

How We Acquire Knowledge and Communicate "That' What We Know

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SPEAKERS PSYCHOLOGY

Theory of Meaning

Theory of Knowledge

The Language
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World
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European Tradition from Descartes

The Individual's Capacity
For Knowledge

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Based on *Spreading the Word, Groundings in the Philosophy of Language*, Simon Blackburn, Clarendon Press, Oxford Reprint 1990: 3, Figure 1.

Among the Mic Macs

What came to pass was within the well ordered life of the Mic Mac. The laws of family life, earthly and other world legends, and the helping rituals to the Great Manitou and the techniques of survival were taught to each of the new sections of warrior, hunter, fisherman, and gatherer. Survival was considered an art form. Everyone pulled the weight of making sure each season could be survived. Each season came with the woes and the illnesses from the Earth's temperature mood swings; sometimes, all in one hour. Shamans were relied upon to do the dream-scaping, to follow the angle of the moon's face-first appearance. Their dramatic skills of naming the type of monster who lived to create havoc among fishing boats were necessary. The functions of preserving food and making clothing fell to the women, highly-skilled, and greatly respected among the clans. Grandmother Moon selected the timing for them too.

Prison of Grass: Canada from a Native Point of View, Howard Adams: "Governor Kieft of New Netherland is usually credited with originating the idea of paying for Indian scalps, as they were more convenient and they offered the same proof an Indian had been killed. By liberal payments for scalps, the Dutch virtually cleared southern New York and New Jersey of Indians before the English supplanted them."

The Dutch operating out of East Harlem figured out how to destabilize and depopulate the ridiculously rich coastline from Maine to the Gulf of Saint Lawrence. The language of the Mic Mac sounded like spring water gently slushing over a gravel bed. Into that sound came the hardness of European languages and murderous thoughts. The Dutch had no staying power among all the other super powers with larger kingdoms, all of them better salesmen of the bountiful harvests of gold, silk, and special spices to be had from the Far Eastern route right through the solid heart of the North and South American continents. At the same time of the Mic Mac's undoing, the Dutch lasted long enough to place bounties on their heads in the form of delivered scalps. While they were at it, they sold and bought Malecite and Innu scalps too. As the Beothuks grew more and more scarce, family pacts were made to flee deep into the forest above the now-known

St. Lawrence River regions. The Mic Macs faced a certain future based on genocide, oppression, and suppression.

In 1942, William and his friends, all Canadian soldiers had spend many furloughs of special hours with their Mic Mac friends on Cape Breton Island. William enjoyed his hours by the sea. The hours spent on the small lakes and rivers reminded him of his subarctic homelands on the Saskatchewan River. He traded words of meaning with some of his Mic Mac-speaking friends into the Cree language. This delighted him. One fine night, his Mic Mac friends took him alone of all his other comrades to Kluskap O'Kom. Using torches of kerosene filled bottles with a dense cloth wicks, they explored the caves and the people told him their story. Later, they found their way back home in a spectacular breaking sunrise. William sang his sunrise prayers learned from his Sioux-born grandmother. And he was filled with the wonder of the Mic Mac imagination. He promised to return on the next furlough to share his Cree stories from his beloved homeland.

Within that week, the entire company received word they were forbidden to go near the reserve again. The body of a Mic Mac girl had been found raped and left to die by the seashore. This violation broke every law know to man. Everyone was now suspect in this unfortunate and deadly incident. William wept. He was banned too. World events split the world he was experiencing. A recurring dream followed him to England, then to Holland, up the Rhine and back again deep into the boreal forests of home on the Saskatchewan River delta.

In that dream Kluskap came to see him. The apparition stood straight and very tall. With his shock of white hair and his long braids, the profile looked like Old Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce that his great-grandfather had told him about. Kluskap always welcomed him into a wapikonikamik. There was always a good fire burning outside and inside. Festive drumming was always heard. Voices in Mic Mac floated in and out with the winds; the roar of ocean waves breaking rounded out the setting as Kluskap told him about himself and the Mic Mac, and the Innu. He finished always with his promise

of returning just as the petroglyphs had said. William woke from every dream close by to danger or in imminent danger. He accepted Kluskap as his spirit guide.

In 1945, he returned to the western continent by way of New York City. He had time to visit Battery Park and came to a place where Kluskap appeared to him in broad daylight. Kluskap was crying, shedding huge tears that ran into the ground. William had grown up used to night and daylight spirits. The great sadness of Kluskap disturbed him but he interpreted this appearance to the great sadness of returning without comrades of all kinds of people. He was in a hurry. The city was full of sinful delights including grand spectacles of professional shows. Youthful exuberance took precedence over an ancient apparition who cried copious tears into an open pit ground.

