Chapter Four

WRITING OUR WAY HOME:
RUBY SLIPERJACK’S *HONOUR THE SUN*
AND
THOMAS KING’S *MEDICINE RIVER*
CHAPTER FOUR
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Ruby Slipperjack in her book Honour the Sun registers and critiques the prevailing ideological assumptions and values which underwrite the exclusionary culture of the dominant culture, set against the social and cultural potentials of the native worldview to contain and hold together the fractured lives of the people. Her novel navigates through the psychological development of a young girl to come out with the sad story of the disintegration of a single-parent family in an alien isolated set up very much susceptible to the abuse of women and children. Though apparently autobiographical, Ruby Slipperjack does invest the stories of others into her narrative framework and weaves a beautiful story where the children are more matured and knowledgeable and whole than the adults, where in fact the children see what the wide adult world cannot because of the lack of what she says, "internal vision": "...the things that we lose in our childhood because we have been blinded as we get older. Our vision goes, our internal vision" (Lutz 205). Ruby Slipperjack honours the child because" The child is so honest, so open. The child has memory of creation, because the child has not yet lost that connection" (Lutz 209). This connection with the wider world of nature, with the native world that values and sees animated beings infusing the world strikes a Wordsworthian note in Slipperjack's fiction "I am a non-verbal communication person", she has said in her interview to Lutz (212) and this aspect of her native culture with its dependence on silence, on gestures, signs, to "see the person inside" (211) and to communicate without words with" that feeling between the sentences" (210) to capture the spirit of the character" (210) comes out well in her narrative, even though English is her second language. That is why she is uncomfortable with the forms of behaviour of a dominant literary culture bent on finding meanings, symbols, patterns and structures in a
work of art when she is only concerned with her world: "I stuck to my four seasons I
wanted that connection there, with the land" (Lutz 214).

Ruby Slipperjack is an Ojibwa from the Fort Hope Indian Band in Ontario. She
retains her traditional native heritage and religion in her personal life and uses them in
her writing. She spent her childhood on her father's trap line on White Water Lake and
then went to a residential school after her family moved to a community along the
railway mainlines. She has got her BA degree from the university. Honour the Sun is
her first novel about a young girl named the Owl that grows up in a tiny Ojibwa
Community in northern Ontario. The manuscript was kept for a long period on her
shelves before she gets a publisher to get it published. The novel is dedicated to her
family and set in a small imaginary isolated community along the CNR line. The novel is
written in 27 chapters, based on the diary-entries of the only the narrator, who writes her
past childhood and present adulthood experiences in a carefree and humorous way. The
story covers six years beginning from the summer of 1962 and ending in the summer of
1968. The Owl is a ten-year-old girl at the beginning and is a sixteen-year-old teenager in
the end when she returns to her community from an urban boarding school completing
her education. Her diary entries have been revised and several episodes extracted in the
novel.

The title is a key-phrase in the novel having significance. The Owl's mother
always promises her of a better world and a bright future for her people with the
following famous statement: "Honour the sun, child, just as it comes over the horizon,
Honour the sun, that it may bless you, come another day." (211). She tells her to accept
life as it comes without any complaint or grumble The Owl not only accepts her life but
also records her experiences in a simple and straightforward way. Her diction is very
simple and humorous, sometimes a bit ironical She writes about her own self and her
people without any change.

In the first chapter, the Owl presents a portrait of her family with the following
description: "There are seven of us in the family, four girls and three boys. We live in a
one-room cabin our father built before he died " (11). The Owl's family consists of her mom, her three brothers Dave, Wess and Brian, her three sisters - Barbara, Vera and Annie. Besides them, there are three foster kids named Maggie, Jane and Tony who reside with them and her mom doesn't receive a penny from the government for them. She introduces herself in the beginning " I'll be in grade four this year. I am ten years old, I think. We don't celebrate birthdays. I know my birthday because it is only the day before Christmas. So I'll be eleven years old this Christmas" (14)

Dave, her oldest brother, is married and stays (separated) away from them a long time ago. Wess spends most of his time at the cabin on their old trap line. Brian is a small boy of six years old. Her older sisters, Vera and Annie, go to a boarding school in the winter. Her eldest sister Barbara is married to Allan and has a 3-year-old baby Cora. Her father is dead long time back.

There is a one-room Indian day school in the reservation for native children's education up to grade four. As she says, "The grades in our one-room Indian Day School are divided by the rows of desks, one row for each grade" (14). The older native children are usually dropouts because they don't like to occupy the last row of desks in the school. Native children are forcibly sent to far away boarding schools for higher education. In her community, four native kids have left home to go to boarding schools. Most of the time, the school remains without a teacher and there is no education of these kids without teaching/teacher. In chapter 13, for instance, the Owl mentions that she finds a notice "No school Today-stove gone out. Have a nice Holiday!" (108). This satirical notice implies how the white teachers do not take proper action for educating native kids and use to cancel their teaching for petty matters and for their own interests. Native children are absolutely free, being out of school and spend time just playing, shooting, and fishing.

Some native children skip school and do tricks on people as their pastime. In chapter 20, the Owl narrates about the "outhouse gang" of which Annie, Rita, Hanna, Maggie, Sarah, Liza, Freddy, Ross, Jed, Ben, Joe, Ted, Little Tommy and Owl herself are the members. They silently run away and group together at the sand pit. They constantly...
raid gardens and steal carrots, radishes, turnips, and rhubarb. Sometimes they bring 
female panties from other's clothesline and put them on the teacher's line. The boys shift 
the outhouse to the other side, so that the person will fall in the hold before he reaches the 
outhouse door.

At her fourteen, she leaves her home to go to a residential school in the town. In 
her suitcase, she keeps "a couple of shiny rocks, a pinecone, and a mallard tail feather—all 
wrapped in a piece of paper." Barbara finds them and frowns at her. "Can't take these! 
What're they going to think, you carrying around things like these? White people are 
going to be looking after you where you are going, you know?"(190) The Owl misses 
her "treasures" and goes with Annie to the town. She asks herself, "Will anything be the 
same when I get back? Will I change while I'm gone?"(191). She comes back home 
during vacations. She finds everything changed and ruined except the medicine man who 
gives her wise preaching.

