

Deserae Tailfeathers
Blood Reserve, Alberta
Age 14

Present Day Quebec

Present Day Quebec, 1608

Day 1

Today we saw birds fall from the sky. Mother had asked me to take my younger sisters down to the river to wash their hair. We gathered berries along the way. The riverbank was low today, and my sisters complained about the cold water on their skin. After we washed our hair, we sat on the rivers edge in the warm sunlight, eating the berries we had picked. The youngest, Bell, whom we had nicknamed “Little Feet”, had found interest in entertaining herself by chasing a gopher while I braided my other sister’s hair. Morning Star was the second oldest and I, Snowfall, was the oldest. My sister Morning Star should be the oldest, I thought to myself. She was so much more responsible and brave than I was. I hated all my responsibility, and I hated being scolded by Mother when I didn’t do something right. Morning Star was so much better at that than I was. She always seemed to do everything right.

I turned my head to glance at Bell who had resorted to shoving her tiny hand down a gopher hole. “Your not doing it right.” said Morning Star. I glared at her. “Fine then, you do it.” I said as she started to undo the plaits I had braided.

I laid my head in the grass, closing my eyes and feeling the warmth of the sun. It felt so good I could almost taste it. Suddenly, Bell cried, “Look!” We turned around to see her little finger pointed towards the sky. At first all I saw were a few blue jays flying above the treetops. Then, one by one they dropped to the ground as we heard loud popping noises.

Both Bell and I turned to look at Morning Star for an explanation, but she sat there with a puzzled look on her face identical to ours.

Day 2

I laid out the meat that Mother was going to cook on two large rocks next to the fire. It was still daylight. I told Mother I was done with the meat and asked if I could pick berries by myself. “Don’t wander off! It will be dark soon.” said Mother.

Picking berries by myself was the only time I ever got to be alone. It seemed Mother always needed my help, or I always had to watch Bell or take Morning Star with me somewhere.

I used this time to walk through the bushes. I often ended up by the river. Sometimes I would see people from our camp bathing or fishing, so I tried to avoid the river. My favorite spot was the apple tree on top of the hill that overlooked the lake. Especially during the fall, when the leftover apples fell from the places that I couldn't reach.

I sat under the tree after I had filled my basket with berries. I closed my eyes for a while and hummed a song I used to sing to Bell when she was a baby.

When I opened my eyes, I didn't notice it at first. I thought maybe it was a reflection of the sunset on the water, so I closed my eyes again and almost drifted off to sleep. I sat there with my eyes closed for a long time, counting the minutes in my head. When I opened my eyes, my heart began to race.

It wasn't a reflection. It was a large wooden ship with a white sail. It was coming towards the riverbank in full view of the camp.

"Can anyone else see it?", I thought. I didn't know what to do. I thought if I stood up, they would see me and I didn't know what they would do if they did.

I sat under the apple tree with my heart racing until the last of the sun had set, waiting for Mother to scold me when I went home.

Day 3

They arrived this morning. A big ship with a white sail filled with men with weapons and skin the color of a fish's belly. They had shoulder-length brown and blonde hair wrapped in curls and a hat with a feather on top of their heads.

I hadn't seen them personally. Mother had rushed us back inside our tipi as soon as she had heard word of their arrival. We sat inside all afternoon and played a game with Bell's toys. I hadn't played with Bell since two summers ago.

After our game, we sat in the tipi and tried to be as quiet as possible because we heard loud voices and dogs barking. I could only make out a few words. The rest of the voices sounded different. They sounded gruff, and the words they spoke were foreign to me.

We sat in silence for a while, until we heard loud popping noises like the one's we had heard the day before. They got louder and louder and seemed to be getting closer. At one point, Bell had begun to cry and was soon comforted by Morning Star.

Our mother was not with us. She had rushed us into the tipi but left again to find our Grandmother. It was almost dark and we hadn't seen our Mother since morning. Something was wrong. I could feel it and Morning Star could feel it too.

Day 4

We went to sleep crying and hungry. Mother had not returned. Bell called out her name while she slept. This morning we awoke to the sound of silence and the grass fresh with dew. I didn't want to open my eyes because I knew I'd have to leave the safe peacefulness of our tipi today.

My stomach growled with hunger. I'd found some dried meat and water that Mother had put away many months ago. As Morning Star, Bell and I ate the dried meat, I could tell none of us wanted to leave. We were scared of what we didn't know. Even Morning Star, as brave as she is, had a look of fear on her face. We all wished Mother would come walking in with fresh berries and cooked fish for us to eat. But she didn't.

I told Morning Star to stay with Bell. I really wouldn't mind staying with Bell and making Morning Star go and look for Mother, but I knew that Mother would scold me when we found her if she did.

I started looking around our camp. Small fires burned on butts of grass everywhere. Wooden poles and weapons lay around on the ground. There wasn't a person in sight.

I wandered towards the river. Peeking through the forest trees, I could see a campfire and people in hats sitting around it. I could still see the sailboat. I could smell fish cooking. The warm, sweet, delicious smell surrounded me and filled my nose.

I didn't want to be here alone. I wanted my sisters with me, to keep them safe, and to keep me safe. I didn't know these strange people and I didn't trust them.

Turning around, I began to make my way back to the camp, or what was left of it. I made it through the forest and reached a small bush, just near our Grandmother's tipi. I saw a body, and small feet sticking out from under the bush. I recognized the moccasins.

What I saw made my blood run cold. My mother lay dead on the ground, dried blood on her face and a gaping wound in her head.

With tears streaming down my face, I ran as fast as I could back to our tipi.

Day 5

Today we will leave camp. Just the three of us. We will travel north as far as we can. I stayed up all night in the freezing cold, seeing my mother's body flash in my mind over and over again.

We left as soon as the sun rose. Taking only our blankets and some leftover dried meat, we set off on our way through the forest and towards the river.

We approached the riverbank with caution. I could see the large white sail of the boat in the distance.

A man with eyes the color of water and white hair had spotted us. We hid behind a large rock, and in my mind I begged him not to come any closer.

He stared down at us and yelled something to the other men. This scared Bell and she started to cry. I tried to hush her as best I could. The man walked away and came back with some water and cooked fish. It made my mouth water. He handed the water to me and the fish to Morning Star. We looked at each other in confusion. I took a tiny sip of the water. It tasted cool and refreshing.

We did not know this man. How could we trust him? How did we know that he didn't want to hurt us? I wished I knew what to do. He had friendly eyes and I could feel something inside me wanting to trust him.

He extended a soft, white hand towards me. I looked at my sisters and reached for his hand. Soon after, he led us toward the sailboat. I didn't know what the future would guarantee. I still had my sisters, and somehow I knew that by trusting this man, a future for us would be guaranteed.