When he did think of the mannerisms and exhibition of tears, it was on the sobering stretch between Georgian Bay and Lake Superior as the train clacked its steady beat. The European open-pit gravesites were not burial grounds meant for hallowed ground; rather they dispersed individual identity to escape mass genocide charges. To the European mind if you cannot name the victim by name there is no victim. By contrast, there is always a tomb of the unknown soldier because you can always name the war he died in. He tried to find a new and comfortable position every ten miles. Those were slave labour camps over there. Slavery has not ended was one of his conclusions.

When he arrived home he heard the news of who was dead, who was home, and in what condition. His wife in 1940 was a bride at seventeen to his twenty years. She was eager to continue the sharing of this life with him. They were great storytellers already the both of them. The hours they spent alone trapping, fishing, skinning animals, and preparing their different tools were filled with stories near and far, factual and reality-imposed. Then there were the legends sometimes serialized-told night after night, changing like the moving lights of wawatay.

Most times as the fire was crackling down where ever they were, he told of Kluskap and his occupation in his dream-scape. He always ended with his last walk on the beach away from the glyphs.

Around his forties, another apparition came after he had spent a night at a place called Pahonan near Glenmary. This was an old place filled with the thunder of wandering and bellowing buffalo, painted ponies, Papaskoniwak Indian riders, all night steady Pohoutac drumming, and lots of goose dancing. Its other name was Fort a la Corne named after the Frenchman who had stopped to build a fort there. Only the old inhabitants knew the Cree and French name. An ancient stretch of road bears the name. A la Corne who had been sent back to France after the English won the war for Canada by wearing down the lazy and cross-eyed inner kingdoms. He carried his commission directly from the King's own treasury. On his way home, he had been shipwrecked off Cape Breton and had walked along the coastline when he met Indians who recognized him. They took him home and nursed him back to health. If the Indians had not recognized him they might have killed him or each other. William did not know any of this.

William told his wife about this new visitor.

"My Grandpa had his family tree there," she said. "Does the old one say anything? We must know somebody in common"

"This old fellow looks like an old Frenchmen from one of the old books. Why is he here though?"

Kluskap returned the next night. In that dream he showed a mudflat as far as he could see. William woke up puzzled and worried. He had seen mudflats once before. He had worked at a dam worksite on the Churchill River at the old Rapid River trading site. Life intervened. Steady work, sweaty work and even underground work came with back-breaking efficiency.

The old Frenchmen appeared once in a while as he worked on the rivers one way or another. As a growing youth, he had spent several spring times by the white water rapids with his parents. In summer and early autumn, they picked berries near there. His Mother, a medicine woman, had looked after him through many a nasty cold. She took him on her medicine and herb journeys into the wild, teaching him what the different plants were named, and how to prepare and use them. This was before she had

to hand him over to his Dad to apprentice for his life as a hunter, trapper, and fisherman.

Even now he could hear her murmuring to him in Cree and he felt her cool hand on his forehead. At the washayak he looked out over the water and saw Kluskap coming walking on the water only to his ankles. He saw where all the huge boulders on the river bottom sat exposed. He shook his head not believing this moment. Kluskap disappeared and the old Frenchman beckoned to him. In his mind, seeing and feeling the presence of three old ones in one spot was big business. He needed to see a really good interpreter of dreams—Mishahe e-qii itah-kamighan.

During the time of the Oppression, the riverine Indians had been forbidden to practice within the rituals of their belief systems. William knew by heart where every medicine man and woman lived. He now needed the medicine to do a spirit-walking journey. William was instructed to ask the Frenchman what he wanted and to take him on a spirit journey. The medicine William now possessed for himself was strong enough to send him spirit walking.

"Take me to your spirit place," he asked the old Frenchman who understood his Cree. Then, William had no memory of how he got anywhere. But he was by a familiar seashore during the draw-down of the tide. It was near the glyphs. The Frenchman spoke directly to his mind. He showed him the bottom of the sea with empty nests. Then, he was home again, walking with Kluscap on the water only up to his ankles showing him mudflats as far as the eye could see on a lake always full of fish. Major man-made changes on the freshwater and the saltwater, and the Indian people were to suffer again. But so was everyone else. This was going to pass whether William told anyone of what he saw in his spirit walk.

