

ARTICLE

Excerpts from *Inbetweenness*: Joanne and SPÁ,ET on Death and Hope

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Abstract

These excerpts from *Inbetweenness*, an upcoming hopepunk novel, intertwine eco-social justice narratives and Indigenous education through climate fiction. *Inbetweenness* challenges Western-centric paradigms by highlighting diverse voices and posthumanist perspectives, focusing on the tension between contemporary environmental crises and Indigenous knowledge systems. It features characters like Joanne Penderwith, a graduate student navigating social justice, ecological connection, and decolonial praxis, inviting readers to reflect on allyship and positionality within activism. The novel also juxtaposes human-centric actions with the voices of other-than-human entities, using multi-species ethnography to embody ecological storytelling. A pivotal segment details Joanne's transformative experience at a salmon ceremony led by the WSÁNEĆ First Nations, showcasing the resilience of Indigenous practices and their potential to guide sustainable futures. *Inbetweenness* uses fiction-based research methods grounded in 20 years of transdisciplinary research. It critiques performative allyship and advocates for authentic relationships with Indigenous communities, proposing a hopeful approach to environmental education and climate action.

Keywords: Climate fiction; decolonisation; Hopepunk; Indigenous education; language revitalisation

Introduction and context

This is an excerpt from my upcoming hopepunk (Mancuso, 2021) novel, *Inbetweenness*, where I bridge eco-social justice narratives and environmental education through the lens of climate fiction. The work weaves together stories that challenge Western-centric paradigms (Turner *et al.*, 2024) by foregrounding diverse voices and posthumanist perspectives (Badmington, 2003). Posthumanist thought invites a radical rethinking of anthropocentrism by foregrounding the agency, subjectivity, and communicative capacities of more-than-human beings, thereby challenging the boundaries of who gets to speak and who is spoken for (Barad, 2003; Crinall & Stanger, 2025; Lasczik & Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, 2022). In conversation with critical animal studies (Best *et al.*, 2007) and decolonial frameworks (Sousa & Pessoa, 2019), posthumanist perspectives destabilise settler-colonial hierarchies of life and opens pathways for reciprocal, rather than extractive, modes of relationality with the Earth: “posthumanism shares a common interest with decolonial critique in that it directs our attention toward ‘that’ which is objectified, muted or rendered passive by a certain manifestation of anthropocentrism or human.” (Zembylas, 2018, p. 254)

Central to this narrative is the tension between contemporary environmental crises and deeply rooted Indigenous knowledge systems (Snively & Williams, 2016). Through characters like Joanne Penderwith, a graduate student at a local university who navigates the complexities of social

justice, ecological connection, and decolonial praxis, readers are invited to reflect on the intricacies of allyship and positionality within activism over non-linear time frames.

The novel juxtaposes human-centric actions with the voices of other-than-human entities, embodying an integrated approach to ecological storytelling by using multi-species ethnography (Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010). In this excerpt, the character SPÁ,ET (bear in SENĆOTEN), a black bear mother, represents a future where large carnivores have access to their territories alongside human habitation. Readers are invited into a near-future that has engaged significantly with ecological and cultural restoration. The inclusion of other-than-human perspectives compels readers to reconsider the boundaries of consciousness and the relational obligations humans hold among other beings and ecosystems (de La Bellacasa, 2017; Wilson & Wilson, 1998).

A pivotal segment details Joanne's transformative experience at a salmon ceremony led by the WSÁNEĆ First Nations, a community that I have been working with as a researcher for nearly 15 years. This child-led celebratory ceremony of the first salmon run returning to the area includes special songs, dances, and community sharing that have been passed down since time immemorial illuminates the resilience of Indigenous practices that have withstood colonial impacts and highlights their potential to guide sustainable futures. The narrative underscores the symbiosis between cultural resurgence and ecological stewardship, advocating for the integration of Indigenous-led governance as essential to effective climate response (Vogel *et al.*, 2022). To this end, I use SENĆOTEN, the language of the WSÁNEĆ peoples, throughout the excerpt as a way to support language revitalisation, something that Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples are encouraged to engage in (WSB,). The language team at WSÁNEĆ School Board and Montler's dictionary were highly influential in this work (Montler, 2018). For pronunciation support please visit <https://scalar.usc.edu/works/sencoten/senoen-dictionary>.

This piece also critiques performative allyship through a reflection on academic spaces where well-meaning discussions sometimes centralise non-Indigenous guilt instead of amplifying Indigenous agency (Daigle, 2019). Joanne's journey embodies the struggle of navigating these complexities, urging educators and scholars to pursue authentic, reciprocal relationships with Indigenous communities (Gladue & Poitras Pratt, 2024).

By employing hopepunk as a method, excerpts of this work can serve as a pedagogical tool that shifts discourse from dystopian defeatism to one of hopeful imagination through eco-social-justice orientations (Fettes & Blenkinsop, 2023). This work proposes that recentring narratives on relational accountability, respect for Indigenous knowledge, and the decentring of Western scientific norms can catalyse more inclusive and hopeful approaches to environmental education and climate action.

