

Broken Pathways in The Prairies

Dakota

Pa was getting ready to leave. He's probably preparing for the annual Métis buffalo hunt. My brother Theo, who is 13, Ma, and I would go to support him. What I remember from the buffalo hunt last year I was there was that we had to follow the group wherever the buffalo or *ill bufloo* went. I'm only ten years old, and last year I couldn't join because I had chickenpox.

I can't wait to go this year, because my friend Winona from the Red River Settlement is going too. My dad is a French Northwest Company fur trader, so he's happy to be living in my hometown, Fort Gibraltar. In the trading post, he usually sells pemmican.

Pemmican is dried *ill bufloo* (bison), dried *enn grenn* (berries), melted fat, and small fruits mushed together. My mom and her family are indigenous. Because she married my dad, we are a Métis family.

I saw him loading up the Red River Cart near the loghouse, my *mayzoon*, while I came back home from the fields. I had been playing with Winona.

Winona lives three, or doors down my loghouse. She's an only child and we have a bond like sisters. She looks exactly like me. I have *zhveu brae'n* or brown hair, and she does too. I have hazel eyes as she does. We are the same height and skin colour.

I shouted out to him, "Paaaaa! What are you doing??!?"

I quickly ran over to him. "Come see," he replied, "it's important."

Strangely, the rest of my family came: Theo, Ma, and my grandma, *nouhkom*.

It was a bright Saturday morning. Theo and I looked at each other, exchanging the odd look.

"We're moving," is all Pa said.

I was wrong. The buffalo hunt begins in early spring. I forgot. I put on my sad face.

WHY?

He knew the gloomy face I had.

“There’s a new order from the governor.”

Wait. The governor? What did Miles MacDonell do this time? He’s Scandinavian and came into power in 1811. He has ruled for three years. He works with the Hudson’s Bay Company. But my pa works for the opposing company. I think it has something to do with rival business. He spoke more.

“The governor created a new proclamation, the Pemmican Proclamation. It forbids exports and imports of pemmican for HBC and NWC. The annual buffalo hunt for the Métis is cancelled this year. Now, no one can sell pemmican.”

My emotions turned from melancholy sentiments to furious tears. Why, just why had the governor gone against my family? Why did he have to do this to the Metis? I pieced the whole story together. My family would have to move because my dad wouldn’t have an income. Most of the village would be going through the same. Winona’s father is also a trader and we may not see each other ever again. The whole village will have to split. We’ll have to move outside of Ft. Gibraltar and probably go farther east.

Theo was with me later that day. We cried all the tears, flowing like the Red River. None of us wanted to leave, but what choice did the Métis have?

The following week was the day we were supposed to leave. Every citizen in the village in the fur trade had to pack up their belongings and leave where their culture, homes, and memories were. Today is the day my family hauled the bags and take the journey to Seven

Oaks, my soon-to-be hometown. My family would not leave for anything, but this order is what is stopping my family from enjoying our life. My friends are leaving too, and I may not see them ever again.

I woke up after two hours of my nap in the rickety horse-driven Red River cart. The sun, or *salay*, had peeked out of the horizon. It was so bright when I opened my eyes; I could barely make out the features of the world around me. I can hear the robins singing cheerfully. Theo was snoring loudly beside me and Ma was adding floral patterns to one of the pairs of gloves she had made. Nouhkom was sleeping too, but she sleeps so quietly, she could be sleeping and you wouldn't know it.

Ma works as a seamstress back at Fort Gibraltar. She would make simplistic clothes, but add her style of seed beads and embroider her signature climbing vines with coloured flowers. I love her clothing. For my ninth birthday, Ma sewed me some beautiful lady's suede gloves for my size, with climbing vines, and purple flowers (my favourite). She also embroidered my name. Dakota. She named me Dakota because, in Sioux, that means 'friend'.

The moment my eyes were unblurred, I could see we passed a sign saying Seven Oaks. We arrived.

Winona

The rain pattered on the teepee. I could hear the other family sleeping beside me snoring. We've been here since last night and all I could think about are my parents. They are coughing and sniffing at night. March had passed by quickly, and it was the start of April. My father and the other family's father were talking at dusk earlier today. I wonder if they're planning to split up.

On this journey, we took the York Boat and shared it with another family. They are a poor French family of three, like my family. A mother, a father and an eight-year-old boy. Then

there is my family. Pa, Ma and me, Winona. My Pa is French, and my Ma is from the Sioux tribe. Ma named me Winona because Winona means “first-born-daughter.”

We were on this journey because my pa had received life-changing news in my hometown, Fort Gibraltar. Two weeks ago, the governor had said all trading by anyone is banned. The buffalo hunts have been cancelled since that time. My pa is a fur trader, so he goes on all of the buffalo hunts and takes the fur. The other two families that we hunt with take the buffalo meat for pemmican. My friend Dakota is my neighbour’s neighbour’s neighbour, but she is like my sister. Lots of citizens in Fort Gibraltar get mixed up with us because we look the same. Hair, height, eyes. We somehow look the same.

My family was so close to the new village we’re settling in. I remember when Pa told us about it during dinnertime, I was so sad I ran off into the fields.

Wherever the town is, I’m ready for a night of real sleep.

We finally got to say goodbye to the other family we shared the York Boat with. They were slightly rude and cranky when we shared meals.

We would bring our everyday dinner meal, pemmican. But they are French, so they typically get geese and fish, but I can see why.