William fasted for four days again, girded his loins and prayed for more guidance. Assistance came to physically and spiritually help him go and come back. Then he went into the sweat lodge again and asked the spirit helpers to come. They stayed with him so he could go far into himself in time back and forward. Here he could meet all his ancestors. They came for hours it seemed. At Acadie, he was shown his

grandmother as she was put on a boat by the English. Her children Mic Mac and French were not spared. In turn, she showed him the bayous so far from the North. The life they tried to lead quietly listening to the sky list of needs. At St. Francisville, he met more cousins. He was shown the fine woods, excellent acreages planted as if eternity had landed there. He loved it and told his Grandmother so.

She said, "Eh, bien! My family could work here but they could not afford to live here."

"Grandmother your family went ... did you die on the way?"

"No, I was left behind, I ran away back to my own family." This spirit had spirit!

The future? Grandmother let him know; if all the people do not come together to read the needs of sky, it will get very angry. It will gather water and flood the most inappropriate places. The water will break any man-made formation. The wind will go insane and blow everything away. You cannot fool the spirits of the sky. Audubon lived here she said. Sniffing the air, everything was already changed when he started to paint. Yet, as an artist that is all he could do. How was he to know everything had been planted by those Virginia crackers using slave labour and slave wages for the hired few? William felt her anger and then understood the importance of her message.

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When the Nipissing sauvagesse met Jean Nicholet, they bumped into each other so forcefully they both fell down. She was coming home by the village path in a hurry, and he had been spying on her village for two days already, thus running headlong along this same path. Since he was not an animal, she presented her hand to him to pull her up since she had dropped in great disarray all the supplies she carried. Jean was so stunned he complied without thinking. Jean was the stranger, she was at home. Using the Indian sign language of "follow me," Jean followed her carrying at least one big bundle wrapped in leather. It was heavy and she carried three others of equal size carefully balanced on her back by a wide sling of leather across her forehead. She bent slightly

forward and walked evenly, but quickly on the well-trodden path. Behind her Jean Nicolet struggled with two emotions total fear and the exhilaration of discovery: the fear of being killed as soon as these savage people recognized him as a total stranger.

This young woman was a model of efficiency and hard work. By the time they reached her village, he made up his mind to say nothing and stand back till he was pulled forward. If he tried to run away she could have alerted a hunting party to come after him. Jean Nicolet had a stout and brave heart and held one firm belief. God decides the moment and day of death. Pray and hope your day of death has not come. His savage Scot ancestor had left him the legacy of stout arms, and legs and a broad back like an ox and reddish hair all over. Jean could swing an axe like a Viking and sword fight like the French militiaman he was.

What could go wrong in this moment?

Jean was armed to the teeth. He was powerless against a lance sailing through dense foliage or a well-placed arrow, or a cudgel aiming for the back of his skull. Hurons, Iroquois, Innu, Algonquins, and Huron-Wendat he knew so many tribal men. Most he had met in skirmishes as the French braved one miserable winter after another. At twenty three years of age and born in Cherbourg, France, his tough body had the design for his growing coureur des bois lifestyle. Always, he carried tobacco prepared in pouches. He had learned at least one hundred signs of the American Indian hand signals. The sauvagesse turned to him and indicated that she was going to a central building, a store house. She dropped her bundles off and instructed him to follow her. No one approached but all eyes followed them.

A large conical leather dwelling occupying no more space than all the others was her obvious target. She entered, a large well-built Indian came out. Jean did not understand when she said, "Look what I bumped into!" Her father or her uncle or her brother, it did not matter. Jean was going into isolation. He was led into another conical-shaped leather covered building. Jean sat down as indicated. Water and a vessel of food were given to him. He had two choices; he could relax or tense up. His companions might come for him. Yet in this large semi-permanent encampment, the armed citizens

outnumbered all of his companions who might already consider him lost. This was a heavy and tangled wooded area in the middle of nowhere except for the trail he had found. He put his head down and ate. He prayed this was not his last meal with a cudgel aimed for the back of his skull as soon as he finished. He looked around and saw a pile of animal skins to be used as bedding. The next few hours were his to spend as he pleased within this leather and skin castle, he figured out. He spread out the bedding and fell asleep.

He surprised himself, it was dusk and fires had been lit. From this moment on, he thought it best to be alert. He still had all his weapons. How can he communicate? His companions were looking forward to going further West past the fabulous Great Lakes if need be. They were an ambitious bunch and well supplied. Jean sat there with all his microbes getting ready to spread themselves around. By morning they came for all his clothes and burned them. They gave him a bush bath of aromatic cedar and astringent substances and sweet grass fumigated the place he had slept in. Then they took out the skins he had slept on and burned those. An older woman of uncertain age looked though his hair for body and head lice. They urged him to wash his hair in some kind of tar odour filled water. Then, the woman picked his head clean. The leather clothes given to him were Nipissing. When he came out of his leather habitation, he now looked like an Indian with red hair. He marked off one full day. His companions could still be around.