This fiction-based research is tied completely to my work with communities in and around the Salish Sea. It is in line with arts-based approaches to social sciences as described by Patricia Leavy (2013), *Fiction as research practice: short stories, novellas, and novels*. On writing this excerpt, and the longer novel, I am noticing I am actively steering away from doomism and despair, as best I can. It is not that hopepunk must paint a cheerful and unfounded optimistic future. This orientation resonates with queer death studies, which resists normative narratives of loss and instead explores death, grief, and endings as spaces for alternative worldmaking (Radomska *et al.*, 2020). In this way, the work unsettles dominant scripts of despair, aligning with speculative and hopeful modes of imagining otherwise (Eliott & Olver, 2009). The overall vision of the future may still be gritty but it can also be one full of thriving human and non-human communities (Kelsey, 2020). *Hope*, though, is a fracturing concept, one that must acknowledge its entwining with (neo) colonisation (Watego, 2021). How might we adopt hope as a critical stance - a way of engaging with the world that challenges the negativity bias? With this question in mind, this novel is written in a disjointed style that encourages readers to explore the perspectives from different characters over time. Therefore, it might read differently than a hero's journey or narrative arc. It could even feel uncomfortable at times to not know what is going on:

Joanne 2030

Joanne Penderwith found herself standing at the back of her car share, hatch open, staring at nothing. She was mildly aware of the damp cloth of her grocery bag as it clung to her wrist. She was thinking about the book she was reading, where the main character was boiling twigs and leaves for sustenance. It was a not-so-subtle dystopian climate fiction with hints of a massive disaster that rendered all mega-agricultural systems dead. It put the human race into a perilous spin of self-preserving violence.

Argh, so predictable and boring. Can't we think of other futures?

The chapter she started reading last night hinted at the next phase of the storyline: bands of people traversing the world in murderous nomadic groups and eating the bark off of trees.

And here I am, buying groceries.

Not for the first time, Joanne was experiencing a sense of time travel. Not in *The Outlander* sort of way. Rather, the experience of non-conformity within a 24-hour period. The bleak fictional future in her book felt entirely juxtaposed to the feast she had experienced this afternoon with the tribal school just down the road. She had witnessed ceremony, language, and joy within the younger community. It was the salmon ceremony, led by the young people and celebrating the return of the chinook salmon run this year. Certain dances, protocol, and feasting must occur before more salmon are harvested within this moon WEXES (moon of the frog). This ceremony, and this salmon run has been going on since time immemorial. Passing on the ceremony from adult to child, even during times of residential schools, has helped the WSÁNEĆ peoples connect to their culture and human and other-than-human relations.

As she entered the big house, a recently built great hall designed to bring the community together to practise ceremonies such as this, she looked up at the yellow cedar walls, the welcome figures with their arms extended. She let her eyes scan around the massive room, as big as a large gym, but far more inviting. There were the 13 moons of the year presented on the walls as carvings. Each moon represents seasons for cultural and ceremonial activities, indicators of which plants and animals are to be harvested.

Each strip of cedar used for carvings, benches, and wall coverings had been carefully selected, harvested, and treated with respect as this space was built. Even the fire in the middle was real. Through the light haze in the air, Joanne could see many families she knew from the school. Many of them were laughing, clutching drums to their fronts, drum skin towards their heart to warm them up. Many were also supporting the children with their last-minute regalia changes. Each child had hundreds of tiny cedar paddles hanging off of their black, red, and white clothing. Details of ermine fur, copper, and red ribbons were apparent. Joanne also loved seeing the recent integration of rainbows into the regalia, something to celebrate two-spirited individuals in the room.

To get to the point of (re)building not only the big house, but also the community pride, the knowledge, and the relationships to the land, countless legal cases challenged the early James Douglas Treaty. These cases tipped the balance of self-governance and self-determination, so that their communities operated on WSÁNEĆ SKÁLS (values) as the primary governing principles. The SKÁLS helped centre Indigenous Knowledge and First Nations governments as the primary systems to support the Land, the Sea, and the peoples in their territories. Of course, the colonial governments were gaining something in this process too. Recent challenges of rising waters, forest fires, and costs for constant maintenance of park and private land had left the BC and Canadian Governments with an overwhelming stewardship problem. Yet, the capacity of the WSÁNEĆ Nations, of which there are four, had risen to a level where the colonial government was not relied on anymore.

Joanne had left the ceremony feeling hopeful. It was a funny feeling, hope. It left an unfamiliar taste in her mouth, one of indulgent guilt. How can she be hopeful in this time still so fraught with despair? She was also not entirely sure why she felt hope since it wasn't her own community, but she was excited to witness a community that was figuring out its own identity in the face of the catastrophes and crises that she knows are real.

