

LEANNE ~~beta~~ Simpson (Nishnaabeg)
beta simp sake

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.

from I Accident of Being Lost

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.