Finally, someone came to him and instructed him to sit outside. The man started to communicate with him in sign language.

Jean indicated his place of embarkation. "Hochelaga."

"To trade?"

"Yes, but to find new routes around the Iroquois."

"How did you get past the Odawa, the traders?"

"We traveled just a bit further North between them and the Algonquins. I scouted ahead by two days carrying nothing but what I could carry."

"Alone?" This person was good with the sign language. He spoke to Jean saying Nipissing several times. The tribal group was Nipissing. Europeans had come here not totally without the knowledge of communication. The Alps could bring anybody around the mountains, and they had come century after century. Jean had good instincts. He gave his name, his rank, and position in the canoe. Finally, the person seemed satisfied about something. He left letting him know first.

Jean could not circulate around the dwellings for twenty days. Meals and water were to be brought to him. Jean hated the idea, but the kernel of truth of his isolation within the community slowly dawned on him. Jean decided, if allowed, he could stay here till it was time to go home. Surely, if his companions made it past the Odawa, they could make it back.

Here he had to learn one more lesson of inner patience beyond movement. For a man of action, this was difficult. He sharpened his tools and his knife. He whittled down some nearby willows into cutting tools. In the successive days that followed, they always made a fire for him and he roasted some uncooked meat given to him. He found out he could sleep several hours longer each day. He moved by exercising. No one came near enough to touch him, but they communicated with him. Little by little, he knew their names and the faces. The girl he had bumped into was there some of the time, but she was always busy. She moved very well and the fires she attended were well supplied. Slowly, he understood what he was witnessing: his captor's rituals of worship, early morning ministrations, the preparation of leather skins and the gathering of birchbark pieces. The making of clothes and shoes were the women's work. One night he heard the squalling of a newborn. The women gathered birchbark and everyone made very good canoes. Women cut wood with European axes. His mental notes were to prove very accurate later. The Nipissing were very peaceful among themselves.

The twenty days were up. They came for everything. They burned the entire lodge. His newer clothes were burned. He took another bath. He was staying with them, but they were moving again. He watched them clean everything. Each fire pit was cleared out. All stray animals were rounded up by the women and children. All signs of

recent habitation were removed. By the time they were finished, everything looked old and the place looked desolate. Then they took him to where they had taken the canoes, so well hidden he did not know they had reached them till they were right there. He was given a paddle and his usual position in a canoe. His companion was the girl he had bumped into. She was an excellent canoeist. Their other companion was the same man she had first spoken to upon her return. He was her brother.

They both told him not to run away there were many dangerous places where he might die accidentally, and if he reached the Great Lakes, he could still die from starvation or be killed by other people. They pointed in the direction to a place called "the death and stinking waters," and he noted the direction as clearly as he could. They paddled for two days, it seemed to him in a circular fashion. At a rocky escarpment they portaged themselves a full mile across a plateau, but once they entered a thickly wooded area, he marvelled at the discipline of all of them. They came out by a spring-fed creek with clear spaces among the trees. Clearly this was a much used berry patch. They stashed their canoes in the woods, unpacked a few leather goods. Then made lean-tos and dispatched families closely to each other. They faced one another as if in a permanent watch.

His travelling companions were nowhere near him. He found himself housed with some adolescent boys. The hunters were out the next day. Bears roamed here. The killing of them required built-up traps. Their bait was something they called "meechim," of highly foul odour sewn into a bladder that he hoped was animal. The women gathered berries and dried them. Small deer were killed and the strips of drying meat sent forth a pleasant aroma. He was allowed to fetch green wood of hard maple. He was told what to do and he did it. They measured him for some leather footwear and leggings. They had colourful shells from the ocean and small little berries which were mostly pit. These had been scrapped clean and a hole made through them for beading. He remembered the glass beads of Hochelaga. He was measured for a shirt; it came back decorated with shells. He looked around to see who had made this for him. It was not the old woman who delivered it.

Within ten days, they left this spot. He drew the same companions. It is here that he realized the birchbark canoes were totally refurbished, rather than repaired. The men worked fast as the pitch they were making from the evergreen jack pine resin had to be soft and pliable. Each family was very good at this method. It was a part of survival.