Twigs and leaves – what a joke. People have been eating twigs and leaves since before there was remembering!

She realised she needed to stop reading that book.

Joanne also realised she was staring into space. Perhaps this was a classic affect of a struggling academic, to be caught up in her head; she forgot what she was doing. She glanced down at her grocery bag, a grubby reusable cloth vessel full of cartons of chai tea mix, bananas from Ecuador, granola from Belgium, organic berries from California greenhouses, and milk from who-knows-how-many thousands of cows. Not for the first time, she thought:

I am a walking paradox. I am a walking virtue signal.

She picked up another bag that contained a heavy jar of canned salmon, a gift from Elder Max, one of the Elders where Joanne worked. During the feast, Max had grabbed Joanne's wrist as she went around the group thanking them for inviting her to the ceremony. It was a fortuitous day because earlier that day the first WSÁNEĆ University courses were being offered in the community.

Max's twinkly-pierce-through-your-soul eyes were in full force, as well as her incredibly strong, knobbly hands. One of Max's hands was holding onto Joanne's wrist like it was a salmon about to squirm away, while the other hand was wagging a finger at her as if she had just been caught stealing berries. She was speaking in SENĆOŦEN (the language of the WSÁNEĆ peoples) so fast that Joanne leaned forward as she tried to hear harder. Max eventually translated:

I am sorry to not see your family with you today. This is an important moment, and you are important to us. You helped make this happen and your family is part of that too. You are also part of this work now. You are accountable to this work. HÍ,SWŪKE SIÁM.

Joanne realised she was saying this loud enough for other Elders to hear. She quickly understood that this was about Elder Max broadcasting her trust in this white young woman amongst the group. Still some of the other Elders eyed her with distrust.

Fair. That's fair. Thought Joanne.

Max then leaned closer to Joanne's ear, her scratchy voice and warm breath tickled her.

I know that this hasn't been easy for you but your position as a student and employee at Vic-U helped make this happen in a good way. Bring this salmon home to your family. You need to all be well fed, with good food from the Land. This is a medicine of our people. This will bring all of you ÍY, ŠWŪKÁLEĆEN, good feelings.

On the drive home, Joanne was stunned. She didn't turn the radio on, which was unusual, because Joanne was one of those people who has the news on all the time. She wanted to stay in ÍY, ŠWŪKÁLEĆEN, that good feeling in her heart; she was beaming from ear to ear. At least for a little while. Halfway down the peninsula, her mind drifted back to one of her Vic-U professor's recent discussion questions.

What are you doing in your life to help centre Indigenous futures?

The discussion had been fraught. Joanne was the teaching assistant in this masters of Education class on social justice and environmental education while completing her PhD in settler-Indigenous relations. The class consisted of a diversity of students, though it didn't take long to scratch the surface to find privilege under many of their positionalities. Especially the loud ones.

After some initial silence, an argument broke out, or at least the way that arguments happen between mostly white students. The passive aggressiveness and righteousness started with white guilt and then went to how enlightened everyone was - but in different ways. She got a chuckle out of one of the student's comments:

I was low key doing this work way before you were doing this work!

It was a race to figure out who felt the greatest anguish and who had most atoned for their sins.

I used to play Indigenous wayfinders in my canoe on the lake and loved pretending to be Moana. Oh how I wanted to have magical powers to read the ripples in that little lake.

Oh yeah, well, I built a tipi in my backyard and lived in it for two whole weeks while I stink-eyed my parents for not eating more local foods and not buying me a bow and arrow.

Ha! You think you two have guilt? My great-uncle worked as a priest in one of the residential schools. My family is inexorably linked to the cultural genocide of First Nations.

I have been donating to the Friendship Centre since I was a teenager.

Yeah, but money doesn't buy reparations! I convinced my grandma to give her urban property to the local First Nation.

Isn't that just money in the end? The Nation will likely flip it or develop it!

No it is Land. And that is what they want.

They!? who are you talking about, the Hereditary Chiefs or the elected council?

Maybe this is what Joanne's professor wanted in the first place? It was odd watching him stand awkwardly to the side as all this played out. Perhaps his question was misleading.

It puts the onus on us as individuals to help centre Indigenous Futures. And the question itself, when delivered to a bunch of new graduate students, further centres on white and non-Indigenous folk, or at least that was how I interpret it. Hmm I am going to have to watch this professor.

Joanne did a little stink eye of her own at the professor to try to convey her thoughts. Maybe this well-intentioned, greying white guy thought he was doing a good job of situating today's discussion around action. However, he did it in a way that was totally unsafe for the two Indigenous graduate students in the class.

Joanne came back into the present. She shook her head as she looked down at the steering while she saw the smug greasy-haired professor in her mind's eye.

Ugh, I should have said something that day in school. Or afterwards . . . maybe I still can.

There was no grin on her face anymore. Somehow, she had made it home and was on her street in one of the designated car-share spots.