The Owl along with her family and people in the community does canoeing and 
berry picking along the railway tracks on holidays during the summer. They take lunch 
and supper in the camps by the lakeside. They take bath and swim in the lake and dry 
themselves under the sun. They wander miles and miles to collect blueberries. They do 
camp fires in the evening. She says, "Supper smells delicious - fried fish with onions, 
mashed potatoes, canned corn and, of course, the hot bannock and blue berry jam washed 
down with camp-fire tea."(23). The Owl remembers selling berries in the store and 
buying groceries, fruits and vegetables in return. She joins her cousin Joe to do fishing by 
the shore. They also do hunting and camping. Her mom does the sewing of fishing nets, 
reads the Bible and tells stories to her children at night. Every fall, they gather firewood 
for the next winter. They go to the lake's end, cut wood the whole day, load the canoes, 
and bring the wood back to the village.

Everyone does some work at home. Nobody sits idle and lazy. The mom doesn't 
want anybody not to do homework and be weak. Once she asks Tony to pick up a heavy 
log. When he hesitates, She says, "Do as you're told right away, Tony. I wouldn't expect
you to do something I know you couldn’t do.” The Owl remembers accompanying her mom once to the west and of the island. Her mom checks the fish net and gets three large trout. She then drops a slimy old catfish back into the water.

The Owl does a lot of “daydreaming.” One day, she thinks about her mom while sitting in the class. Her mom checks the rabbit snares going deep into the bush on the other side of the railway tracks and catches three rabbits. She also does fishing and catches four jack fishes. She dreams “mom was so happy and I was really proud of us” (125). Her teacher awakens her up. She gets stings on her finger while playing tag and daydreaming at the same time. Due to her daydreaming, she misses an offer of bubble gum from her mom. Then her mother says, “I am telling you, girl, your daydreaming will get you into trouble one of these days” (59).

As a serious observer of nature, she closely looks at different birds and animals and listens to their music.

Alcoholism is one of the biggest problems of natives. It has made them “a rotten people” and destroyed their peaceful community life. The Owl cites one instance in chapter four. On Thursday, summer 1962, the men working far away return to the reservation. She states: “The got off the train drunk and they had lots of liquor with them. We can hear them yelling, fighting and screaming from here. Every now and then a shotgun goes off somewhere. Dogs bark and children scream and cry. Its noisy and really scary” (33).

These drunken natives drive away women and children from cabins. They hide in the nearby island the whole day. The children are from playing, swimming or splashing. In the evening darkness they come back to their cabins. The Owl’s mom ask them all to go to bed early then she hears the drunken Indians coming down the path with raised voices, wrestling and arguing each other. John Bull, known as “The town Bully”, kicks at their door and shoots the dog-rocky dead. The Owl screams and cries hard when the dog takes its last breath. Then her grief turns into anger and hate, which later on settle like “ton of cold cement” deep inside her. She says, “We are so vulnerable, this cabin full of children. No father or brother protects, no police to come our aid. We are at the mercy of
all the evils at their"(36) She immediately gathers courage and fearlessness. She doesn't care for her death. She sees a number of nightmares in the night. In the morning, She recovers from her shock, anger and hate. She feels ok and says, "Everything is alright again. Everything is the way it should be Smiling, I imagine being a blackbird The warm air gently lifts my breast, filling me, through me, and I become one with the night, only to emerge again as me, to honour the sun, in the early morning light "(39).

Sally, the old native woman, passes away due to alcoholism Ben's mother is also found drunk and filthy in her cabin. Another time, a drunken Indian kicks their cabin door and crashes into pieces. Her mom doesn't call to the police because Owl assumes, "I wish I were big, very big and strong; I 'd squeeze that hateful man like a piece of cloth wrung out to dry, and then I'd... I can feel warm tears running down my checks"(101) She becomes strong inside and promises not to cry. When the same drunken Indian arrives at their cabin on Christmas her mom scolds, "Don't you Ever, Ever come around here again! The Owl is out of fear and very much relaxed. She feels like hugging her mom and sisters and looks at them with "Love-filled adorning eyes " She is proud of being one of them. Her family boldly faces the challenges. She feels very much safe and secured and realizes the importance of her family.

The Owl is surprised to find her own family being alcoholics. Annie is found drinks with one girl at her house, when her parents are drunk. The Owl also tastes wine once with these girls. Her mom also has drinking problem. In chapter 22, She finds her mother taking wine with Sarah's mother She finds her singing a hymn loudly, surrounded by drunken Indians She is totally oblivious to everything and everyone around her. The Owl forcibly takes her mother out of that place and brings her back home. Another time, she is found drunk and senseless at Rita's cabin. She is not found at home and the Owl is very lonely in her cabin. Next time, she finds her at Han's place drinking with rotten world What a damned homeless life "(180) Even she finds Freddy drinking and behaving with her wrongly.
Sexism is the result of colonialism and racism. Native women are treated badly by both native and white men. The teacher, who is presumed to be moral and ideal, is depicted as immoral and untrustworthy. The Owl describes her teacher's sensuousness and lust in the following extract: "Still holding my arm, he pulls me and starts tickling me. I begin struggling when he pulls me tight between his knees. Suddenly, I see I'm alone in the classroom. Something is wrong; he's pulling me tighter, holding me closer to him. I don't know what, but there's something wrong." (126) The Owl, being ten years old, becomes a victim of the teacher's lust and passion.

Jed has his eyes on her body. He says to her, "Listen, you're petty miserable right now. But look at that body you got there and that pretty face. I'll wait for you, I'll wait till you're grown up in about a year or two, then I'll come get you." (177) The Owl scolds him and asks him not to touch and leave her alone.

One night, Freddy comes to her bed and says, "Did you know that my mother and your mother made an agreement long ago, that I would take you for my wife when I could support a wife? Well, I've loved you since you were a little girl. Now you're a beautiful young lady and I'll have you. I'll leave you and look after you." (180) She doesn't approve this agreement made between two mothers and claims her own right to make decisions about her future or marriage. Freddy is driven away immediately.

On her return from the residential school during the Christmas and summer holidays, she finds a number of native youths as rivals to own her hands. They include Jed, Bobby, Ross, Freddy, and Jerry. All make their demands for her in various ways. Freddy roughly kisses on her lips, Jerry puts his arms around her, and Ross, giving her a crushing kiss says, "I love you. I always have!" (198) Bobby can have her by hook or by crook, whereas Jed approaches her Mom saying, "How are you going to keep all the men off here when she looks like that, eh? In a couple of years, you will have all the young guys at your door..." (177). Jerry continues to disturb her and make her life uncomfortable. She hates him and others too. She cries like a kid. She imagines, "I wish I was just a little kid again." Why does life have to be so complicated? I am tired, so very...
tired."(206). Being sixteen, she feels like ninety-four sometimes. She feels very cold and isolated, helpless and hopeless. She prays lord to protect her from dangers she, before going to bed, murmurs: "Please lord, protect our cabin put a shield around our cabin" (177).