At night, as Jean absorbed a bit more of the language, he heard family voices murmuring blending in with the sound of mosquitoes. Each night, a different legend held forth and then the children would ask for another. He knew some stories told by other fireplaces told to him and his siblings. There was universality about this wish to hear one more story. Even though his peasant blood made sure he woke at the crack of dawn, already the hunters were gone. He never heard them leave.

They kept moving around. He stayed with his tasks no matter how mundane. His peasant ancestors around Cherbourg had heeded the early call to hard work. He just kept going like a big ox. He learned not to crack his way through the underbrush like a big mammal. Up to now, he thought he had been very good at this kind of tracking but he was noisy. One of his regrets was he had been instructed to leave his musket behind. He could use it now to show these hunters another way of killing large mammals. Then it occurred to him if they had found him with a gun they might have killed him for it. He missed his gun! Not his mother or family with the same intensity. At some point, he knew he had become a survivalist. Now he almost moved like an Indian, blending in with the trees, crossing quickly in the open spaces, learning how to mark the direction of the wind and smell open water; he had to smell soil differences. It made a huge difference between drinkable water and bowel trouble.

Then the Nipissing went fishing in a newly-built weir. They had not built it. So they shared some ways with other groups yet unseen. Were the others as busy as they were? The families moved with urgency, the nights were getting a little bit hotter. Women picked the moss for bags stuffed into baby cradles carried on their backs. His red beard was now a tremendous bush. Children loved it.

He helped everyone gut fish. He had a good knife and a whet stone. He was good for something. They could still kill him and take all his tools. He learned more about

them. They had made a place for themselves between warring societies and trading nations. They told him they had to go to a gathering just before the season changed. They could trade items there. They had some surplus hides and some goods. Bone adzes, bone needles, sinew for sewing, eagle feathers, other bird feathers for trimming and decoration, and bone whistles. They also gathered bear glands, and rendered bear-grease and very fine skunk oil. Now he had something in the future to bargain with. Back in Hochelaga, sailing wooden boats from across the ocean were berthing loaded with trade goods. He did his best to describe some items. It came down to muskets, ammunition, sisal rope, cotton of different weights and colours, thread to sew the same cloths, metal needles, glass beads of many colours, and metal pots and pans for cooking. Cooking oil, whale oil for light, heavy shoes with heels and buckles, he just kept on going ...

"Furniture, why?" He described stone houses and wood furniture to eat on, sit on, sleep on, etc.

They smiled at him. "You can carry all this over the portages?"

Finally, he stopped and caught the absurdity of the moment.

Then they told him of southern tribes that met once a year at one of the Great Lakes sites. They all went there for blessings from the Great Manitou who held all their wishes and needs and wants in his great hand. They had heard white men were in the mouth of another great river, the Mississippi talking of yellow metals, stones of many colours and horses. They needed pots and pans. Metal tools were good and useful as bone tools were brittle. But did the metal tools last too long and had to be carried everywhere? He explained the function of whetstone.

Jean stopped for a few minutes then decided to tell them his people had horses, cows and oxen.

"Well, we will have furs to trade for the smaller things," Jean said, "We can do business then."

"We will take you to the Odawa. They can take you back," they told him.

During the Great Gathering, Jean could not keep up with all the trading and the talking. Now he learned something else about this clan group. Even if they had wanted to they could not stop what they had to do to send him back with someone. They had to finish the season within hours of its ending. The seasons changed here very dramatically within hours and they had to adapt and prepare for the colder seasons. Jean Nicholet promised to return. They asked him to return alone citing it would be hard to quarantine more than one man. Not with the way they had to move around. He said he understood.

Jean went back to his society unsettled, both in mind and spirit. He witnessed events among the Nipissing that been taken as a godsend by his own people. He made his annual confession and made his communion. His position in this feudal system of serfdom was a mark of his own European marked progress. As engaged his outgoing risks and his subsequent solo return had made him a seasoned *coureur des bois*. He could sign for a return voyage, provided the Governor in this time of 1621 felt there was enough money to stock such a journey of chance. The money for the goods and crew was guaranteed and he was a quasi-leader with pure and applied information. He knew he wanted to return to the Nipissing, he had so journeyed with, but he wanted to keep their counsel of coming alone. From his few female relatives he found sewing tools and several threads. To his own astonishment he asked one of them to make a dress in the Nouvelle France-style of the day and in proportions he thought his Nipissing female canoeing partner might fit.