Time is so weird. How did I make it home?

So then, how do I feel about my feelings of pride and hope? Am I allowed to bask in the pride in advocating the administration at Vic-U into helping support the WSÁNEĆ University? Or am I also performing settler-allyship in a problematic way? Is this my move towards innocence?

Joanne gathered up the rest of her groceries in a heroic, one-trip-from-the-car effort and entered the fray of her home. Despite being a 35-year-old PhD student and administrator in the Office of Indigenous Research at Vic-U, Joanne lived with her mum and brother. Housing was still outrageously expensive in the city; the real-estate bubble still hadn't burst. It was more like a blob now. And furthermore, she liked living with her family . . . sort of. She was trying to be more relationally accountable than *just* sharing a house. This concept was something that she had learned from working with Elder Max. It is important to look after our Elders, and those can be parents too.

Hi! I stopped on the way and grabbed some groceries . . . oh and look at what Elder Max gave to us. Joanne said as she took off her shoes and raised the can of salmon.

How was the ceremony? Asked her mum disinterestedly, not looking up from her phone.

Joanne's hackles went up. She had been burned too many times when she poured out her heart to her mum only to receive negative, sceptical commentary in return.

It is in her eyes. She is always comparing and critiquing and picking. It comes from a place of worry, but it sure irks me.

Joanne could never quite say this thought out loud — it was more of a felt experience. Joanne's relationship with her mum played right into her feelings of guilt. Sometimes she felt more connection to her work and her research than being at home.

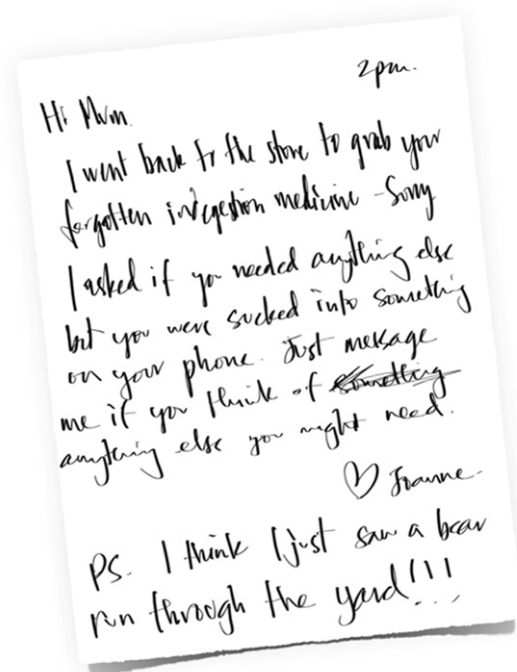
How do I live well with my mum? Okay, Elder Max said: start with respect . . . start with respect . . . start with respect.

Trying to channel all of this inner turmoil, she decided to respond anyway:

The ceremony was amazing, Mum!; I wish you were all there; I am . . . I don't know how to describe it . . . The Nations are just so invested in each other and in developing their own way of teaching, training, and guiding their members.

I feel like I need to do something, change something in my own life after seeing all that.. what do we do that has that sort of connection to our families, each other? . . . How do I connect to more community?

Oh yeah, that's nice dear . . . Said her mum looking distractingly at her phone, *what did you get at the store?*



SPÁ,ET 2032

Her eyes were cold.

Body warm, though. Hear the slightest pawfall around, stale, sour stench of other connected ones; layered seasons. Blurry, blurry. The grass, the trees, the skies. Can't see very well in this cold, dusty eyes, like after long sleep. Food, shelter, water.

To SPÁ,ET, the air had a new chill in it. Like the cold damp fresh air that comes from the bottom of valleys at the end of an inlet of saltwater. It was the first truly cold day of PEKELÁNEW leaves-turn-white moon and the air was saturated, yet it was just above freezing. The grey-brown leaves had created a pile at the base of the ČEN,ILČ Garry oak.

Cold eyes. Will the drips stop soon? Less things to eat now but tummy full, so much food, acorns, salmon, grubs, plants. Food, shelter, water.

SPÁ,ET was a TÁN, Mama. She had pain in her joints from all the walking with two cubs inside of her. She was pregnant. Her own mama had taught her how to deal with pain; How to regularly treat herself with KO,PEŁĆ, spiky plant, Devils-club roots.

ĶO,PEŁĆ hard to come by, not so regular damp swamps. But if mixed with KEXMIN seeds, more energy. Time to make the long sleep - bedtimes! Food, shelter, water.

SPÁ,ET had a maniacal stare, coupled with an increased heart rate, a nasty cold sweat, and the feeling that she wasn't doing enough to get ready for winter. She didn't know where to start despite the fact that she had done this for eight years.

However, she knew this wasn't going to last long, the KEXMIN medicine would wear off. SPÁ,ET was walking out on the Land, remembering the rhythm of her steps. This time of year always

carried her down a particular valley, down towards an enclosed forest of mixed ĆEN,İĬĆ and JSĀİĬĆ, Douglas fir.

