

Islands of Decolonial Love

Stories & Songs

by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson



...ance and swim in the...
...they moor and then they can gather at
...with the sun dry
...and from their
...appearance
...melody. It son
...Ma kko or
...Sung has word
...add that the
...reach of and
...discoveries
...emblem or
...claim further
...compared to
...in a with a
...indicating the
...in this
...in that
...found
...their
...kopp
...General
...General
...dell, give
...stand of lo
...I used made
...know. The more
...from the lake
...could not be
...their
...insensitively
...they built long and gradually narrow
...hide and hung from a strong bent tree
...to this day, in preference to the steel trap
...coverings of birch bark and rushes; the
...kettles from clay and pulverized stone
...Copper, though abundant on the lake St
...During this era of their history there was in
...religious and medicinal practices. The Cran
...in the space of three generations; or one in
...ated and the people scattered in bands.

treaties

at this particular point in time, the last thing you need is to be one of the only native kids, instead of the only native kid.

you are supposed to be studying biology but you are a horrible scientist—it was a happenstance escapist decision that had snowballed out of hand because of a lack of intervention on your part. after six years of university study, the only thing you know for sure was that “flammable” and “inflammable” both mean the same thing.

you are twenty-two.

there are a couple of problems with being twenty-two but you don't know about them yet, because you can only find out about the problems sometime after you are no longer twenty-two. anyway, one of the problems with being twenty-two is you start to get afraid that maybe you're horrible at everything, mostly because you're

not really good at anything yet, so you decide to stay the course with biology until a sign appears, even though being stoned drunk all the time doesn't register as a sign.

the other problem with being twenty-two at university is that everyone gets mad and becomes a marxist and a buddhist and you are no exception because someone leaves a copy of zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance in the outhouse and you steal it and all of a sudden counting the number of dead alcohol-saturated ephemeroptera under a microscope becomes working for the man and capitalist and reductionist and the myth of objectivity, which propels you headlong into the loving uncommitted arms of art students, hippy musicians and pot—they've always liked ndns more than scientists do anyway and even fascinating romantic love is better than no love at all, except it's not that easy to orgasm. ok it is, but still. there's something missing, but you don't know yet, because you don't know what until you're thirty or forty or sometimes you don't get to find out at all.

so you sleep with a bunch of the hippy-artist-potheads and some of it's good and some of it's bad and some of them give good head and it's all a nice distraction while you spend the days counting juvenile salmon on the bottom of a stream somewhere north of here.

then it's halloween and the white kids dress up as the proletariat, and the rheostatics come to town and they play steve's tavern and by the end of the night the floor is a mixture of draft and costume debris and dave bidini wades through it all anyway with his acoustic guitar, long after the last encore, belting out the wreck of the edmund fitzgerald as he walks amongst the now disheveled audience, unconcerned with the fact that he is in land owned by stan rogers.

you stand still when he sings "gitche gumeee" because it's the only almost nishnaabemowin you've heard since you moved here and you want dave to notice and to rescue you, and to pack you up in

the rheostatics van and drive you back to ontario, and set you back up beside a big lake.

but that doesn't happen.

by now one of the hippy-artist-potheads you've been sleeping with is calling himself boyfriend which involves: 1. going to the bar and drinking pitchers of oscillating drink specials in a pizza delight-like setting 2. fucking. 3. telling him the shitty songs he writes are deep. the two of you only deviate from the formula one time, and it was the time you got up and drove down the trans-canada towards halifax for no reason.

an hour down the highway, well past amherst, the car loses power and you find yourselves on the side of the highway as the winds pick up and the cbc tells you a hurricane is coming. a local in a truck stops and then comes back with a tow truck so he can tow your car to his friend's garage, which he says is a "certified vw repair centre."

the garage is a large rectangular metal shed. along one side, two women, girlfriends you presume, are hanging out on old couches by a wood stove. one of them brings you tea while you wait. your chair rocks back and forth like a meter while the mechanic works in front of you.

and now the bad news.

"the car is very hard to fix" he says in a thick german accent, "it needs parts. the switch is broken that shuts the battery off when the car is no longer running. that is the part you need, but it will take three days to get it here from halifax."

he pauses allowing you to feel the full impact of the prospect of being stuck in the living room of his garage for three days during a hurricane.

then he comes back with, "there is another option."

he says he can rig something up that can get us home. great. perfect. home. whatever that is.

three weeks later boyfriend breaks up with you because "fucking an indian was too much work." you regret ever looking him in the eye and marxism and biology, and dylan (doesn't stick) and buddhism and pot all at the same time. you call the only mi'kmaq you know. he's there in two hours flat and without turning off his car, he loads you into it and hands you a black coffee in a styrofoam cup. you move into the driver's seat while he kicks the shit out of the white guy that decided to be called boyfriend and then you drive away as soon as he's back beside you.

you ask him if he was gentle.

he shakes his head laughing and says "nishnaabeg." and then, "of course. hippies are fragile and his mom is probably some famous criminal lawyer in halifax."

you drive north through the bush of the mi'kmaq and maliseet. by dawn you turn your backs to the rising sun and drive along the big river towards mohawk territory. you look to the right, past the long black feathers on the wing, pulsing through the air, dancing through the clouds, thousands of metres above the river.

a year passes. courage coalesces. you take the train back, arriving to look things in the eye and leaving with the car and a box of detritus from a past life. by the time you reach thunder bay some white kids from winnipeg offer to buy the car for \$2000 cash they made selling fimo beads at dead concerts. the regular household light switch the mechanic installed in the dashboard of the car so you "could turn off the battery when parked" is fascinating to them. they ask you if it is for switching dimensions.

and you look them in the eye and answer "totally."

pipty

i.

Mike harris built a big concrete building on top of kinomagewapkong because he wanted to protect those teaching rocks from the rain. at least that's what his people said, but that can't be true because mike harris hates ndns, so why would he want to protect our teaching rocks? see. i told you. doesn't make sense.

"i want those fucking indians out of the park."

while he was building his big concrete building to protect the tourists from the rain, he blocked the creek and now we can't hear our ancestors talking to us, and some people say the spirits got stuck inside the building and some people say the spirits got stuck outside the building and some people say the spirits can move in and out of the building because after all, they are spirits. once those zhaganosh found out about those teaching rocks there was