On his return engagement he travelled leagues into the wind, rain and sleet, endured every kind of biting insect. Yet his greatest and growing anxiety was about the simple dress he carried well hidden in his personal pack. He knew he could make a huge mistake in presuming too much. Was he asking this woman to share his life? It was not a great life but it was an honest one in any society with a decent value system. He had made no promises to her nor had he perceived any interest in her about him personally. Was he being a total fool? His motives were simple. He wanted a wife. Not just any wife, but someone who knew this life. Not someone he had to set up in a stone

house and maintain through everything that this Northern country could throw at him. Nor did he like the way young women just off the boat were paired with someone who matched their height. The colony had this way of collecting women who paid for their passage by promising to marry whoever was lined to greet them.

Right at this point, his reflective side came to a halt to the task at hand. The maps were good. The cartographer they travelled with before had made an excellent map. He found the very encampment he spent time in. His mental notes gave him how and where they might be as a group. This brigade was a light one of exploration rather than a full flotilla of trade goods. The Nipissing band had asked him to come alone. He had two choices, break off where he had stayed before and follow their trail alone or stay with his companions and hope for a reconnaissance.

This Nipissing band feared illness more than men themselves. He asked to go scouting alone when he sensed he was very close to them. He did not want to lay himself open to ridicule among these hardened men. This time, he took his gun and enough ammunition for several days. At one of the highest points of land he could find he made a fire and waited. He visualized everything about the old encampment and each person he wanted to meet again. The next day he looked for a stream he could take a bath in. Then he went hunting as he knew how to do that very well. His gun made the loudest noise past the trees and the smell of gun powder spread for miles around. He made another fire and sat and waited. When he awoke at the faintest hint of dawn at three in the morning, he realized he was not alone. He heard a single crack, animal noises, some soft-swishing of birds rather than a full beating of wings in full flight. He timed the incidents by counting off the seconds.

Whoever was out there, knew he was there and were observing him. He called out Nipissing, his voice would be his signature for life or death. They came out into this little clearing swiftly to see if he was alone for sure. Satisfied, they came forward, but did not embrace him. Oh God, he was contaminated again!

"You took a bath," they told him. They asked him, "Have you been coughing? Do you have blankets? Yes, we will burn them now."

He did it himself. He was handed another set of clothes down to the leggings which fit him perfectly. Jean laughed with deep pleasure. His mistgoshiow face broke into a gleeful smile. Her brother came forward now. We are all of two days travel from here, almost parallel to your companions. Our canoes are nearby. The men were genuinely happy to see him. The general interest shown his gun and ammunition gave him a cache far beyond his immediate understanding.

At heart, Jean was a gambler, a good one knowing when to stack them, when to hold them, and when to place his highest bid. He was there now. His heart grew huge in his chest. The task was to reach the encampment and to blend in for a few days then rejoin his brigade again. This time he was not to be alone and isolated. Adolescent boys moved in around him, like he was a senior bachelor. His intended was not to be seen to his great disappointment. The second day he asked about her of her brother.

"She is gone." There was no other information.

Long ago, in his growing years, Jean had learned to always wait for more information. He knew she was a courier between them and another camp. Perhaps she was on another errand. The brother would have told him if she was dead, missing or absent for good.

Jean was really bold now; he asked the brother "You have no wife?"

"I'm not ready. At the next gathering I will give my name to the medicine men and women, and they will decide if I am ready or appropriate for someone away from my clan. When the time comes I must give something for the woman of my choice. She says yes or no through her Mother or nearest female relative. It really is about not embarrassing yourself and family. Her family makes a counter offer. We go back and forth until the bride negotiations are right and my gift is accepted. And you?"

"I am ready to marry anytime after this contract is over. Everything is complicated isn't it?"

Jean found he did not have enough Nipissing words to fully express his concerns about what he expected to find in a wife. The words for such a man as Jean existed in the Nipissing language. He was a worthy young man. They were already proud of him. His

experience told him he should give some of his personal history. He spoke about his parentage, his family, even his politics which sounded bizarre in the night air. He had to swear allegiance to the King who lived across the saltwater because he was entitled to take tax money from peasants. He financed every scrap of activity less than wholeheartedly, but his own court system allowed him total control since they had a piece of paper from the Pope another kind of King appointed directly to God. Wherever the men who owned him allegiance could now claim the territory they travelled through in the King's name. Jean caught the glazed looks around the fire and stopped. He was not interesting. The last thing he wanted to become less than human because of what he had been born into as a consequence of such a bizarre society.

She did come back, but he did not see her. He left knowing where she was resting, and that the whole clan were to meet members of other clans at the same gathering. Jean knew where that was, so he said adieu, see you there.