Left-Right. Right-Left. Left-Right. Right-Left. Food, shelter, water.

This place was familiar to her: The micro adjustments of her ankles, knees, hips, paws and head as she walks up and over rocks, down into muddy pools. The reaching JSĀ,İĬĆ and sprawling ĆEN,İĬĆ trees were on fall display. It had been a great season for BİŞEJ acorns. She had eaten so many BİŞEJ that she had become bloated and constipated to the point where she had to eat KĀXEELP Cascara and blow out her belly. That, and the apples from the farmers field helped.

Stench bad. Must leave area for long times. Food, shelter, water.

Puffy, rusty pillows of verdant green and papery brown leaves crunching underfoot. The spectrum of brown to green throbbed in this forest, but it was the smell landscape that was particularly beautiful to SPĀ,EF.

The QOĬEW chum salmon in the streams slipped rich fatty protein. The ĆEN,İĬĆ forest blushed of nutty snacks, the higher elevation puffed of sweet sticky fruit. The delicate green in the reindeer lichen formed softly brittle humus mist. The lung-y kelly green SMEXDELES cyano-lichens flapped from each TĬĀEĬĆ big leaf maple stem like an overly productive elephant ear factory. The browns of oak leaves still clinging desperately to the slender, sensuous branches caressed the cold smells of the air, like sky tea.

What Mama say about lichen? Don't eat that, make you insane. Hmm, explains few things. Food, shelter, water . . .

SPĀ,EF TĀN had spent the fall in rapture with all of the kin around her. And rapture means, she had spent the Fall eating as much as possible, without feeling panic about human interactions, despite them living all around her. This could be her last litter and she needed to eat enough to give birth to cubs and keep them warm and fed through the winter.

She was heading to her usual den, just far enough from the stream, and just close enough to the ĬĬO,EL camas field around the base of the big oak. There was a hollow in a tree in this special field that she had successfully used before as shelter.

Circling it three times, she noticed that there were some recent smells in the area.
Piss from brother STĬĀYE Wolf. Ummf - want go to sleep! Go way! STĬĀYE! come out!

STĬĀYE stuck his head out of *her* den, showing teeth and feeling annoyed at himself for not smelling SPĀ,EF as she approached. It was just so comfy in this den. Truth be told, it wasn't his normal spot. He too was trying to figure out where to go for the winter. He had been on his own this summer and was looking around the area trying to find some consistent food. He was a bit of a seafood lover, it turned out. His pack had kicked him out and he was searching for a new pack to join.

He had been travelling for days, sometimes swimming, sometimes loping through human roads at night, and had found the salmon stream just down the hill, but this den had been too tempting, despite its old SPĀ,EF smells. And now look who had come back.

STĬĀYE snarled . . . *Get away from here. This is mine.*
SPĀ,EF rolled her eyes...*come on, STĬĀYE, you know mine. You smell it. Food, shelter, water . . .*

SPÁ,EF rushed STKAYE, and chased him away from the den. STKAYE circled around a few times, panting, and yelping, snapping his teeth, but his protests weren't going to get him anything. He eventually slinked off in search of another place to bed down.

SPÁ,EF spent the next few days making her bed by collecting grasses, leaves, and moss into piles just outside the cavity under the oak tree.

Food, shelter, water . . .

Of course, she had to get rid of the STKAYE smell. The temporary bedding this young wolf had dragged into the den was stinky. With very delicate paws, the bear gently sifted through the new piles pulling only the softest materials. This took a few days to fully prepare, but by the end of the week, SPÁ,EF had finally created a cosy spot for the winter. The last act, after having a final pee and poo and a big drink of water, was gratitude, like Mama SPÁ,EF had taught her.

Thanks creator for den. Thanks KÓ,PEEC, KEXMIN for medicine. Thanks CEN,ILC for food. KAXEELP for release! Thanks STKAYE for moving. HÍ,SWKE SIÁM.
Food, shelter, water . . .

Dear Joanne Oh you saw a bear! 🐻 I haven't seen anything yet. Be careful out there. 🐻 I am sorry I missed you. I am off to book club at the Smith's tonight, Mum ❤️

Joanne 2035

Joanne felt terrible, understandably. Her mother had just died of pancreatic cancer after years of undiagnosed stomach pains and resistance to medical support. She remembered the phone call. She had been walking with a friend in a park that protected a very important spit in the Salish Sea. Her phone buzzed and sang a Bewick's wren song in her pocket. It was odd that she was carrying her phone, but she had promised her wife that when she went on hikes she would bring it with her. She often would set the ringer to 'off' when walking, but not that day.

Hi love, this is your mum . . .

Oh hi mum, what's up? Are we still on for dinner on Sunday?

Well dear . . .

What is it mum?

Joanne could hear her mum choke back a sob.

