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“Election Day”

There are people fighting down the road. Yesterday I saw my older brother walk out of the house with a bat. He looked scared. All he told me was to “stay put”. I haven’t seen him yet. My Cocum’s sitting on the couch watching T.V I ask her, “Cocum why is it like this?” she tells me. “Its election time,” then tell me to go to sleep.

I wake up to the sounds of men talking in the kitchen; I crawl out of my bed and quietly sneak out of my room. I look out and see all the lights on in the hallway, kitchen and living room. I poke my head out and see my father sitting with my uncles and my brother.

“Well I don’t know about the Redfeather family, they don’t seem like they’re on our side this year!” My father says as all his brothers laugh with my older brother Steven, sitting there with a shiner smiling but not laughing.

“Yeah boy, you got ‘em good” my dad leans over and puts his arm over my brother. You could see he’s been crying and is holding back tears. But he’s still smiling. Seeing him like that makes me hold back tears.

“What are you doing up boy?” My mom Linda grabs my arm and sends me back to my room. I don’t fall back to sleep I push my ear to the door and listen.

“Well bro we got em good” my uncle Percy says.

“Yeah! I just said that!” says Anthony, my father.

“Well we lost five votes there, that puts us roughly at about 235 or less depending how people react to this little... umm... little scrap,” says Percy.

“We gotta maintain! Guys I want you to talk to your people and let them know this thing was not our fault. Okay?” My dad says with his tired voice.

“Yeah we got it Tony. Don’t worry” my other uncle Sampson speaks finally, after laughing for about five minutes.

They all got up and put on their shoes, except Steven. He sat there for about two minutes before he started to whimper. My mother was already asleep. My dad was driving my uncle’s home. I took this chance to talk to my hurt brother.

I walked out the door for a second time. The lights were all on except the living room where Steven was lying on the couch. I sat across from him on a tiny chair.

“What’s wrong?” I ask him.

“Nothing, go back to bed.”

“No you’re hurt. What’s wrong?”

“None of your damn business. Now get lost before you get smoked.”

“Fine then. Just thought I’d be nice. Not my fault you got hooked around.” I say viciously.

He gets up and walks right up to me and I’m cornered

“I told you, you’re gonna get smoked!”

BOOM

Damn, should’ve stayed in bed, I think to myself

I wake up on the couch with my dad watching CNN sitting on the loveseat opposite me. He stares and lights up another cigarette. DuMaurier king size. He has always been smoking them since I was born. People say they’re bad for you. But I don’t care that smell reminds me of him and home.

His name is Anthony Bear. He's thirty-six years old and in his fourth year as chief of the Redtree Saulteaux First Nation, two and a half miles south of Saskatchewan's capital, Regina. He's not a big man as his last name implies and he's not mean either. Well as far as I've seen. I've been told he used to be a dangerous angry young man in his younger days, but that's all I hear. These days he's quite mellow. Even with all the troubles surrounding him, he keeps a cool head. I try to be like him but I can't. Being a kid with dietary problems can give you a lot of anger towards many people. But all in all he's taught me well.

I wake up, sit up and he looks at me smiling. Then it kicks in. The pain. My jaw looks like a purple grape. I got hit with a devastating right.

"Ow! Damn it, forgot all about that," I say.

"I thought I taught you how to avoid those shots, my boy."

He throws me a bag of frozen peas and I place it delicately on my chin. It soothes my pain, only temporarily. Until I remember I have school in one hour and my bus will be here in ten minutes.

I was up and put on my clothes and as sure as sun, my bus is here. I hop on the bus and sit next to my best friend, Benjamin Redfeather.

"What do you want?" he says with a sharp sting.

"Huh?" I say stupidly

"I know what your damn family did to my dad last night!"

"What are you talking about? What did my brother do?"

"Your brother? So it was Steven?"

"Look bro, I don't know what you're talking 'bout?"

I stopped and noticed the whole bus had stopped to witness my buddy's spat and me. I recuperated and struck back

"Look it's not my fault our dads are running against each other!" I thought I said. But I didn't, I meant to say it, but I didn't.

When I came to, I was sitting in the back seat of the bus being held down by my cousin Mick. He kept telling me to calm down. The bus was moving now and I could hear everyone saying Ben's name and me. Mick let me up and I saw everyone's eyes. They

were viewing me carefully like a child watches for a bee. I looked down at my white shirt, which was now striped with red, and also my hands were looking as if I had been painting.

I saw down and asked Mick what happened.

“Whoa! Bro, he started cutting up your dad and called you a fatty! Then you smoked him twice, then he got you back with a few jabs that made your nose-bleed.”

“Well, did I win?” I asked out of breath.

“I dunno I broke you two up before anything else bad happened.”