Ben has saved a kitten from drowning. Wess states, "I suppose he will save all its kittens, two, when that cat has babies. Then they will all starve to death."(46). This image implies the conditions of Natives in Canada. It is presumed that Native people may either survive or increase in number or they may starve to death due to poverty, sickness, depression and disease and will be totally wiped out. Wess has got TB and sent to sanitarium. When he returns back home, Vera suffers from the same disease and is shifted to the sanitarium for treatment. The Owl comes to know about the death of Freddy's father and recalls her own father's death that happened long ago. In the last chapter, the Owl pays a visit to the Cemetery and looks at the graves of Jere, Tony, and her father. She recalls most of the dead and remembers how only a few older people had "Natural" death and how others died due to the railway accidents and alcohol-related accidents. In chapter-8, we see Sally dying due to her drunkenness. Her husband the Owl witnesses the scene and trembles in fear beats Ben's mother. When he kicks her, she gets seek. She is taken to the hospital for treatment and recovery.

Native people have a high regard for the medicine man he has significant role to play in the community. He not only gives medicine to seek people but also preaches moral lessons and wise judgments to save his people from all evils. All love and care him a lot. The Owl narrates her experience in the following sentences: "The door opens and incomes a man with a gray hair jutting out from the side of the dark green cap on his head. But its the sparkling eyes and the smiling face that brings a thrill of excitement, love and respect; its the medicine man"(91). The medicine man gathers medicinal plants and herbs from distant places he prepares his medicines out of this roots and herbs he lives in the nearby town by the railway track. He has a strange accent. The Owl thinks, "How I wish I could follow his around and find out what he does and see how he makes
his medicinal brews" (Ibid 94) When he comes to the reservation, he stays and takes lunch with them.

In the last chapter, the Owl again meets the Medicine man. He has come to the reservation to give medicine to a native patient. The Owl says, "I feel his calming presence flood my soul, a rushing warmth of completeness, of knowledge undefined, then calming peace settles over me. I feel like I have just completed a circle." (210) He is the only person who has total harmony with his own world. The Owl talks to the medicine man that "summers are for holidays with family, lakes and camping" and she is going to miss her place and people. She wishes all her family members to be together again, but she is hopeless. She finds her old cabin cold and lonely without her mother and others. Her mom is married to another man before one year and her siblings are staying far away. The medicine man says her that the cabin is only a reflection of what she feels inside. She assumes how it is hard to remember the sun on cloudy days and to hear the stillness among noises. To her philosophical view, the medicine man rightly response "One thing you know for certain without a doubt is that the sun comes up every morning and sets again in the evening. Does it care about the clouds? The stillness itself lasts for ever but the noise can be silenced." (211) She also realizes the truth that the sun is always up there and silence is always within us. She laments that she has got so much from the old medicine man but has nothing to give him. She wishes she could do something for him.

Contemporary Native Canadians are mostly converted to Christianity even though they practice their indigenous religions. On Sundays, they attend the church. The Owl describes, "Down the path and across the clearing, people are coming from every direction, all heading for the little red Anglican Church as its bell tolls a second time." (130). She finds the whole community in the church except the four catholic families. The Owl minutely observes the collection affairs held in the church. People use to donate dollars plenty she states "There are lots of ten and twenty dollar bills in the plate. I have never seen so much money. Piles of it." (131). People even compete among
one another in giving donations to the church. Hanna says that the old man by the lake and the man across the tracks always try to out give each other.

They observe Christmas and wish one another on Christmas day. They celebrate the occasion with feasting and having beaver meat and candies. The Owl's mom entertains guests with food and drinks. Native men and women drink heavily on this occasion. Like a true Christian, her mom reads the bible and other prayer books at night regularly before going to sleep. The Owl narrates:” On a little table, beside Barbara's bed among the clutter of Bibles and things, sits the blackened coal oil lamp that mom reads by every night The page-marked Bibles are always there There's a thick, red Cree Bible, which no one understands but it's read anyway The other is a thin, black prayer book in Ojibway that she's reading now. Then, there's the thin, black one that holds the hymns which mom sings...."(15).

The Owl recalls the minister giving a sermon from the bible that was open but held upside down for a long time. She was about to laugh but resisted herself from laughing. Wess imitates the church minister and preaches from one of mom's Bibles to his sisters wearing mom's black dress and a long white scarf around his neck. She also remembers a black-clad priest visiting the Catholics only once a year, mostly in the spring and preaching sermons.

Priests usually baptize native children in the church. Native elders practice the traditional rituals and ceremonies for occasions like birth, marriage and death. However, Native Christians at least visit the church regularly and also read the Bible. They also believe in love, peace, kindness and sacrifice like any other Christian. The Owl, believing in Jesus Christ, states: "When everything goes wrong, Jesus would be there. Actually, it's quite comforting to know that there's one person stronger and more dependable than your own mother! He will always be near me - yesterday, today and tomorrow and all the days after that"(175).
Native people have a close relationship with Nature. They worship spirits and pray them to save them from evils. They depend upon different components of nature and always show their respect and express obligation in proper traditional manner.

The Owl and her mom gain courage from every danger they face in normal life. "Acceptance of reality" is one of the most important features of Native life. After any horrible and traumatic experience, her mom prepares them to welcome the rising sun in the new and fresh morning. She instructs, "Wash your face well and comb your hair. There, now stand by the window. The sun is just about to come out. When the sun comes over the horizon, he will see you and be very pleased that you're all ready to greet him and he will bless you." (182). She also advises her to listen to the silence, when she is in turmoil. The Owl wonders how to listen to the noiseless silence. She makes an attempt and finally listens to her own heartbeat, the chirping of birds, and the whistling wind over her head, the train, etc. She narrates her new mystical experience: "The ice melts on the lake, the grass turns green, the leaves come out, the flowers bloom. I look over the land and feel peaceful and happy." (185). Thus, the Owl listens to the music of silence. She is now grown up and being a beautiful young girl, she doesn't talk to anyone outside her family.

Native Children spend most of their time in the midst of Nature. They do playing, hunting, fishing, swimming and canoeing in the lakes and forests. They do berry picking during the holidays. They stay in tents, do campfires, take lunch and supper there far away from their cabins.