He joined his companions, checked the map and found they were always two days travel from the clan but they would merge at the gathering. His brigade would now go there to do some trading and meet other tribes. He mentioned the bathing and how they had to leave everything that was cloth behind. Tools, pots and pans, some guns and ammunition were all for the trading. We may not be the only ones there he cautioned his fellow workers for the King of France. The King of England has the same kind of workers we are. For some reason, he was really happy there was no assigned priest sitting up front with a stack of bibles, holy water, wagers, his crosses and the messianic glint in hard, dark eyes. They explored exactly what was known to all the Indians who had travelled these trade routes. This way they avoided all the places where they could die. They sang *Not even for the King's Mother*. Some of the portages were unavoidable. Jean carried his load exactly as he had seen his canoe companion manage large loads way beyond her strength. He also had to carry his gun and ammunition.

Finally, they came to the gathering place. Only a few people seemed to be there. He marked the change of the season. They were almost there for the summer solstice. He

found the brigade an island to unpack, to stash goods, to hide their different loads. They pulled their canoes into the bushes and repaired them as now they knew how to do that. He made sure they were as invisible as possible and created night sentinels. He was busy and happy at the same time as more and more people gathered. This time he knew some people and he could talk to them. Lodges went up and all the civil authority of a large encampment fell into place. Temporary positions were designated. Camp leaders emerged every morning urging the attendance at sunrise ceremonies. The Algonquins were leading the ritual prayers this year.

The tribes were at home here. Fearful of one another out there, here they became cautiously amiable. They observed one another closely. Jean with his gun and ammunition was more than a curiosity. The bidding was starting already as to the stack of furs it would take to buy one. The commerce here resembled a silent auction. All the wares were shown in a spread-out fashion on the ground. Sure enough he saw English-made tools, no guns. He saw cloth for the first time in amounts to speak about. Combs, hair fasteners, arm bracelets for the men, bear talons, lots of fur, all well finished. There was an unspoken attitude of the finest finished products of the fur now being traded. He saw abalone shells stacked like poker chips. This was the money changer? So many tokens buys you ... If this was an exchange how did it work beyond the goods exchange? Copper sheeting and gold spread thin rather than the smelted kind, it was all here.

Then the Nipissing arrived. They found their usual encampment and set up housekeeping. The clan had many bundles of herbs. The bear oil had been rendered into the finest of oils. The different clans gathered one evening once again as everyone was there now. The medicine lodges were set up. Disputes could be aired before the Elders; marriage partners could be asked about.

Out of plain civility Jean asked if he could approach the medicine people if he was eligible as a marriage partner. Did he have a sponsor? How was he employed? Was he a good hunter? Was he healthy? Did he have prices on his head? Did he have bad medicine thrown at his family or his person? What was his belief system? What were his

sense of values? He was lucky he could have misunderstood quite a few of the questions. But his own upbringing had taught him a value system, it was acceptable. This system talked of exchanges as caches. He spoke two other Indian languages, lived near the Iroquois. He came with immunity to certain germs, and ill winds of madness were not in his family. They turned him around like an animal specimen. He showed them confidence, he had it together as a man. Yes, he could satisfy a woman. Would he give her disease? No. Did he have someone in mind and from what clan? They had to know because they had to mark him and her for inherited diseases or as disease free. He did not know that was all part of their encoded bargaining. He could not believe the questions. What book of medicine did these questions come from? He was passing a test he did not know about even his smell during the interrogation was noted.

Her name had been submitted too. She had already done through the testing. She knew when she had made it past the medicine woman. She would get a partner. Did she have one in mind and who was her mother? She had an aunt who could broker for her intended. Yes, they could render a decision for their compatibility.

The brigade companions met at different times anxious to get moving. Jean urged them to get to know as many families as possible. They could bring out some trade items in the middle of the celebrations surely to follow. This included canoe races, foot races, games of chance and dancing to Ojibway drums and chanting. Curiosity might overwhelm their entire lot of trade goods, but if they were cautious and not arrogant they could get rid of some of the goods. They showed them one gun and some ammunition. What do you want for this gun? Fur, this many stacks for this gun and ammunition. They bargained hard. But Jean was aware he had the guns they wanted. He knew exactly when he had the right stack of furs. Fair and square, he had another mark on the back of his head. Another clan had been recruited to sponsor him on the good words of all his companions and his clan by adoption.

Mequeq s-khi-konis was his name, a moniker he did not know about.

