

PLIGHT

Lucy, Kwe, and I walked through the neighbourhood last fall, when all the trees looked like the time Nanabush hid his Kokum in there — like the maples were being swallowed by flame-arms of red and orange. We marked each one with a spray-painted purple thunderbird so that when their leaves were gone we would know which ones were the sugar maples the following spring. Really we should be able to tell by looking at the bark and the way the branches hold themselves, but we're still too new at it. Kwe was so pregnant I made her stand back from the paint fumes. Lucy made a stencil so the thunderbird would look like a thunderbird and not the death mark the city puts on the trees when they are about to cut them down for safety reasons.

Now it's March, and we have thirty tin buckets, thirty new spigots, tobacco, a drill with two charged batteries, a three-eighths-of-an-inch drill bit, and thirty flyers. The neighbourhood we're going into mostly votes NDP or Liberal in provincial and federal elections, and they feel relief when they do. They have

perennials instead of grass. They get organic, local vegetables delivered to their doors twice weekly, *in addition* to going to the farmers' market on Saturday. They're also trying to make our neighbourhood into an Ontario heritage designation; I think that mostly means you can't do renovations that make your house look like it isn't from the 1800s or rent your extra floors to the lower class.

We know how to do this so they'll be into it. Hand out the flyers first. Have a community meeting. Ask permission. Listen to their paternalistic bullshit and feedback. Let them have influence. Let them bask in the plight of the Native people so they can feel self-righteous. Make them feel better, and when reconciliation comes up at the next dinner party, they can hold us up as the solution and brag to their real friends about our plight. I proofread the flyer one more time because everyone knows white people hate typos.

Hello!

We are collecting sap from this Maple Tree from March 21–23. We will be by to collect it once a day, and we will pick up the bucket, lid and spigot on March 23. Thank you for your support in our urban sugar-making adventure.

FWP Collective

The Fourth World Problems Collective is us three Nishnaabekwewag, plus baby Ninaatig, plus Sabe, but Lucy and Kwe don't know Sabe is here. I'm the only one that can see him and only sometimes.

We're meeting in my backyard to build a fire, smudge, and make some offerings before we begin. We've had several meetings about the forty-eight words on the flyer in order to get the proper balance of telling, not asking, while side-stepping suspicion. No one feels good about hiding the fact that we are Mississaugas and that this is us acting on our land, but no one wants to end up a dinner-party conversation either. I fought hard for the word "adventure" because it is such a signifier with these people. It makes them part of it; they can be part of the solution without doing anything. Their only job is to file the flyer on top of the fridge with the bills and the permission slips and forget about it. This is the perfect get-out-of-jail-free card. Feel liberal in all its glory. No need to call the cops or the city; it's sustainable. *Help the Indians and their plight.*

We debated framing this as performance art, well I debated framing this as performance art because white people love that and if it were the fall and this was

Nuit Blanche we'd be NDN art heroes. We could probably even get a grant. But it's the spring and we actually don't want an audience; we just want to make syrup in my backyard without it being a goddamn ordeal.

Sabe texts to say he is running late. Lately he has been texting me more than showing up in person because he has other clients. He rolls his eyes when I say I'm his client. Kwe is sitting on a white plastic lawn chair, breastfeeding baby Ninaatig into a sleep coma by lifting up her "Not Murdered, Not Missing" T-shirt. She is laughing, saying, "This is the least queer thing I do." I try to think of something smart to say, like that there's nothing in the NDN queer rulebook that says you can't have a baby or breastfeed, but she already knows that, so I just smile and nod. I'm thinking the curve of her breast is sacred and sexy as fuck. I'm thinking how much I miss prolactin. I'm wishing the gentleness Kwe has for Ninaatig, Lucy had for me.

Lucy is wearing my black leather motorcycle jacket, chain-smoking out of range of Ninaatig. The baby carrier is at her feet, ready to carry. They act tougher than they are. For NDNs the tougher we act, the purer our hearts are, because this strangulation is not set up for the sensitive and we have to protect the fuck out of

ourselves. I wish they'd soften for me. I wish they'd drop it sometimes, and let me in. I wish they could feel my warmth in the way that would compel them to give it back. I wish loving Lucy wasn't so lonely.

I mumble some Anishinaabemowin and put my offering in the fire. I think this in english because I don't know how to say any of it: This is our sugar bush. It looks different because there are three streets and 150 houses and one thousand people living in it, but it is my sugar bush. It is our sugar bush. We are the only ones that are supposed to be here. Please help us.

I think: Maybe I should be more specific, because the magic of the spiritual world is never super clear to me. Obviously I need their help. I'm an endless, wandering pit of need. They must know that, but I also know it's important to ask. So what am I really asking for? Help remembering everything? Help remaining undetected? Help collecting the sap the next day and boiling it down for twelve hours in my backyard? Help dealing with the authorities? Help while I sit at the edge of Lucy?