Aboriginal people use to have a life in poverty and depression. Native men and women have to do all sorts of manual labour to earn their living. Their income is not sufficient for all members of the family to have proper food and clothing. Poverty is also one of the reasons for their poor education and health care systems. The Owl's family consisting of seven members and three foster kids live in the same old cabin built by her father some years ago. Her mother has added another small cabin to the present one and sleeps their with her little son Brian. The Owl describes about the mattress in the
following way: "Our mattress is a big canvas sack filled with straw" and "our blankets are all quilts sewn from discard clothes." (13).

In summer holidays, they do berry picking and sell berries in the store to buy groceries, fruits and vegetables. They do fishing and hunting for collecting their food. They gather firewood for the winter. They have to survive against odd situations like extreme cold and unavailability of food. When the Owl does have no school, she goes with her mom to check the rabbit snares in the bush and fishnets in the lake. Wess and Vera suffer from TB due to poverty and poor food. They are shifted to the sanitarium and Annie stops going to the town school. Alcoholism is the output of poverty and suffering. Natives stick to alcohol and drug soon after they are without work and money. The Owl's mom takes to drinking when she finds her family disintegrating. She is strong woman in the beginning, doing all sorts of housework such as sewing, fishing and making food. Now she is weak and drinking all the time. The Owl hates her people due this problem of alcoholism.

The novel ends with a positive note, a hope that "the sun will keep coming up till the end of time" and the people who are here today may be gone tomorrow. She remembers her mom's words: "Honour the sun, child, just as it comes over the horizon...." (211). She realizes that the brightness and the darkness are like the two sides of the same coin. Without any complaint, She accepts the truth, the realities of life and world around. She "loves her community" and accepts it along with its problems. She makes no attempt to find out any situation of them like protagonists in other native novels. The day today life and several incidents linked to it are depicted through humour and irony in a simple and straightforward way. Into the complex dynamics of the novel are woven such issues like the problem of the mixed bloods, the role of the Native community in the life of the people, the question of social status, and not the least, the problem of coming home to the native fuel.

Thomas king was alive to the question of status, as defined by the Indian Act, a piece of federal legislation in Canada that " regulates virtually every aspect of reserve
life", including band politics" (Silman 10) In fact from 1869 until 1985 the Indian status was determined by a patrilineal system, that is, by a person's relationship to a male person who is a direct descendent in the male line of a male person. When an Indian woman marries a non-status man, she too loses her Indian status and would not be able to regain it even if she subsequently divorced or widowed (Silman 12). And when a woman loses her status through marriage she loses just about every right that she has as an Indian: her property, inheritance, residency, build, medical, educational and voting rights on the reserve (Silman 12).

In the novel Will suffers a lot because of the restrictive government legislation, as is evident from a letter written by Will's father to his mother: "Sorry you had to leave the reserve, but Calgary's a better place for a swell girl like you. Stupid rule anyway" (King 4). Will is also taken as a non-status Indian and when his friend Harlen Bigbear takes him to the Department of Indian Affairs to get a loan to open a photography studio, he was not lucky: "Whitney Old crow shook his head and explained to Harlen that his office couldn't make loans to non-status Indians, that he was sorry, but that was the way it was" (99).

This problem of a non-status Indian or a mixed blood had received considerable focus and attention in such works like mourning Dove's Cogewea, the Half-Blood (1927), Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony (1977), Janet Campbell Hale's The Jallng of Cocelia Capture (1985), N Scott Mamaday's The Ancient Child (1989), Louis Owen's The sharpest Sight (1992) and Bone Game (1994) and Susan Power's The Grass Dancer (1995). But to Thomas King there are far greater issues to be attended to and the question of whether one is an Indian or a white is not important. Deliberately he has kept Will's father nameless, even though his mother's family is referred to by name. Even Will is not given his full name and he is known as Rose Horse Capture's son, a part of the Medicine River community, and his contact with white people on a personal level has been minimal after he moves back to Medicine River. Furthermore, Will has the advantage of being raised by a strong Indian mother with the support of the Medicine River...
Community and he is free from the problems experienced by mixed bloods like Jim Loney of James Welch's *The death of Jim Loney*. The Indian community is like a wide expansive family, very much in sharp contrast to the white European idea of a nuclear family and it is from such a family will draws his strength and support the entire Medicine River community as a large family explains the harmonious bond which exists in between the people and the natural world outside Harlen explains will that they have "got the Rockies, too you see over there ... Ninastiko-chief mountain. That's how we know where we are. When we can see the mountain, we know were home" (King 93) Because such a home embraces the entire community and involves a lot of people, even a simple task of taking a family photograph for Joyce Blue Horn is not a simple affair

"Will, when Joyce Blue Horn Said family, she wasn't just talking about her and Elvis and the kids, you know .Elvis has nine brothers and four sisters"

"Come on, Harlen."

"And Joyce" said Harlen, trying to keep form laughing out loud" Joyce has seven sisters and five brothers"

"The photo special is for immediate family" Harlen wiped his eyes with his shirt sleeve. "Oh" he said, "then were only talking about fifty people or so" (King 205)

When Thomas King titled one of his books as All My Relations, he was thinking about this idea of family where all the members of the community live together in harmony, very much in intimate terms with nature.

Another significant strand in the narrative of *Medicine River* is the use of stories for protection and survival and not for imprisonment and enslavement Earlier will had used stories in his attempts to understand and come to terms with his father we know that for Will, his father was without a name or a history and whenever the occasion came he made up stories about his father for him to believe. Even when he insisted that he "didn't miss him...didn't even think about him...had never known the man" (King 80), he was in
fact missing the experience of living with father. The stories he created about his "always getting postcards and letters with pictures of him standing against some famous place off helping women and children take sacks of rice off the back of tracks" (King 84) in fact enabled him to face the reality of living without a father, and his construction of stories, narratives he inherited from his Indian past helps him to liberate himself from an oppressive present without his father Greg Sarvis rightly asserted in his book *Keeping Slug woman Alive*

"Storytelling is a fundamental aspect of culture, and stories are used in a number of ways and for a multitude of purposes. Stories can work as cultural indexes for appropriate or inappropriate behaviour. They can work to oppress or to liberate, to confuse or enlighten" (4).

