I'm going home

I follow the filtered silence and gales through a car window I watch this infinite ribbon of elegant burgundy eyelashes stretch above the snow; these throngs of red willow whips are frozen in dance around the feet of maples, cedars and birches dreaming of snow-padded silver skies while they sleep softly under Arctic rage.

The featureless covering on both heaven and earth even puts me to sleep. At every stop we get, whether it is my Auntie's, Mindohwabee's or Tim Horton's, we grab a coffee—not a *cup* of coffee—*a* coffee, double double. It is the lifeblood of everyone who tries to live here. The dark syrup pounds in our veins, pours out of us, and paves the one and only road home.

And I remember: I'm going *home*

to hide in the soft, brown insides of my mother's tiny trailer, emerging to visit at my grandmother's house, a labor of my grandfather's love on the corner of a morning walk and a maple street.

Not two minutes in the door, my uncle picks a fight with my aunt. Then, realizing his social faux-pas, he lightens his load on a chuckle. The furniture in this house has been rearranged as often as the inhabitants have changed shifts including the dog(s) kept outside. But the two sweetgrass and birchbark placemats on the wall haven't moved in years.

That's all it is:

playing cribbage in my Aunt's house on Christmas Day, pegs slip off of the table onto cracked linoleum between drops of spilled beer, they point to the packed living room beneath half-sized stompings and video games, my ears strain to pull words from the conversation in a tongue as old as we are and I get chastised for spacing out;

playing volleyball on warm, summer nights

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in front of the house built of the trees and hands of my great-grandfather, a family so big, we fill up a whole ball court with spectators to spare: cousins pitted against cousins nieces against uncles and the ball is our wit that survived a language genocide back when black robes replaced armor, and pedophilic assaults replaced gunfire (like those against my Uncle Naangoonskwat in the hollow of night); back when notes were sent home from my mother's grade one teacher to my grandparents: "I'm afraid to inform you, Mr. and Mrs. B'noswe, that your speaking the Native language in your household is negatively affecting your daughter, and her ability to learn English in her classes..."

> after decades they slip out: "Can you get me that *biish*," *odi*?? Am I ever thirsty."

It's those words

to hear those words—

it's cribbage and volleyball, too-

but, it's leaving the world at the sign, covered in snow up to its knees, painted by a local artist, that says: Welcome to the Village of Wikwemikong

ENDNOTES 1. Water 2. Over there

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