Oh mum . . .

Joanne's mother died 10 weeks later in hospice. She had not been going to the doctor often enough to receive detection. That was the trick with the new epigenetic diagnostics, you had to be tested often, and many people still couldn't get access to a general practitioner.

The loss of her mother was devastating for Joanne. She had finally finished her PhD, and her mother died a few weeks later. What was supposed to be a celebratory time in her life, ended up being filled with grief and the complexities of settling estates and wills. Joanne's brother wasn't really around to help much after he had moved to Australia to work as a plumber. He had come back for the funeral but needed to get back to Brisbane to help build for the massive refugee influx there.

Joanne was feeling sad and conflicted, her mother, who had raised her to love life, be curious, be kind, and stand up for her values was now gone. Yet in those last number of years, her mum had drifted away from these values. She had become less interested with what Joanne was working on and more concerned with how much money Joanne was making. Her mum had also become obsessed with being online and this was taking the place of quality family time. Many of her friends and relatives had become sucked into their devices, and despite Joanne's wife's sympathy, she was feeling very alone.

Something changed for Joanne that day 5 years ago, when she had gone to the Salmon Ceremony. Over the years of being with her family, she noticed them being less and less connected. They were more attached to their phones, VR headsets, smart glasses, and implants. It was less about interacting with each other and the world around them and more about interaction as online personas.

Joanne started joking that they were all dividing from nature and from the world around them. Well, at first it was a joke. In the past number of years, research had shone a very bright light on the importance of disconnecting from devices. Device addiction was causing a lack of connection to tangible communities, leading to epidemics of depression and loneliness. Joanne was not as interested in listening to the news. She found herself joining up with friends and colleagues in digital detoxes, nature walks, and community-organised projects. News from the outside world did still filter in, of course, but she was able to limit its influence on her mood.

What are the divided ones doing today? Oh yeah, having their faces sucked by their machines . . . Well, I am going for a walk. See you later! Maybe I will see that bear again. I hear she has been spotted up on the mountain.

Joanne headed off for a walk up ŁÁU,WELNEW, a sacred place for the WŚÁNEĆ, the emerging people. Spring brought fireworks of flowers there, fawn lily, camas, spotted fairyslipper, rattlesnake plantain, sea blush, and sedum. Pinks, purples, mauves, and creamy tickles of light scattered across the landscape. Spring was a magical time in the Garry oak ecosystem. It was an important time to be alive, to see and be seen by the other-than-humans all around.

As Joanne rounded the bluffs, resplendent in liquorice ferns and sedum, she saw two women in the distance, off the path. They were bent over amidst the sea of purple camas flowers. Joanne knew from her research that they were marking the poisonous white death camas plants so that the bulb's didn't accidentally get harvested with the regular camas for the feast later in the season. The challenge is, the bulbs look the same, but luckily the flowers don't. Marking the flowers in the Spring is an important job to do in preparation for the harvest.

Joanne recognised the two women from various functions in the Nation, but she didn't know their names. Joanne decided to practise some of her SENCOTEN.

Okay I can do this . . .

ÍY, SĆÁĆEL SIÁM, ÁŁE E SW Ū ÍY OL?

The women looked up from their work, excited to hear their language, the language of the land . . . they smiled.

ÍY SĆÁĆEL! ÁŃ ŁTE Ū ÍY.

Joanne smiled back and slipped back into English. She could see that they were focused on their work.

Oh good, so glad you are doing well. HELJÁĆE

ĆQEN ŁTE E TTE SPÁ,ET. KÁŁELEX!

Hmm. I only understood SPÁ,EF Bear in that sentence . . . I'll keep my eyes open.

HÍ, SWKE!

Joanne continued on the walk. She loved hearing the Pacific wren's trill. It reminded her of those music devices from long ago, tapes, but played backwards. The walk had lulled her into nostalgia. She started thinking back to the early days of her PhD, and remembered her professor and his clumsy questioning. She remembered Elder Max, whom Joanne had maintained a good relationship with over the years and with whom she would often seek counsel. She remembered the pure thrill of seeing the community supporting each other starting a new University.

And yet, Joanne felt like she was still performing scholarly in many ways rather than being one to stand in solidarity. She felt like she was pulling the line for the larger institution so it could report on the number of Indigenous students it matriculated, the number of projects it had with local First Nations and Indigenous communities, and the number of research dollars pouring through the university.

Am I really helping to centre Indigenous futures?

What Joanne felt like she was missing was being on the Land and Sea. She, too, had become a disconnected one, but in a different way than her family. Despite intentionally getting outside in the evenings and weekends, much of her work was focused on supporting others to conduct research in collaboration with First Nations communities.

Disconnection doesn't only mean being addicted to digital worlds. It is an addiction to the colonial world, which was separating by its design. I am addicted to the colonial world . . . I am disconnected too.

