long on top. Now she had both an eyebrow piercing and a septum ring.

Her father was a Morin, which was also a common name where she was from. The Morins in her town were Métis, like the Garneaus, Gauthiers, Loyers, and Rheaults. However, her father wasn't from her town; he had moved out west in the 1990s, when jobs in the pulp and paper industry were plentiful, and his parents had followed later, when Lee was born. Lee was occasionally teased at her all-white school because of her name, but no Morin from her hometown ever mistook her for one of their own.

When she was younger, Lee used to fantasize that the thing that made her special was buried by successive generations of Morins and Reimers. She wasn't sure what it was, and her ideas varied between a vague and romantic family history of madness, the discovery of a famous ancestor, or—

when she got a little older—proof that she wasn't just a generic white girl. It didn't seem impossible. Her friend Chloe Gerber's father discovered that his grandmother was Jewish, and he ended up receiving a settlement from the German government for property stolen during the war. Lee didn't think she had any Jewish heritage, but she did feel like something had been stolen from her, and this feeling persisted like an itch. In the second year of undergrad she took a class on biological anthropology, in which she learned about some specific features of Indigenous dental morphology. When she was back home at Christmas, she asked her senile and compliant grandfather if she could examine the backsides of his teeth. Her grandfather obligingly slipped the bridge from his mouth and held it out to her in cupped hands. Her disappointment was profound, but so was her embarrassment. By then she knew that genealogies were just stories people made up about themselves.

Lee didn't set out to make up a story about herself. It happened naturally and spontaneously at field school in Honduras during the summer between her third and fourth year. Travelling outside of the country for the first time was more anxiety-producing than she anticipated, and her initial enthusiasm was snuffed out by the oppressive heat, the unfamiliarity of the food, and the dirtiness of the town. By the third or fourth day, when the other participants had clotted into friend groups and were already sharing in-jokes, Lee was fantasizing about flying home. She affected a detached and disinterested attitude to cover her discomfort, taking frequent smoke breaks—a newly acquired habit—and wearing earbuds most of the time. Finally, the Black girl from Guelph—Courtney or Lindsey—asked if there was something wrong. It was so obviously done out of a sense of duty—they had sat beside each other on the short flight from Miami to Tegucigalpa and shared some biographical details until their conversation awkwardly dried up—that tears flooded Lee's eyes. Embarrassed, she spontaneously said that she found digging up Mayan artifacts uncomfortable, especially since the project was led by a white director. She wished there were Mayan crew members, or—better yet—an elder on hand to provide spiritual and cultural context. Something changed in the girl's face. Her lips parted, and she began nodding her head emphatically. After that, Lee was treated warmly by the others, and the director checked in with her a few times to see how she was doing. He said he'd love to get her feedback about how they could do things better in the future.

Once she was back at school, Lee began to identify herself as a Morin from Métis country and then, later, simply as Métis. It was just easier. She began following several prominent Indigenous writers and activists on social media, and some of them began following her back, each mutual a feather in her cap. Lee's friendship with Anna was the final piece falling into place. Although she could not, perhaps, follow the strands of her DNA back to a place of innocence, Lee had the imprimatur of Anna's love.

She heard the door handle turn and jolted upright as Colin flicked on the lights. Sorry, he said, squinting down at her. I didn't know you were here. Is it okay if I use the office? Lee nodded groggily and checked her phone. There was no message from Anna, and it was now 4:00; she'd slept for hours. She watched Colin settle in at his desk and boot up his computer, still in a kind of daze. So I guess you've probably seen everything, he said abruptly, swivelling in his chair to face her. Are you—I mean, it must be shitty for you. Lee stared at him. His face was arranged in a way she figured was meant to look sympathetic but not overly so. About my defence being delayed? she said. I know. I requested it. Colin looked confused, and at first she thought that she had pierced his smug little bubble, but then his expression changed to one of pity. I didn't know about that, he said. I was talking about twitter. You should probably delete your account.

The spaces inside Lee's skull and ribcage began to spin and heave. She retrieved her office key from the bottom of the mug, packed up her computer, and left without saying anything. She needed air—and a drink. Outside the building she encountered three undergrads she knew from the Intro to Ethnography class she'd TA'ed in the fall. They were on their way to the shuttle, but Lee press-ganged them into going to Stuart House for a drink. The two girls, young and effortlessly cute, intimidated her, and she kept accidentally calling the guy Colton even though his name was Colby. Lee bought the first few pitchers of beer, drinking it faster than the others. After a few failed attempts at conversation, she gave up and just listened to them talk. One of the girls was joining Anna's crew for the summer, and this information upset Lee into drinking a sixth or seventh glass of beer very quickly. She texted Anna three times: *What's going on, neechie?*, *If I did something maybe just tell me?*, and finally *You don't know how badly you're hurting me*. When her phone lit up and vibrated moments later, Lee's heart spasmed, but the text was from Mark Elliott. He said he'd been trying to contact her, and he asked if she could meet him the following morning. Lee stared at her phone

until the text disappeared and the screen went black. When she looked up, the two girls weren't there anymore, and Colton was sitting a few tables away, chatting with some people she didn't know. She poured the warm dregs of the last pitcher into her glass, drained it, and left.