Thomas King used such stories to help the characters in confronting the hard facts of life and in enabling them to liberate themselves into a harmonious life, without being chained to an oppressive limiting present. There in the community of Medicine River, everybody knew that January Pretty Weasel had shot and killed her husband and then had written the suicide note to protect herself, in fact everybody knew that her husband physically abused her an more than one occasion. As Will recalled one occasion when Jake hit January after a basketball game, "right in the face with his fist. Betty down at the hospital said January was a regular in the emergency ward. Betty told January to file charges, but she never did" (45) But instead of accepting and confronting the reality of January's crime, Will, Harlen and the people of the medicine River community, knowing fully well that justice had already been done, eventually decided to invent the story that "Jake probably shot himself maybe because he hated himself for beating on January or he was angry at the time and didn't have anyone but himself to hit" (King 51). Unlike James Welch Thomas King didn't want "a stark image of a contemporary Native American cut off from much of what could sustain and enrich him" (Ruppert 56) If King depicted the seamer side of Native American life devoid of the spiritual life-giving power to nourish and sustain, he too presented the rejuvenating power of the native community to hold its
people together in a world of blighted dreams and broken promises, a community that is life home, a family in the shadow of Ninastiko

Thomas King is a mixed-blood having a Cherokee father and a Greek mother. He admits that he has a little of German descent. He is originally not from Canada nor belongs to any Canadian tribe in reality. He was born in Sacramento in California. However, he has stayed throughout his adulthood in Canada and now also works as a professor in English in the Guelph University. He has dual citizenship, both of Canada and USA. He is a creative artist, a short-fiction writer, a novelist, a filmmaker, and very much interested in photography. He only writes about the Native stuff and likes to be called as a Canadian Native writer. In one interview with Professor Lutz, he states: “I think of myself as a Native writer and a Canadian writer. I doubt if I could call myself a Canadian Native writer, just because I’m not from one of the tribes from up here. But all of my short stories, and the novel, and the anthologies, and the critical book that I co-edited, were published here in Canada, and they all have to do with Canadian material. I have done nothing in the US to speak of” (Lutz, 1991, 107). He doubts because he has no first-hand experience of a Native person in Canada. He has neither spent his life on the reservation nor has been brought up in a foster-home nor educated in a residential school. Like any white Canadian youth, he has got his higher education in a university and finished Ph. D degree from the Utah University in 1986. He taught Native American studies for many years at the Lethbridge University, Alberta, and then went to America to join as a professor in the department of American Studies, Minnesota University. He is fully assimilated into the mainstream Canadian society and lives like an elite academician in the university campus in an urban setting. He always writes about the Canadian prairie, the Alberta landscape, and the Native people of the Blackfoot tribe among whom he spent most of his childhood and adulthood. He visits reservations, talks to Native elders and artists, and collects lots of Native stories, old legends and myths, ceremonial tales and narratives from them for his own creative material.

Thomas King initially begins to write stories to influence a fellow academician and marry her. Professor Helen Hoy who is his first critic and well wisher as his wife inspires him to write more stories. He has a happy married life with her and their
children. Both teach in the English department of the Guelph University, Ontario, Canada. King has become one of the foremost fiction writers among Canadian Native authors. He is known for his works which address several contemporary issues such as marginalization of Natives, falsification of history, breaking down stereotypes or romantic images about the First Nations created by earlier non-Native authors, and revival of Native culture and heritage through “pan-Indian” performances of traditional ceremonies at urban Native centres. He is very much concerned about Aboriginal people in general, both on and off the reservations, and their social problems due to federal and provincial governments’ apathy towards them.

Thomas King’s major literary works include his first novel Medicine River (1990), A Coyote Columbus Story (1992), All My Relations (1992), One Good Story, that one (1993), and his other novels Green Grass, Running Water (1993) and Truth and Bright Water (1999). He has been awarded Canadian Governor General’s Award in 1992. He co-edited a volume of critical essays on Native literature titled The Native in Literature (1987) with Cheryl Calver and Helen Hoy. He also worked as the guest editor of the special Native issue of Canadian Fiction Magazine in 1987. Many of short stories by Canadian Native writers published in the above issue were re-published in his volume All My Relations later on. As a scholar of North American studies and contemporary Canadian Native Literature, he has delivered numerous talks and organized several conferences. Many of his critical articles have appeared in literary journals like Canadian Literature and World Literature Written in English.

Medicine River is an important novel of Canadian Native writing. This novel was originally thought to be ‘a series of stories’ set in the fictional town called Medicine River. The chapters were written as independent short stories. In his interview with Constance Rooke, he gives his opinion as following: “They did start out free standing pieces, but before the first draft was finished, many of them became more dependent on each other, vignettes, if you will, knitted together by those long running bits of narrative—the father’s letters, the flashbacks to Will’s younger days, especially to the woman he
knows in Toronto. All of those things give the book some sense of a novel, but I prefer to think of *Medicine River* as a cycle of stories*"* (WLIWE, 1990, 63)

The novel depicts a Native community on the Canadian plains. The setting of *Medicine River* is given a vivid description in the beginning of the book. The opening paragraph of the first chapter portrays the location like this: “*Medicine River sat on the broad back of the prairies. It was an unpretentious community of buildings banked low against the weather that slid off the eastern face of the Rockies*” (1). As a particular place, it illustrates its universal nature that it is not different from other towns of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. Will informs to Alice in chapter 16 that this town is in the west of Toronto. This place is best enjoyable in the autumn, which is better than hot summer and long and cold winter. He ironically points out that he doesn’t like the prairie wind that sweeps in and out of the community in *Medicine River*. This town is made more definite and realistic with some specific references such as the old Merchant’s Bank Building, the MR Fire-station, the American Hotel, the Friendship Centre, the Chief Mountain, the MR Herald as the only local daily, and Will’s own photography business studio to be named as MR Photography.

As a personal narrative, the story is about Will, its chief character and narrator. It is the story of his psychological journey from adulthood to manhood. He is a forty-year-old Indian photographer who moves from Toronto back to *Medicine River* where he spent his childhood as a young boy with his mother and brother. The novel is the documentation of his fragmented soul and fragmented recollections. Will remembers his childhood days through flashbacks and at the same time recalls about his fatherless life. He doesn’t clearly remember his father because he was about four when his father left his family in search of job in different cities. He imagines “*I must have seen my father, heard his voice. But there was nothing. No vague recollections, no stories, no impressions, nothing. He was from Edmonton I knew that*” (7-8).