I watch the flames as they disappear my tobacco and carry my thoughts to those that care. We each take our turn walking around the fire in the right direction, smudge the gear, and put it into our

backpacks. But we are not done feeding this fire. Kwe takes off her ceremony skirt, the one that she sewed tobacco into the hem but sometimes resents being forced to wear, and puts it on the fire. Lucy pours one shot of whiskey into the fire for their Auntie who passed away three years ago. I smoke my pipe even though there is blood because I am powerful and beautiful and sacred and I always deserve to be reminded.

Then we carry the buckets and Ninaatig to the car. I have three pieces of maple sugar from last year in my pocket in case we need to distract Ninaatig from reality for a few minutes. In case we need quiet.

I think: If I get caught, hide my kids.

We drive the car around the corner to the first tree. It's darker and colder than I thought. I wish I wore my winter boots instead of my running shoes with plastic bread bags inside them to keep my feet dry. I set down my backpack on the packing snow and put a tiny pile of tobacco at the base of the tree. Kwe takes Ninaatig out of the carrier and sits nursing. I see salmon, eel, caribou, eagle, and crane circling our sugar bush at the end of the street. Lucy rubs their hand on her bark. Sabe kisses my forehead, steps back, and then disappears. I hesitate, and then I take out the drill. I hope this doesn't hurt.

to the oldest tree in the world

i'm worrying about
what you're drinking
you're worrying about
what i'm breathing

i like you
because you
never
talk
too loud

i breathe it out
you breathe it in

i like you
because you all hold
this all together
with the parts i can't see

i breathe it in
you breathe it out

you: eleven times my age

me: draped in clouds of youth
i think i know what you've seen
i think we're the same
but it's not true
i don't know
i don't

i don't know how to say this
without embarrassing you
but i do know
i believe in saying things
i do know
i believe
in the telling

your wrinkled grey skin is gorgeous
&
i hope you don't know what's happening.

i am graffiti

i am writing to tell you
 that yes indeed
 we have noticed
 you have a new big pink eraser
 we are well aware
 you are trying to use it.
 erasing Indians is a good idea
 of course
 the bleeding-heart liberals
 and communists
 can stop feeling bad
 for the stealing
 & raping
 & murdering
 & we can all move on
 we can be reconciled
 except, i am graffiti.
 except, mistakes were made.
 she painted three white Xs
 on the wall of the grocery store.
 one. two. three.

then they were erased.
 except, i am graffiti.
 except, mistakes were made.
 the Xs were made out of milk
 because they took our food.
 one. two. three.
 then we were erased.
 except, i am graffiti.
 except, mistakes were made.
 we are the singing remnants
 left over after
 the bomb went off in slow motion
 over a century instead of a fractionated second
 it's too much to process, so we make things instead
 we are the singing remnants
 left over after
 the costumes have been made
 collected up
 put in a plastic bag, full of intentions
 for another time
 another project.
 except, i am graffiti.
 mistakes were made.

caribou ghosts & untold stories

we are always almost drowning
 we are the best trained troops
 that refuse to fight
 we are hyped up on aesthetics
 and tripped up
 by real life
 we don't have time to feel these feelings
 so we file that for
 another day
 we don't have to plan for the win
 because we always lose
 anyway
 caribou ghosts & untold stories
 bad timing
 & smashed hearts
 train tracks six pack riff raff
 deadening regret
 a collection of old parts

we get these little gifts
 of tremendous, unclouded
 by past dues
 we get these tiny moments
 but there's never
 enough glue
 we'll tie ourselves together
 with bungee cords
 and luck
 bring the fish,
 the fire,
 & the new knife
 catharsis is still elusive
 so we'll save that
 for another day
 meet me at the underpass
 rebellion is
 on her way.

*Dedicated out of respect to the intelligence and commitment of
 Black Lives Matter Toronto for halting the Pride parade in
 2016.*

A FEW GOOD REASONS TO WEAR A LONG SKIRT

you can cut part of your skirt off if you need bandages, hair ties, j cloths, a sling, rope, fishing line, shoe laces, a belt, a sack, kleenex, toilet paper, ear plugs, a hat, a protest sign, a flag, a towel, a trail marker, snares, or dental floss. also, if someone loses their loin cloth, you can whip one up out of your skirt, & still have ample skirt left over.

if you are in a big hurry & you aren't wearing underwear and you want to have sex with someone, it could save time.

if you want to masturbate, but you are in public, you could use your skirt as a tent.

if you're on the lake in your canoe & you drop your paddles & you forgot your whistle & it's too far to reach the paddles, you could use your skirt as a sail to sail to shore.

if you are ice fishing & someone falls in the hole, you could use your skirt as a rescue rope to rescue them.

if some youth of the day steal the canadian flag from the flagpole outside the high school, they could fly your skirt until they buy a new flag.

if you need to attack a fort, you can get everyone together to play a fake a game of lacrosse with the shirts, and then when one of the skins "accidentally" throws the ball into the fort, & they open the gates to get it, you & all your skirted friends can take your knives & axes out from underneath your skirts & attack the fuck out of the british.

(tested and proven to work june 2, 1763, at fort michilimackinac.)

