



A PROJECT OF THE DOMINION INSTITUTE

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**18 yrs.**

### **The Might of Oneness**

On the edge of a precipice, life is simple. There are no rules, norms, and differences. It is all exactly as one perceives it. The breath-taking edge of the world, the never-ending drop to the bottom. The water below, the sky above, the precarious balance struck between them on the point of a stone.

I am awake. I do not feel awake. Maybe I am still dreaming. All my dreams are tranquil. Yet I find solace when I am awake, so I could be anywhere between dreams and reality.

No, I am awake. I can feel the movement around me, the vibrant life of nature and how alive you feel when you simply breathe. I feel it. I also feel my obligations weighing on me, bearing down, overwhelming because I am helpless.

Last week, the government apologized for residential schools. It signified nothing but pain to my grandmother. It was a reminder of her past, a past she had worked hard to leave behind, her motivation for living a full life so she could forget it. Forgetting the past is similar to a garden of impatiens. Every year they leave, but every year they bloom again. The flower is a pretty thing, a part of life. The past can be an ugly thing, but it is still as much a part of life as the tangible flower. It creates us, moulds us.

My grandmother was lost. She was taken away from her family, told to forget her past, the only way of life she knew. The aggressive assimilation policy of these residential schools did not accomplish what it had set out to do. Nookomis clings to the past that was ripped away from her, and forgets the past that was forced upon her.

Now, with these apologies from the government, she has seen what she did not want to see again. More than anything, she feels the pain of separation, and the isolation from those she loved. She feels loneliness.

My mother does not know what to do, nor do I. I am nadanis to my grandmother, to my mother, and my father. But today I am not much.

I am here on the precipice, forced to face the reality of my lack of ability to help my grandmother as she gives into depression. The inadequacy I feel is astounding, humbling. I sit here connecting with nature, hoping to find an answer while staring into the depths of the water.

There was a time, not long ago, when I did not know what to believe, or how to feel. I lost my connection with what had so long helped define whom I felt, and hoped, I was. That phase lasted longer than I knew. I lost the feeling of my connection to my ancestors, and wanted only to live my own life. I wanted to establish myself as an individual, and I felt confined by beliefs that I thought were not my own. I felt suffocated. It was as if I had no choice, like my grandmother, though I knew I was

grateful to not have the consequences she endured. It was only after I realized after that every time I was feeling sad or confused, every time I had faced a trial or tribulation of life, that I sought the help and guidance from the teachings of my ancestors that I did have a choice. My choice had never left me, it was just not as apparent during the times of joy. My grandmother gave me my strength, and helped me make that choice. I now close my eyes.

Sleep claims me as its own. I willingly obey its command. My dreams guide me to a time when unicorns still existed, and time travel was easy, simply a matter of imagination. A time when nookomis would tell me stories about her childhood, a simpler time for her as well. I learned all I know about my ancestors from her. She would tell me stories of traditional ways, give me the teachings I now know to be my truth, my choice. I went to my first sweat lodge with her. I discovered a connection with my past that otherwise would have been cast asunder. Learning about events in school had a new meaning because of what she taught me, not just through her words and wisdom, but also through her life. She is the strongest woman I know, and I cannot let her fall deeper into her own psyche, left alone with her terrors, her nightmares. If she must face them she will not face them alone.

My dreams take me another course. I am crying on the stairs, I have just found out my grandfather is dying. I am too young to fully understand death, to even know exactly what it exactly means to live. Yet I know that soon I will not see him or feel his life around me again. Nookomis is wise, and she knows what it is to face death. Death has already claimed some of her friends and loved ones. She comforts me, praying with me, telling me that just because we would no longer meet mishoomis in this life, in this form, did not mean that we would not see him ever again, and that it was time for his spirit to continue on the journey.

My dreams take me to one more place. I am deep within a forest. The crisp, fresh air, and the dark green trees surround me. I come upon a clearing, with a creek. Two animals are drinking from the same creek, but on completely opposite sides. A bear, and a wolf, drinking the fresh water, will then separate and continue on their journeys, along their separate paths. But, that is not at all what happens. They drink together; they take their time, enjoying the richness of the water. Then for a long moment when it seems that it is time for their journeys to continue, they look at each other. The wolf does not know where to go, and the bear was looking for a companion on his journey. The wolf crosses the creek, where they each take one more drink of the sweet water, and then continue on together. Together.

I awaken. There is no trouble distinguishing dreams from reality this time. The answer has been so simple all along. She has spent so long helping me find my inner spirit, giving me what was taken away from her. No, it was not taken away, just a failed attempt.

That night, back home, I sit with her for hours, telling her the stories she used to tell me, giving her all the love she's given me. What she went through cannot be undone, but the loneliness can be. I see the light in her eyes; I know she will be all right. Tomorrow we will go to a ceremony as a family, we will cry and face the demons together. Tomorrow she will see just how much she is not alone. All the people at the ceremony who went through what she did, who endured the same pain, loss and loneliness will unite, and accept the apology as a groundbreaking gesture, and the healing

can continue, together. Her family that was so lost to her and out of reach will be with her in spirit, as she holds the hands of the elders, and sings with the brothers and sisters who will be there with her tomorrow. Tomorrow holds all the promises of today.

But for today, for now, we sit together. We are together.