Bob, his father, is a white rodeo cowboy from Edmonton and a good friend of a Native person named George Harley. George introduces this stranger to Rose, Will’s
mother, on his request. He was attracted by the beauty of his mother and wanted to marry her. Granny Pete doesn't approve of this marriage and the couple leaves for Calgary to settle down outside the reserve. A fellow passenger asks Will about his father on his return flight to Toronto. He feels humiliated and tells lies about his father. His father is introduced as an engineer, a pilot, a stockbroker, a career diplomat, a photographer, a doctor, a lawyer, etc. He wants his father to be a great personality and he feels proud to be a child of such a personality. He doesn't wish his father to be a rodeo man. He says to himself, "I didn't miss him. I didn't even think about him. I had never known the man." (80) He, however, stops worrying about his father whom he has never seen in life. He begins to imagine long stories about him until he takes a particular shape with a distinctive sound. He thinks: "He was a tall man with a low, pleasant voice. I imagined him best as a freelance journalist who roamed the world taking his own pictures and writing his stories." (84)

Will's mother used to tell a lot of stories about a character without his name. She brings in "someone" in those stories either playing with the kids or driving a car. Will knows that someone is his father. She sometimes gives names to this someone such as, Howard, Martin, and Eldon, but not the real name. Will remembers one particular story that has been said to them again and again. The story is about Howard Webster who tries to impress Indian girls, spending money after them. He has bought Will a cowboy hat and driven him to several places. Will thinks of asking questions about this man to his mother but has no courage to do so. His father's letters to his mother reveal a lot of information about him. Will has read these letters secretly as a child. One such letter in the first chapter states: "Dear Rose, I'll bet you never thought you'd hear from me again. I have thought about calling or writing, but you know how it is. ... I'm going to be in Calgary for a rodeo." (1). There are five such letters published in this chapter by the author who uses letter writing as a literary device in the narrative. They inform the narrator that his father does rodeo shows far away moving in different cities. He wants to spend time with them but doesn't do that. He writes to come and meet them, but never arrives. He breaks his
legs in one show and stops doing shows. He joins a real-estate company but doesn't have enough income. He sends a musical top and nuts for his family but they never reach them. He wants to send money but his wife receives no money from her husband.

In one of his letters, we are informed how his wife has to leave the reserve. It says: “Sorry you had to leave the reserve, but Calgary’s a better place for a swell girl like you. Stupid rule, anyway” (4). Lionel James, the Native elder and a member of the Horn community, comes to him and informs him about his father. He is a good friend of Lionel and has hosted dinner for him and Sam Belly after one big rodeo in Calgary. He also states, “Your father got his picture in the Calgary Herald when he won the all-round title. He used to carry it in his wallet” (169). In Norway, Bob tells the story of his parents in a restaurant after a rodeo. Will listens to Lionel and believes in his presentation of his father. He feels proud to be the child of a rodeo champion.

Will recalls his childhood memories. “James and me grew up in an apartment on Bentham Street in Calgary. Mom worked at the Bay cleaning up, and I guess we had enough money” (44). There were other Indian families staying in that apartment. Henry Goodrider, another Native boy, puts a big cardboard on the apartment showing the name ‘Bentham Reserve, Indians only’ (44). Mrs. Oswald who doesn’t like this name calls them and says, “White people do not live on reserves. And no matter what your colour, all of us here are Canadians” (44).

His mother packs up things one day to return home. When James inquires if they would go back to the reserve, their cousin Max says:

“No, you can’t. You guys have to live in town cause you’re not Indian any more.”

“Sure we are,” I said “Same as you.”

“Your mother married a white.” (9)

Even a small boy knows that a Native woman loses her legal right to land and racial status if she is married to a non-Native male. Will’s father is dead by a car accident and his mother can’t afford to live in the city with her two children. She has no government.
support as a Native widow to manage her daily expenses. The law doesn’t allow her to return back to the reserve and live with her own family including parents and relatives. Even after her white husband is dead, she can’t reclaim her Native status. That is why she decides to stay in the town off the reserve.

Rose is a very strong woman being a Native Indian in Canada. She is very proud of her parentage and marries to Bob against her Granny Pete’s wish. She is very independent-minded and self-centred. She does manual labour of cleaning offices to earn her living when her husband doesn’t support her financially. She used to clean offices at the Bay and then at the Petro-Can Building. She has not enough money to spare for herself after supporting her two children. She remains confined to herself mostly and accepts the things as they happen. Will thinks: “My mother had a favourite expression for all those times in life when things didn’t make sense or couldn’t be explained” (252).

She doesn’t blame anyone, neither God nor Luck, for bad things happening to her. She continues to do her work without any complaint or bothering about the result.

Will remembers how her mom used to send him a shirt on his birthdays. All those shirts were used ones, bought from second sales. She can’t afford a new one due to her extreme poverty. She would wash, iron, and pin those shirts in a neat rectangle to give them new appearance. On his twenty-seventh birthday she sends him such a white shirt pinned with one of his father’s photograph. She has circled his head and written ‘that’s him’ pointing with an arrow to his head. Will realizes now that “Knowing was an important thing for him to have” (87). Will’s father has sent a number of letters to his mother from several places that he visits to do rodeo shows. She never allows anybody to read them and hides them in a wooden chest under their old photographs. Once Will tries to read some and is roughly beaten by her.

Will’s father dies in an accident and his mother decides to have a family portrait with her two children. She wants them to remember their family though the portrait. She has put the photograph on the kitchen wall till they vacate the house in the apartment. Will’s mother becomes sick and keeps it a secret to herself without revealing to her
children about her illness. James is taking her to the hospital and there she talks a lot of stories of their early life. Then she dies on a Tuesday in the evening. Will has to come back to Medicine River to attend her funeral. He doesn’t know that this visit to Medicine River would be a turning point in his life. He would return to this place forever. Harlen Bigbear, a Native from the place, gives him a ride back to Medicine River after the funeral. Will has no idea about him who “glided into my life” (92).

Will informs his brother that he is going to settle down in Toronto because he likes the place for good restaurants and other visiting places around. He promises that they would be in touch always. Harlen asks him when he thinks of “moving back home” (93). He also expects him to return though Will is in no mind to return home. Medicine River is a small town to settle down and he is already settled in Toronto. But he doesn’t know that he would be jobless once he is back there. Will works in a studio and his boss has sold out the studio in his absence. The new owner has no intention of running the studio and has already closed down it. Now Will is jobless and struggles for survival and tries his luck here and there. He gets occasional assignments but no permanent job afterwards. He packs up his things in wooden crates and cardboard boxes. He sends them west of Toronto where he is destined to move. Then he finds himself landing at the Medicine River Airport where Harlen still waits to welcome him for his homecoming.