I had a boost of positive motivation when we arrived in our new town. The citizens were very welcoming and showed us a pre-built loghouse. Pa already paid for it and sent the money and supplies to a messenger.

Our new home was out-of-shape. The roof has a few chipped areas, the smell in the loghouse was as dry as dust, and the garden has lots of yellow patches, but with some hard work, I can see this place as my new home.

The next day, I woke up from a bed, or *liti*, and let out a long yawn. It was sunrise. I knew the roads ahead of me may be longer than my family and I wanted, but I had the determination that this new town will be great.

It's been about two weeks since my arrival in my new town, and I've learned so much about it. It started when I was alone walking down the dirt path and passed by two other log houses. The one next to us was half a kilometre away from our house. In that house was a young couple with twin babies, both boys. I noticed that the next loghouse past that was a bigger loghouse that was definitely well-maintained.

It seemed like the garden was well-managed, the logs looked fresher than in our house, and I can always hear joy and laughter in that house. I've visited the couple beside us once, but today I want to visit my neighbour's neighbour.

I did a little knock, and the most amazing thing happened!

My best friend, Dakota from Fort Gibraltar is in my new town too! Her grandmother, Nouhkom, actually answered the door. At that moment, I saw Dakota, my best friend.

I asked her a lot of questions, like how long their family have lived there, what is the town's name, how they even got here and why they chose this town. She said her family has lived there for a little over a year in the town of Seven Oaks. They left the day after the announcement by the governor, and their family asked the villagers to help build the loghouse. Dakota's father found a new job as a fur trader again, just like my pa.

I knew that day that our lives would change for the better, and a bright future is ahead of us.

Narrator

Ten months had passed since the rejoining of Dakota and Winona. That day the families met up and they each shared their stories. It's now 1816, two years since the governor announced the Pemmican Proclamation. They've been living in Seven Oaks for some time now, and have been warmly welcomed by the Métis community there.

Dakota's family was doing great. Nouhkom loved the fresh air, Ma enjoyed embroidering for the new crowd in Seven Oaks, and Pa enjoyed selling his pemmican and all the beaver pelts he had left.

Winona's family was doing fine too. Her Ma has sold her embroidery in Seven Oaks.

One evening, Dakota and Winona were hiking in the nearby forest. Nouhkom had come with them since the two girls were only ten years old. Nouhkom looked tired during the short walk, so she sat on a log nearby.

Dakota said, out of gas. "Nouhkom, it's dark. We need to get home soon."

Nouhkom looked up to the dark sky. The sun was setting.

"I should tell you a story now," she tirelessly said.

Winona and Dakota squealed with joy. They loved Sioux legends from Nouhkom. They were always interesting, and the two girls always wish for more after another.

They both nodded their heads, excitedly.

Nouhkom replied, "Okay, listen closely."

The legend Nouhkom was telling them was about the spirit called Thunderbird. Thunderbird represents an eagle or falcon. He had two heads, colourful feathers, sharp teeth, and sharp claws. It was believed that he could water the earth, make storms and even send

floods. He could flash lightning from his long beak and when he flies, the beating on his wings creates the rolling thunder. Thunderbird was there to protect the Sioux people from Unktehila and other evil spirits. He warned the people when danger comes with thunder and lightning.

Unktehila was the evil horned water serpent who always fought with Thunderbird. It had a diamond crest on its forehead and bright scales, roaring like fire. He would steal the people's crops and send droughts when he wants. Thunderbird would save the people from starvation and death.

"Wow," was all Winona could say.

Dakota looked in the night sky, in awe of what she heard.

Dakota then replied, "Now I know why the totem pole looks like an eagle! I remember the Thunderbird totem pole back in your hometown, Nouhkom!"

Nouhkom nodded. "Yes, dear. Thunderbird has always protected us from wars and kept us safe from Unktehila."

Winona gasped.

"Do you know what I realized?!?"

Dakota was deeply confused.

"If Thunderbird can predict the future with thunder and lightning, I think he's telling us war is coming. Listen."

Winona was right. The thunder crackled in the sky.

"This is why I brought you, girls, to the forest," Nouhkom said.

"Sooooooooo," Dakota said confused, "we're not only here to pick cranberries?"

The girls realized Nouhkom's suspicious urge to go and their jaws dropped at the realization of war. *Was a war going to come?* the girls wondered.

They walked home altogether in the serene silence of Seven Oaks.

Two weeks later

The day had come. Sixty-one Métis men were going to a plain near Seven Oaks. As predicted, the war had come. Twenty-five HBC employees were fighting with the Metis because Duncan Cameron, one of the Métis, was furious and encouraged the Métis to destroy the injustice. So, this is how the Battle of the Seven Oaks began.

Dakota and Winona wanted to go see too, but Dakota's father said it was too dangerous, so Dakota and Winona were unhappy with the news. Cleverly, Winona found a tall oak tree and the girls climbed to the top for an excellent view of the battle.

As they watched, BOOM! Muskets were firing. Men from both sides were riding horses. The horses were out of control. Dakota and Winona were watching both of their fathers fighting to keep the Metis nation alive.

Dakota and Winona had seen the battle to the very end. They thanked Thunderbird for the victory of the Métis.

NOTE:

This story uses Michif words, written in italics. Michif is the language created by the Métis, combining French and Cree mix. A list of the words are below.

ill bufloo = a buffalo

enn grenn = berries

mayzoon = house

zhveu brae'n = brown hair

nouhkom = grandmother

salay = sun

lii = a bed

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