The marriage brokers met. They were compatible. He was a worthy young man and she was a worthy young woman. They were both working class—in spite of his

position in a white man's brigade—he was still a working man. Could she do better? Anytime she knew everything a woman had to know to keep her lodge alive and well every season. She was a quick learner and not easily frightened. Hysteria did not run in her family. But she was a cross-adopted daughter, a daughter to her matrilineal side to a brother of her father's side. She was given at birth to the family who had suffered an unfortunate happening. They had shared food and utensils with some white men and had fallen ill. Her brother and she were found after the family had not returned. Because they did not share in anything, they had survived. The medicine people needed one daybreak and all the daylight hours to conclude for approval or disapproval. At this point, the two were not allowed to meet alone anywhere.

They carried heavy medicine these two young people. Jean now felt the full pressure of this route he had taken. If he acquired a wife here, he had to take her home at some time. Would she be willing to travel with him? The dress, the European-style dress, he took it out and unfolded it. It was so inadequate as a present. Then he remembered the tools. There was a thimble. He was so glad he had remembered to buy the ivory combs too. Then he took a piece of cloth and made a bundle of everything. After delivering his bundle he then prayed to God this would represent his best wishes. He waited, if he was called it meant his present had been accepted and the proposal scrutiny had been concluded. Now where could he go with this? He had to have a plan based on how far away she could stand to live from her own people.

Anxious as Jean had been, he knew nothing about the drama of the process that could deliver his bride to him. He had admired her movements around campfires, her ability to carry heavy loads, but he had not spent hours talking to her alone. Always people were present. He had felt chaperoned.

She knew they were. Her value to her clan was in her skills as a courier and the ability to work alone. The other skills had been learned much sooner than usual. As orphans, her brother and she had become extra mouths to feed. During the childhood years, no famine had visited their camps but other dangers had suddenly multiplied. Children were drafted to learn tasks sooner and to apprentice a year earlier. Some failed,

but these two were comfortable early on. Management of time for tasks were critical to the entire clan. Leadership was sound.

Now they took her aside. "We want you to take the red-haired mistigosiw as a husband and you will live with him wherever he goes. You will teach him our language, and you will learn his ways and language. We have to teach them to survive. Part of the bargain will be that he must bring you back so you can tell us about them."

She did not have a mother and father to mourn, but her brother was very dear to her psyche. He was going to be married too. She no longer had to prepare his things when he was gone on hunting forays. She was free from the clan rather than beholden. But they needed her gathered information. They embraced her one by one. They went in one of the lodges to tell her a story so no one would ever forget her. Jean went to sleep knowing nothing of this background information. She did not have to tell him anything. The Elders had predicted the changes to come and they even told of the centuries it would take. They told her, this line of Jean and herself will last for centuries they said with many smiles. She would ask him not to change her name so her clan would never forget her. Forever, she remained the Nipissing sauvagesse.

A sunrise ceremony was sounded and a messenger came across to Jean and the woman—of the Nipissing was called too. The medicine people discharged their findings and both were welcomed closer to the pleasant fire now surrounded by Elders. They both had strong medicine. They were the right age for each other. He had to promise to bring her back to visit her clan and she had agreed to go and live with him. Jean was elated. He promised to bring her back and further promised to look after their children upon God's will. They dismissed them both quickly as others were waiting. The news was not always this good for other suitors and those women seeking husbands. She had made no promises to him. She was a good woman who knew what it meant to be a wife.

He had to finish this trip. They had one month left to go further inland. He had secured her as his wife. Then one morning he was gone with the rest. He promised to return and bring her home to Hochelaga. He knew where to find the clan and she promised to go with him. That one promise meant Jean could keep working as a coueur

des bois, and he had no idea where this could lead. Yet she had accepted the dress, the sewing tools and thimble, the ivory combs. Later, he knew she had the dress in the bundle unused for the day they would be together at Hochelaga.

Yet life had a few tricks up its sleeve. In a small room very powerful people had heard of Nicolet's quest to be part of more exploration and his ability to learn languages. A messenger met them at Allumette near where he had spend two years learning the Algonquin language. He had orders to go back and live among the Nipissing as they were right in the territory explorers wanted to use. An eight-year stay among his relatives began and his wife was happy she could remain with her clan. The children came and they looked after them. He was to become an excellent hunter and she learned his language. He was a good teacher with a willing student. His trading abilities increased as he learned more about what was needed and portable in these subarctic regions. She in turn was able to show some integration of goods into new uses. Thus, flour milled in Quebec was made into a flour mixed with a raising agent made a fine bannock—a flat bread. It was easy to make, but the flour was subject to infestation. Her skills were further developed and enhanced because he knew what was available. She in turn told him what was a wasted resource. Together they sought wild ginseng which grew out the St. Lawrence valley and far into the Ottawa valley.

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