Lee followed a deserted footpath through the clumps of half-lit buildings, despising the campus with a ferocity reserved for things one would soon be rid of. Better things awaited her: a doctoral program at a prestigious university back east, a new apartment, new friends, respect. Everyone here could fuck off into the sun. After a few minutes of walking, Lee looked around in confusion. She'd intended to walk in the direction of the shuttle stop but somehow found herself standing outside the Earth Sciences building. A window on the seventh floor was lit up, on the same side of the building as Anna's office. A vague and inchoate plan began to congeal in her head, and she decided to go up, see Anna, and fix things.

She decided to stop by her office first to retrieve the bottle of prosecco she'd stashed in the mini fridge for her defence celebration. Anna wasn't a reliable drinker—lots of times she just drank sparkling water—but Lee would make her drink tonight. They had shit to get past, and shit could not be gotten past without proper lubrication. Unlocking her door in the dark proved to be challenging enough to justify immediately popping the cork and taking a swig. Then she set off down the corridor, taking the long way to Anna's office so she'd have time to formulate what she was going to say. Her imagined entreaties all fizzled out after one or two words, however, and all she could really imagine was skipping straight to the part where everything was all right between them again.

Lee rounded the final corner and froze. With horror, she realized that she'd misjudged the position of the window from outside. The light was coming from Ernie's office, not Anna's. She began retreating down the corridor, but the sound of her name forced her to stop and turn back. Ernie, silhouetted in his doorway, was calling to her, asking her to come see him for a minute so he could show her something. Lee put the bottle down with exaggerated care and went, even though she was starting to feel sick and wanted badly to go home. Once inside the office, she balanced herself with one hand on the back of a chair, swaying slightly. Ernie stood over his laptop, typed something, and held it up to her. The screen displayed a front-page article from *The Sentinel*, Lee's hometown's newspaper. The headline, "Counsellor at Camp Maranatha Awarded Prestigious Scholarship," was accompanied

by a photo of a grinning girl, blonde and tanned, with friendship bracelets adorning both wrists. The caption read: “Kaitlynn Morin, valedictorian of the graduating class of Centennial Collegiate, will attend university this fall in the city her father, Stephen Morin, hails from.” Is that you? he asked.

Lee stared at the photo until the pixels blurred and no longer formed a meaningful image. I don’t know her, she said. Then a great wave of nausea overtook her, and she fled. She managed to make it to the bathroom before vomiting up the beer and prosecco. Once she was done in the toilet stall, she braced herself on a sink and stared into the mirror for some unknowable length of time. The face she saw was an assemblage of features that could have belonged to anyone. Ernie threatened me, she thought. She repeated the phrase in her head a few times. Once the narrative had achieved the consistency of gelatin, she splashed water on her face, dried it with handfuls of thin brown paper towel, and went home.

Anna was waiting for her the next morning, sitting on Colin’s chair with her arms folded across her chest and a bound copy of Lee’s thesis on her lap. Her face was arranged in a way Lee had never seen before, and for a moment Lee only recognized her by her clothing. She dropped her backpack, turned her chair to face Anna, and slumped onto it, head swimming in the achy soup of her hangover. Let me explain, Lee said. Anna interrupted her. No, you’ve had plenty of chances to explain, she said. I vouched for you. I helped you get grants that weren’t meant for you. I put you on my podcast and platformed your work. I feel so fucking stupid. Anna’s face rippled, as if a stone had been cast onto its surface, and she held up Lee’s thesis. The sad thing is that this is pretty good. I like the chapter where you retell the history of the Iron Creek site using traditional Cree storytelling conventions. But it’s all a lie. No, it’s worse than a lie. Anna paused for a moment, frowning. It’s a cabinet of stolen medicine bundles. It’s a blanket soaked in goddamn smallpox. She let the thesis drop into the blue recycling box on the floor.

What did Ernie say . . . Lee began, but Anna’s face twisted. Don’t even think about fucking with Ernie, she said. He always thought you were full of shit, and he was right. He contacted people. It turns out there’s nothing on the Métis registry—no Kaitlynn Morin, or your dad, or anybody related to you. I did some asking around too. Nobody’s ever heard of you. You are not Métis. And, just so you know, Ernie recorded you on his phone last night, so if you were thinking about making up some shit to get him in trouble, you can forget it.

The sine wave of that past—the one where Ernie had done something unforgivable and she could still be who she said she was—collapsed and spread like an oil spill in Lee’s mind. She opened her mouth, but no words came out.

Mark’s waiting for you in his office with the Dean of Graduate Studies and Julie George from the Indigenous Students’ Association, and your committee is planning on resigning. Do you understand?

Lee nodded blankly. Her academic career was over, but this seemed like just a detail in a larger tragedy that was unfolding—one she could not yet see the end of or even quite position herself within.

I’m telling you this as a courtesy, Anna added, because I used to think of you as a friend.

Lee felt as if she were floating up to the ceiling, where she would pop like a bubble of soap and disappear forever. What should I do? she asked.

Anna shrugged. You could just walk out of here and come up with some bullshit story that makes you the victim—that’s what you people always seem to do—or you could go into Mark’s office, admit you’re a fraud, and start taking your goddamn medicine. She leaned forward, forearms on her knees. So what’s it going to be, *môniyâw*?

Môniyâw—white girl. The word lodged like a shard in Lee’s chest.