Will’s return is well accepted by all members in the Native community of Medicine River where he has only spent his childhood and a bit of adulthood. He is included among all immediately though he was away for a long period. Will is registered as a “non-status Indian” and has no scope or opportunity to get any financial help from the DIA for any business undertaking. Harlen introduces him to the DIA officials with the following statement: “Man’s a world-famous photographer, you know. Worked in Toronto” (99). He could get a business loan from a local credit union on interest.

Will’s studio named “Medicine River Photography” is inaugurated in a rented room near the old post office. His business cards are widely circulated among local natives on the reserve at the Friendship Centre. Harlen brings for him a calendar project.
of the Friendship Centre. He completes the project on a bank loan, but his six thousand dollar bill is kept unpaid by Ray. He gets offers for taking wedding photographs, party pictures, and family portraits. He takes snaps of respected Natives including David Plume, Bertha and Lionel Morley, and of Harlen. On the advice of Harlen, he runs a family portrait special and gets the first offer from Joyce Blue Horn who has a very large family. A photographer usually remains behind the camera, but Will is a member of the extended family of Joyce. He stands in front of the camera with others when the snap is taken in the auto-snap mode in the absence of the cameraman. In the beginning of the novel, we find Will as a detached observer of the community keeping him aloof from the rest. He behaves in a strange way, as if he has nothing to do with others and others have nothing to do with him. Gradually he is dragged into the community activities by Harlen who introduces him to Native elders as “Rose Horse Capture’s boy” (208). Lionel introduces him to Floyd’s grandmother and says: “She knew your mother. She’s happy to see you’re alive and getting enough to eat” (210).

Will is accepted as a basketball player in the Native team of Medicine River. He is an athlete from his school days. His coach Mr. Bobniak inspired him to play the game. Harlen as the new coach of the “Medicine River Friendship Centre Warriors” team requires a centre player and asks Will to play in that position. He provides him with a set of team uniform including a blue jersey, orange shorts and a pair of white socks with two yellows stripes around the top. Will is initially reluctant but Harlen inspires him with the following words: “Person always looks better in a basketball uniform. Team needs you. You don’t have to be real good, Will” (13). Will is flattered enough to accept the proposal and play for the team as a centre player. He remembers his mother’s statement that “every person born has a talent. Some people have three or four, but everybody has at least one” (12). Will is the athlete and his brother James is the artist who has the talent of drawing pictures.

Another way Will is accepted by the community is his cordial relationship and gradual intimacy with others there. He is introduced to Louise Heavyman who is a tax...
Harlen tells Will: "You're a handsome man, good job, good teeth. Good personality, too. You ever think about getting married? A man's not complete until he has a woman by his side" (27) Before Will thinks about his further development with Louise, Harlen informs about her pregnancy following the relation with Harold. She should be helped out of her difficulty by a sincere friend like Will. Will takes care of her and takes her to the hospital. He feels "good, clean, strong" for the first time in his life Will names her daughter as South Wing and collects a traditional birthday gift for her from the Native elder Martha Oldcrow He helps Louise to buy a big house where he spends many nights with the mother and the daughter. He expects to be the future boy friend of Louise, but to his surprise, the woman frustrates him.

Will is the ex-lover of Susan Adamson, the secretary of his editor-friend Bob Hobson. He meets her at the McMichael Art Gallery that has housed a contemporary Native art exhibition. They talk and take lunch together She comes to stay with him in his room when they have a close intimacy Will states "She went up the steps as though she knew exactly where she was going, and we went to bed as though we had been lovers for years" (109) They went out to watch several programs such as a poetry reading ceremony, a play, and an art exhibition followed by a meal and sleep. They talk about various topics on bed and indulge themselves in sensuous lovemaking. Will gradually feels her presence everywhere in his flat and often begins to miss her when she is not there Will has no idea about her past life and about her family He comes to know that she is married with two children She continues to have extra-marital relation with him and expects to have her divorce from her husband Ralph soon.

Susan waits for the Christmas and presents Will a new camera strap with maple leaves on it for the Valentine's Day. When he thinks of moving to a big apartment, she leaves with her things without giving him any hint of her departure Will feels hurt and lonely with a lot of anger After six months, he receives a ring from her again She gives him road direction to her apartment and invites him for dinner. Will finds a lot of guests being invited for the dinner. He discovers that Susan is independent with a steady job,
house, two daughters and a new life. She has discovered her new independent life without support from Ralph or Will. Will suppresses his emotions and returns back to Toronto with a heavy heart.

Will is portrayed as a contemporary Indian in Canada. He is a qualified photographer working in the urban setting of Toronto. He struggles to survive in the city without proper food, good salary, and good housing. Susan asks him if he has read the latest released Native fictional narrative, Basil Johnston's *Indian School Days*. When he is introduced to guests in the dinner party as an Indian photographer, the following statement by Alice is significant to the context:

"Susan tells us you're Native, too," said Alice.

"Kind of ironic, isn't it? I mean, being a photographer."

"What?"

"You know the way Indians feel about photographs" (229).

Canadian Aboriginal people generally don't like to be photographed. This is the stereotype created by non-Natives about them. On the contrary, the anthropologists and ethnographers have pictured them. These old pictures have been preserved in archives and museums for the sake of preservation of Native people and culture. Whites have created this romantic image about Indians that Indians having photographs is unbelievable. White ethnographers and researchers have pictured many Native elders and storytellers since early contact period.

Thomas King has broken down this created false image of Indians. Will's father has sent many of his pictures to his wife and has also asked for a picture of his wife and children in one of his letters. Will's mother takes a photograph of her family for preservation of family value. She puts it on the kitchen wall to have a look at it on daily basis. Being a photographer himself, the author has not only portrayed Will as a Native photographer but also has exposed Native people to modern technology. Harlen convinces Will to return home saying "No Indian photographers, Will. Real embarrassing for us to have to go to a white for something intimate like a picture" (94). Indians like to be exposed to their known persons only. They all belong to one extended family despite their racial differences.
Lionel who is one of the respected Native elders and storytellers living at the period is invited from all over the world to travel and tell Native tales legends to younger Natives. He has a passport and visa to travel outside Canada. He asks Will for a picture, because he needs a credit card. He says to Will “May be you’ve got one of them credit cards, too” (165). Will is having a credit card and bank chequebook. He is like every other modern human being in the whole world. He makes transactions of every kind to run his business and to fit him into the modern society. He travels around by air and has visited all major cities including Calgary and Toronto. He is exposed to many electronic gadgets like TV, fridge, telephone, and camera. He drinks liquor in bars and goes to theatre to enjoy movies and plays. He experiences life like every other contemporary Native in the entire globe. He does not represent any stereotype image as portrayed about the First Nations people by white artists or non-Natives in general.