She knew something was wrong in heart. And her gut had been telling her for a while that it, too, had been hurting. She had seen a bunch of doctors about it over the years, unlike her mother, but most of them attributed her issues to stress.

One day, when Joanne was at work, she visited with Elder Max, who happened to be the Elder in Residence that day. Joanne told Max about her heart, about her mum, and about her worry about living a life in the office.

Max said:

Pay attention to that heart. Focus on your health. It sounds like the medicine you have been taking, although it is good, isn't helping enough.

You might benefit some different medicine. Come out on the Land with us. Come eat with us from the Land. Take a break. This Land is the medicine you need.

Joanne didn't know what to say. She worried that if she accepted, she would be taking the place of a young Indigenous student on a camp. She felt guilty for even taking the time with Max at this moment. But her heart told her that Elder Max was exactly correct.

Joanne's attention came back to the moment on the trail. She stepped around a big old Garry oak, lost in thought about what she should do.

Woah, big dog! Holy shit. Not a dog. That's a bear!! It's close but not too close. It seems totally engrossed eating that TOQI Skunk Cabbage in the swamp down there. Maybe I can sit up here, upwind from it, and watch. Do you mind SPÁ,EF? Maybe this is what Elder Max was talking about.

The next day Joanne requested a leave of absence from work. She had already trained some staff in her work at Vic-U. She felt confident in passing it on to a young, Indigenous, 2-spirited graduate student. They were from Treaty 6 Territory and had been slowly creating a community at Vic-U, but it was hard for them to be so far from home.

The next day, Joanne headed to Elder Max's house, where she had been instructed to come with just a few belongings for the trip.

First things first. You will be joining the Land-based Language cohort that works with both the Tribal School and the WSÁNEĆ University. They will be out in boats, on the Land and in the Sea doing important protocol, culture, and language learning. You are an outsider, but you are also a friend and supporter. The students know that you will be there, and the instructors - I am one of them - will be there to help guide you. You will be invited to do some healing ceremonies with us, and you must commit fully to the process. However, there will also be ceremonies that won't be appropriate for you in this process. I know that you will be able to be respectful because of my long relationship with you. But it bears saying again: you are in need of medicine, good Land-based medicine that we get from traditional ways. None of this medicine or protocol is yours to share, other than with special permission.

Thank you so much. I don't know what to say.

That is just it . . . you don't need to say anything, watch, listen, and practice when you are asked to practice. The Land will help you heal. It always does.

Elder Max then drove her to the new University. Joanne was already feeling better. She was on a good path. Elder Max and the bear had both helped her see that this was the right way to go.



SPÁ,EF 2042

SPÁ,EF TÁN was very weary. slow. aching. pain. in. each. step. She looked down on the valley from the bluff. The open meadows below held sweet fruit trees, steaming compost heaps and easy walking.

She was not only a TÁN anymore but a SILEŞ many times over. She was a grandmother to an entire community of bears in these Garry oak forests. She had taught them to navigate around the permanent dens of the humans. She had helped her cubs find medicine when they needed it and sent them off to live across the peninsula and the southern part of the Island.

Occasionally she would see them again, but steered clear of her own cubs and other bears she came across. She was a loner - happy with her life. Feeling exhausted now and walking very slowly, she was having a hard time recognising dangers. Just last week she had been caught by some humans who were out on a trail in the forest. She had her back to them, while she was gorging on TŌQI skunk cabbage shoots. They startled her as they came around the corner. She stood on her back legs, though she was too tired to stand for long. They kept yelling and waving their hands as they walked away. Then they were gone.

That was close. Not sure can run.

However, that encounter was nearly two moons ago. Today was a bit different. SPÁ,EF was in and out of consciousness and stumbling a bit. She hadn't eaten since that Spring day with the TŌQI. It was now midsummer. She was walking towards the sun, or water, or downhill. Just somewhere.

So tired. Looking to lie down. Sunny patch under ĆEN,IĚĆ, can watch TIKT northern flicker. Happy.

After stumbling through a farmers field, SPÁ,EF sees some ĆEN,IĚĆ across the way in another field. The sun was getting lower in the sky shining directly into her milky eyes. She stumbled forward getting caught in hidden wires and posts, making it over the fence in a knot of pain.

Cuts, fur-ripping, ouch! Ditch. Water. Soaking wet. Pain. Exhaustion. LIGHTS! LIGHTS! Run! Or maybe not. Can't run.

Joanne 2042

Oh no, no, no, no, no! No! What is that? Is that a bear? Is that THE bear?

Joanne swerved off the bike path, she reached for the kickstand. She had forgotten it was her new gyro bike that balanced on its own. She watched the old bear drag itself slowly across the path, through another ditch and into the field. At first the bear seemed to be startled. Then it met her eyes and its initial apprehension eased to acceptance and then to something else. They held eye contact for a long time. Joanne could tell it was an old bear, it had recent blood stains on its fur.