As we pulled up to the school, I saw Ben walk out of the bus ahead of me with his nose covered up with a shirt. He walked into the school and sat with his cousins. All my cousins surrounded me, throwing shots pretending a rumble was about to happen. A couple was telling each other how to throw a haymaker and others were singing “Bad Moon Rising” our “about-to-scrap anthem”. I was still in a daze. Recovering from my trademark blackout moment. I read up on what happens to me a few months ago. In a comic book “X-Men”, Wolverine has something called the Berserker Rage. So I think I have that. It happens when I get mad. Damn I thought to myself I still got a whole day to go at school, how am I going to avoid the Redfeathers all day, that’s it just stick with the Bears, they won’t try anything yeah that’s it.

First bell rang. The morning went by fast. That whole morning was a blur. Until lunch - something always happens at lunch. I regrouped with my cousins; we walked to the vacant Laundromat and sat on the empty tables.

“Okay, I called this meeting to see what we’re going to do about these bastards the Redfeathers!” my oldest cousin Rob said, he and Steven were very close until Steven graduated and Rob stuck around. People said he was stupid. I just thought he stayed here to watch my back.

“Now Freddy here just fought it out with Ben on the bus, Ben was cutting up my Uncle Tony and our family. We cannot let this slide; if the Redfeathers want a war they’ll get it! I’ve brought 100 water balloons!”

A laugh erupted from everyone even me. Of course he was joking. He said that to calm us down. We all talked for a bit they asked me how I felt. There I am, Freddy Bear,

looking pitiful with a bruised jaw and a bloody shirt. Everyone thinks I got the bruise from Ben. I'm going to get him back; he's going to wish he never called me...

BOOM.

I've just been hit this day is going good. The Redfeathers snuck up on us, just like them to do something so sneaky. My ears rang. I ran outside with all my cousins. The showdown was one. There were six of us against ten of them. I volunteered my pride and myself.

"Look! I'll just fight Ben. It's between us anyways!"

There were looks of acknowledgement coming from everyone.

The fight was on.

I walked towards him with my hands up and my chin close to my chest, my feet bounced and I got ready. Ben was also ready. We bounced at the same time, the unrest was building, the local storeowner turned his sixties radio and the sounds of old-school CCR blasted through the streets. I smiled and lunged forward.

The fight lasted for as long as the song did.

"I heard it through the grapevine" was stuck in my ears after and my knuckles and face were sore. I didn't go into my Berserker Rage. It was a good fight. So good Ben and I didn't notice the tears flowing down our face leaving a clean spot through the blood and dirt.

Rob picked me up and we walked to a back alley. He looked at me long and hard.

With a cracked voice he spoke "You okay? Look, I'll get you home you don't have to stick around this afternoon, I already got Little Jimmy to call you mom, she's coming here now"

The tiny car pulled up, soon after. My mom didn't even look at me. I jumped in and felt her shame towards me. She never liked the idea of me fighting. It was hot in the car and she didn't even put on the air conditioning or even let me roll down the windows. It was hot in the car and that was the longest ride I ever took home.

When we pulled in I saw that there was a lot of traffic going towards the Band Office, I forgot. It was Election Day. We were going to see who would be the Chief, my dad still, probably

We walked in the house and I saw my Cocum sitting there with a braid of sweetgrass and the sweet smell of smudge hit my nose and I instantly felt at ease. I sat next to her and brushed the smoke across my face with my still bloody hands.

I was about to go wash them when she told me “sit”.

So softly and sweetly, it commanded obedience. I sat there waiting for the worst. It was quiet. I finally figured it out. She was waiting to hear what I had to say. I spoke finally. Not knowing what to say I blurted something out.

“Why is it like this during election time?”

She looked at me.

“You know back before the white man showed up we had our own way of doing things. Our people traveled with the buffalo and strong people governed our lives, spiritually and mentally. Some groups had leaders that passed on chiefs through bloodlines while others simply chose their strongest. I was a good system, no problems, people did what they had to do and there was no trying’ to gain control over people with money or things with no value on the other side. What’s valuable is in here...your heart and your soul, you have to be good to yourself and do what’s right. I’m not going to give you heck about you fighting. I want you to ask yourself, was that a good thing for you to do? To hurt someone over small things that doesn’t matter? That is what you have to think about. Will times ever change? That’s not our place to know. For better or worse things sort themselves out and in the end, all you get is how you conduct yourself and how you love other people.”

She got up and left.

I sat there thinking about what I’ve done and wondering if Ben was okay. I didn’t notice how tired I was. I lied down and instantly went to sleep.

I slept for what felt like an eternity. I woke up to the smell of DuMaurier king size cigarettes. I opened my eyes with my dad sitting across from me, drinking coffee and looking at a sheet filled with numbers. I wiped my eyes looked at the clock, 3 AM. I slept for twelve or more hours; my hands still had blood on them. My father looked at me “So? How did you do?” he asked.

“How did you do?” I asked right back.

We laughed.

“I guess as good as you,” he said with a laugh.

I thought to myself. We both did good, but both were sad of what we put our families and friends through in one day.

We sat there. Looking out onto the marsh in front of our house, glowing under the moonlight.

Both wondering what tomorrow will bring.

END