Like other Native novels, Medicine River does not give more importance to its protagonist than the Native community that he represents. Many Native characters in the story compete with Will to claim the position of the chief protagonist. They include Will’s father, mother, brother, Harlen, Lionel James, and David Plume. They play equally important role in the action of the novel. The important women characters include Louise Heavyman, Bertha, Susan, and Joyce Blue Horn. Native community is a union of individuals who play very important role in the making of the community. Because of the community and communal values, individuals are bound to one another physically, emotionally, and spiritually. They acquire their self-identity due to the social customs and traditions that they follow and practice in day to day real life. They are distinct individually but one in spirit. Whenever there is any danger or challenge to face even by an individual, the whole community stands united to solve it and each member support another member as per his strength and capacity. In the novel, two instances are worth considering, the “Medicine River Friendship Centre Warriors” as a Native basketball team and the extended family of Joyce Blue Horn.
The team is under the guidance of its enthusiastic coach Harlen. He states to Will, "Team gives boys something to belong to, something they can be proud of." He tries to be the role model of his team players. He comes to practice sessions wearing a T-shirt with a phrase "Indian Power." He not only gives all encouragement to play well and win in every match, but also he wants to be disciplined and non-alcoholic. The success of their play largely depends on their sportive spirit and killer instinct. They win and lose depending on their way of playing. Harlen always pushes them to continue their practice rigorously and play against Native and non-Native teams throughout the season.

Will doesn't have an idea of running a family portrait special. Harlen comes to him and gives the proposal for the promotion of his business there. He says, "Something like that will bring in a lot of people from the reserve. Family is an important thing." Will decides to take a family portrait for twenty dollars. Joyce avails the offer as the first customer. She asks Will, "Does that special mean all the family?" Will gives his consent without any surprise or hesitation. He doesn't worry about Joyce's big family. His concern is only to take a snap of the family and develop the print. He fixes the time and allows the whole family to drive from the reserve on Saturday. Joyce is very happy to have a family portrait and Will is happy to prosper in his endeavour. Harlen is also happy being the intermediary. He informs to Will that there are about fifty members in her family. Will has thought of the "immediate family" only. Will counts most of the members including Joyce’s husband Elvis, their parents, their siblings, and children of all. Will observes, "By twelve-thirty, there were in the vicinity fifty-four people—adults and kids—in my studio. The kids were everywhere, in the bathroom, in the studio itself, in the kitchen. The adults stood around in groups, talking.

Will finds it difficult to accommodate so many persons in his studio area for an indoor snap. He has to take an outdoor snap on the riverbank. All reach the bank of the river ‘Horsehead Coulee’ not to have a picture, but to have a picnic together and to do some swimming. Will is introduced to every elder as "Rose Horse Capture’s boy" who, according to Lionel’s suggestion, should greet all because he doesn’t know everyone for
he was raised outside the community in Calgary. Will has to perform this ceremony before being accepted back in the community as a member. He does the ritual and takes twenty-four snaps to complete the special family-portrait of Joyce’s family. When he is invited to be there in the photographer, he sets the timer of the camera, runs across the sand and sits down next to Floyd’s granny. He doesn’t want to take a risk with such a big group. The group refuses to stay in a place. The members sway from one side to the other in the process of having a snap. He keeps on moving his camera from one angle to the other. He finds: “Only the grandparents remained in place as the ocean of relations flowed around them” (215). Harlen looks at the photographs and says, “pictures of the family are good things to have” (Ibid.). Will as a Native photographer succeeds to provide Joyce with the first ever family-portrait that was never possible before. His presence inside the photograph completes his circular journey to return back to his community after several years of stay outside.

Thomas King has not directly highlighted upon the Native problems that are there in white societies as well. He has drawn upon some instances here and there just to mention about the issues. He is not unconcerned about the issues of alcoholism, drug abuse, women and children abuse, poverty, and disease leading to death or suicide. For example, the young players in the basketball team drink too much and lose matches. Harlen is very much worried about his players’ drunkenness. Clyde Whiteman is jailed again and again for his petty thefts. Joe Bigbear comes back to the reserve after several years to host a party at the local American Hotel for Native youths. The boys drink and smoke like the host who does nothing but travels around, drinks and smokes always. Will’s father has died in a car accident due to heavy drinking.

Poverty is an important issue in the Native community. They are very poor economically because they are without jobs and any other source of income. They largely depend on welfare cheques; low income from hard labour, and white’s gifts. They have limited needs but they are unable to fulfil them. Will’s mother as a single woman and widow faces a lot of challenges due to her poverty. She struggles to survive along with
her children with the sudden death of her husband. She leaves her cleaning jobs in different offices and goes back to Medicine River because she can’t afford to stay in a city like Calgary. Unemployment is closely linked to poverty and is the most important reason of it. Will is qualified and a skilled professional but there is no work for him in Toronto. He leaves the city for a few days to attend his mother’s funeral but finds himself jobless on his return. Then he struggles a lot for his bread and butter before he winds up his life there and moves back to the small town Medicine River. There he has to struggle for a bank loan and for a DIA assistance to start his own business. Lionel finds it difficult to cope with the changing time. He has to tell old legends and tales for his income. He survives as a professional Native storyteller.

Jake Pretty Weasel is found dead on his bed with a gun and a pen in his hands. It is a mystery whether he has committed suicide or has been shot dead by his wife January. Some say that he has tortured January and she could not tolerate his abuses for long. She perhaps killed him and wrote his suicidal note. Will drives the woman to the reserve for the funeral of her dead husband. She admits to Will “You know he beat me. Broke my arm the last time. I was coming home from the hospital when I found him. He hit the kids sometimes, but not like he hit me” (49). Will sympathizes with the lady when she shows him her face and the yellow and purple bruises around her eyes. She always uses dark glasses to hide her wounded face. Betty at the hospital states that she is ‘a regular in the emergency ward’ (49), but doesn’t complain against him to the police. January is not convicted and arrested because she isn’t proved guilty. The RCMP declares Jake’s death as a suicide.
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