Has it been in a fight? This bear's fur is scruffy and old looking. How am I looking into its eyes for so long?

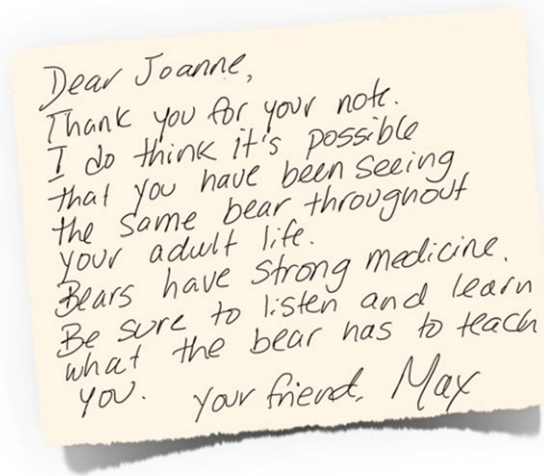
The bear eventually continued on slowly. It looked back occasionally, and for whatever reason, Joanne felt that it was inviting, beckoning her to come. The sun dipped beyond the trees and hills in the West. It was officially dusk. The bike lane was quiet. A soft silence descended on this moment. Joanne had a strange urge to follow the bear. She decided to listen to her heart.

At this point, the bear was dragging itself up by its front paws, broken looking and shambling towards a big Garry oak tree. Lurching, breathing extremely hard, wheezing even. Joanne caught the bear's eyes again.

Oh my gosh, I think this bear is dying.

Joanne stayed away from the bear, finding her own smaller oak to sit under. She quietly unpacked her jacket as a slight chill descended. She decided she would keep vigil, for what exactly, she didn't know. But it seemed like the bear was not wanting her to leave. She noticed a small note tucked in a pocket of the jacket.

What's that? Oh. I know what that is.



Hours passed and the cool air from the bay crept up the valley. The bear kept looking at Joanne and also over at a bird that was flitting in and out of the Garry Oak.

What are they called in SENĆOŦEN? TIKT...oh that is such a good name. Onomatopoeic...the Northern flicker is known for its laser-gun sounding call. TIKT, TIKT, TIKT. Almost like that classic sci-fi film, Star Wars. I wonder why this bear is watching the TIKT so closely.

Joanne found that she was speaking all of this out loud to the bear. She felt guilty for breaking the natural sounds with her words.

Oh wait, but I am nature too. Wasn't that one of the teachings I received from being on the Land with those children all those years ago? I'm always relearning things...

The bear looked upon her with Milky Way eyes. She had laid her head down and her breath was much shallower. Joanne had a hard time discerning the bear from the surrounding grass and camas seed heads. It was getting darker.

What was your life like, SPÁ,ET?

On hearing her name, the bear's eyes flicked open wider then closed, never re-open.

Oh I am so sorry, SPÁ,ET.

Tears started streaming down Joanne's face. She sat, looking at the dark shape of the bear and up at the Garry oak, where the *TIKT* had disappeared at the darkest of dusk.

Weird, I can still feel you SPÁ,ET? Are you here?

The next day, Joanne called the Land Manager, who said they would send out a conservation officer right away. Joanne wanted to hear about what would happen with the bear. They said they would share if it was appropriate.

Over the years, Joanne would come to realise that witnessing the bear's death was a gift. It helped her see death in a new way. The connection of the bear to the Garry oak ecosystem, the flicker, the skunk cabbage, the *WSÁNEĆ* peoples and to her, depicted an interconnectedness that she had studied but now could understand in a lived way.

She also saw anew her own mum's death. That the life she had with her mum was complex and awkward, and it, too, had interconnected and loving moments. She missed the quiet morning chats over tea. She missed the side-splitting laughing fits she would get into when playing board games. She missed her kind worrying presence, always hoping for the best. She had been her mother's cub at one time.

Our lives are all intertwined. Our lives have been seemingly separated, disconnected. However, our connections are so deeply rooted. We are part of the bear's community and so is SPÁ,ET part of ours.

Despite Joanne's challenges with her family . . . Despite her struggles with identity, her guilt of settler-colonialism . . . Despite her coming to terms with supporting Nations' sovereignty . . . Despite the loss of her mother . . . Despite fictional dystopian futures . . . Despite the toll of climate change . . . Despite the biodiversity losses . . . Despite all of this, life and death still carried lessons. Lessons that had to be learned and relearned. And the lesson Joanne is currently relearning is that death can also mean hope. Death can also mean interconnection. Death can also mean life.

SPÁ,ET continues to visit Joanne, most often through her writing. She works with students on writing hopepunk stories as antidotes to the dystopian novels she was sick of reading. Joanne's stories always feature a SPÁ,ET that interrupted the daily way of thinking and introduces transformative experiences to her other characters. Joanne often visits the site of SPÁ,ET's death, which had become a place of solitude, just off the bike path that she rides every day.

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