

# The Raven Is

*Author: Sheryl Mountenay*

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As the being that made the land from sea shells and brought fire and light to the world, I was drawn to the water. Who had brought about this? I saw two tiny beings, one blue-eyed, the other brown-eyed sitting by the riverside. They were playing with pebbles and rocks of all sizes and colours that were nestled in the riverbank. Intuitively, they are driven to taste them. Each plop one into their mouths. After experiencing its gritty, solid texture, they spit it out into their hands yet hold onto it fiercely. Glistening in the river are more of these gems. An afternoon of delight is spent in this world of rocks and water. As they are leaving, they see and hear the Raven atop a cedar tree. The Raven calls out a low and croaky cawcaw, cawcaw. "I will watch over you. I will watch over you."

Though separated, these are happy times for both. I hear giggles and laughing; I see hugs and embraces; hurts being soothed by loving hands and words; young and old beings woven into their lives. Indeed, both the blue-eyed one and brown-eyed one are cherished. There is the joy of discovery. Horses in pastures; deer sighting in the forests. The squishing of mud. The sound of the chickadee, the howl of the coyote. The tickle of grasses. The humming of trees. More rocks (shells and pinecones as well) are collected. They would not know, how not to share their discoveries and their valued trinkets with others. Years pass.

On her first day of class I sense the blue-eyed child's excitement as she circles around her mother as they walk to her school. With pride she holds her very own chocolate box which now contains 2 HB pencils, 1 pink pearl eraser, 1 box of 8 Crayola crayons and a small package of Kleenex. For the next twelve years, she will hear subjects taught in her native language, English. Early Canadian history tells of how white forefathers conquered the land; how the land discovered was uninhabitable; how the brave explorers fought and tamed the savages. The arts, history and sciences taught reflect the knowledge from the shared Canadian and European white culture. Pride in one's heritage is experienced.

I am not sure how. Was it in the blink of an eye that you were lost to me? A whisper I didn't hear. Where did the brown-eyed one go? I see a woman crouching on the ground. Arms flailing, hands made into fists pounding the ground. From the tree top I hear the despair, the keening sorrow, the loss. I see water streaming from eyes.

My search for you is far and wide; spread over many . It takes me two lost generations to find you. My heart breaks. You had been shattered into pieces. I am so

sorry. Such a hollow word. In my shame, you deserve more than me seeking forgiveness.

I learn of your abuse and neglect attending school. You do not return to your family home at the end of the school day. You do not return to your family for 10 years. At your boarding school, there is no one who cherishes the ground you walk on. No one who delights in your very being. No one to comfort you when hurt or sad. No one to cheer you on and say I believe in you. No one to embrace you and calm your fears. No one to boast with pride your accomplishments. You are robbed of gatherings and celebrations of family and friends.

At school, you are given a Christian and settler history. You are not allowed to say anything in your native tongue. Many of those responsible for your education and care treat you with nothing but disdain. You will be punished for rules you do not yet know. You will be mocked and chided for your “savage” and “heathen” ways. You want to cry but you know that too will bring further punishment.

There is no escape from this. For many years and down many dark roads you carry this shame. Bit by bit, in many imperceptible ways, a word here, a scent there, a touch, the murmuring of a stream, the fragrance of the forest, the roar of the cascading river all lure you further and further back into the embrace of the creator, of your mother, family and the beauty that surrounds you. The broken pieces of you are transformed into a determined, focused warrior to fight for what was yours from the beginning, to protect.

The blue-eyed one knows the lens through which she has seen and experienced the world. Her blessings are “too numerous to mention”. One by one, the dominoes start to fall. She awakens to the crisis we have created: the plundering of the land; the destruction of so many habitats; the rising of temperature, the drought, wildfires, hurricanes, flooding; the displacement of people, civil unrest, civil war; the disparity that exists between those who caused the crisis and those who suffer from it. She demonstrates, she holds pickets, she attends meetings, she votes. She signs petitions, writes letters; donates to both well-known and more obscure organizations. She searches to learn and do more.

The brown-eyed girl has no time of awakening. She has lived with the pain over and over again. Her journey of recovery takes a long time. She battles for justice. She battles the settler government for ownership of her language, culture and land. For 20-years she fights all the way to settler’s highest court to have her Indigenous oral history recognized as valid as any written history. Another long arduous fight is needed to prove title to the land. She continues her fight with the settler courts as she rails against pipelines and their poking, prodding and polluting of her home; the disappearance of women along their roads and the camps the pipelines bring. She remains the vigilant warrior.

Seventy years have passed. I have grown tired. I call out cawcaw, cawcaw to the blue-eyed one. "Follow me, follow me." We travel far. I lead the blue-eyed one to the brown-eyed one standing by the river's edge. No words are uttered between them. No sign of having known one years ago. They watch the movement of the river. Time passes. Simultaneously, they each bend over to pick up a stone that is glistening in the river. Their hands brush up against one another's. Their eyes meet. Is there a spark of recognition? Heads tilt to the side, they look into one another's eyes. Neither let go of the stare. Searching. Searching. Searching. Then, as one, they release and open their fists, placing a small gritty stone into the hand of the other. They smile.

From atop a cedar tree, seeing the blue-eyed and brown-eyed one together I feel a surge of well-being in my chest, energy expanding from one tip of my wing to the other. I am hopeful. And the mystery of the water and where it came from? How silly of me to have not known. Before I was, it was. Water has always been and is in every living cell of mother earth. Praise be to the Creator.