

Make you Feel my Love:

Gchi Manido, if you're listening, please watch out for my daughter. She's a beautiful human. I don't know what happened to her, but I'm worried about her.

I had nowhere to go, and no place to stay. A man told me he had a place for me to stay, but he didn't really mean for me to live. Then, one day as I closed my eyes I saw a shadow. He came to me with the sweetest smile, asked me if we could talk for a while.

If I could fly, honey, I'd give up everything, just to come back home to you. I've been missing half of me, since we've been apart.

Mom, I'm so sorry. I was deceived, and you may never know who he is. Don't fret, I was greeted by the kindest manido. I didn't forget where I belong.

I'm so sorry for how I acted towards you. I want you to know that it was never that I didn't accept who you were, but that I was worried that other kids would bully you. This is all my fault, sweetheart.

I hope you know that I loved you. I didn't mean to disappoint you, and I hope you find it in your heart to forgive yourself.

We've become a statistic. That's what everyone feels bad about. I lost half of my heart, our people lost a spark; a leader. However, what crushes me is you lost your dreams.

I'm going home, mom. Maybe, I'll get to see grandma and mishomis.

Apparently, you went down fighting. You made everyone so proud, baby. I'm glad that you had that fight within you, but I can't get past the... past the thought the you had to use it. My baby had to fight for her life, and I wasn't even there to protect her.

Mom, please! Don't go. Not yet, I'm right here with you.

Ray? My ray of sunshine. A beautiful soul and vessel, the world is missing out on so much. Why would that school kick you out? I'm trying my best not to be angry, but the thing is, my anger keeps the sadness out of my heart.

It's okay to be mad, mom. I'd like to think you'd know that, but, also that I don't hold any anger. I will start my journey home.

Last night, after everyone left, I was laying in bed. My heart just spontaneously combusted. My lungs collapsed, and the pain was searing. It felt like I was being ripped apart, piece-by-piece, limb-by-limb. I was being tortured and then resuscitated, only to be tortured

again. It becomes harder to cope when my Ray of sunshine is no longer shining. I don't know if I can do this.

I'd go hungry, I'd go black and blue. Please know, there's nothing I wouldn't do to make you feel my love. We will make it through the dark, mom.

There's nothing I wouldn't do to make you feel my love.

“I didn't want to publicize that my daughter was now another statistic to the government. I didn't want her name to only be known through this, but I hope that her story can help prevent this from happening to some other lovely girl. We need to start holding someone accountable. So, while this is our story, this is dedicated to all of the other Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, and their families. My heart goes out to all of you. Rayna James was a blessing in my life. She was a ray of sunshine, *my* Ray of sunshine. I never imagined that I would be burying half of my heart. Never, ever, did I think I would have to live through the night without my guiding light. Rayna's father wasn't around, so, when she was born I promised her that I would protect her. One day, she came to me and she said that she liked girls. I became scared for my little girl. She would face a lot of racism and bullying as it was, now, she had the extra target on her back. I feared that our community was too conservative. So, I... I sent her away. I wanted her to be able to be who she was, so I sent her to a boarding school in a seemingly liberal city: Toronto. I knew of many successful Indigenous people there, and many two-spirited. I figured,

‘what’s the problem with that’? *Ndamoshin, gchi manido*. Help me, Creator. Give me strength, please, Rayna...”

You can do it, Mom. I have faith in you.

“The problem with that was I couldn’t protect my baby from so far away. Ray fought, and she fought hard. She definitely had that intergenerational drive and fire in her blood. The day after I found out, I prayed and I prayed. I must have fallen asleep because she came to me. I was talking to Ray. She was telling me that she’s with me, that she loves me. I was contemplating how I was supposed to get through this without her. She told me not to give up and ‘we will make it through the dark’. She explained that a man had tricked her, made her think that he was going to help her. However, that man, he wasn’t intending on her being alive long enough to get back on track. He kept her and did unspeakable things. One day, she closed her eyes, and a kind-hearted shadow came and told her he wanted to talk for awhile. This *manido* saved my little girl from that monster, and brought her home. One of the last things she said before I woke was, ‘I’d go hungry, I’d go black and blue to make you feel my love,’ and it broke my heart. That is what I’d always say to her to ensure she knew how much she was loved.

Sweetheart, there’s nothing I wouldn’t do to make you feel my love.”