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Walking on one path with four stories

Duncan Mercredi

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Walking on one path with four stories

A memory of walking, having left that part of my life and found another in a place with many paths.

I had forgotten that feeling of slipping into the quiet of the trees, the leaves rustling above me, a soft breeze being the instrument of the song they sang, an old song only they can sing. A boy marvels at the softness of the moss that covers the muskeg, each step silent, leaving no hint of the path he took or on the trail that led him there. He listens, soft purr of a young rabbit beneath the branches of the spruce trees he's wandered into, the little one freezes as you reach for it, caressing the smoothness and softness of its fur, still, so still, a soft purring sound as you pet it before placing it down.

The voices in the village behind fading as you decide which path to take.

A boy, older now, wanders deeper into his past/path, hiding from the others, knowing where every path leads, even the ones that have faded over time, that place that held the cedar you picked to disguise the scent left behind after tacking pelts your father had harvested. Maybe take the other one, leading to that place you left the leg trap, hoping to catch a squirrel or weasel, rushing home to nokum to show her. Running without thought, letting the memory your feet guide you safely on the long-faded path without tripping. Only stopping at the stream to wash your hands before crossing on the logs placed across the stream.

A boy, older now, running, no, not running, fleeing from a voice behind me, "stop, stop, you can't get away!", but you never did, no matter how hard they tried they could never catch us, we knew the hidden paths, our footsteps made no sound, easy to escape, easy to become

invisible, the forest was our ally, Mountie boots were not meant to run where our footprints, now long disappeared, still carry our memories.

Then one day, they caught us, some disappeared for weeks, then months, then years and the trails faded over time and only the paths remained, nearly invisible.

Those other paths, the ones by Kanaschak, a place made for lovers, paths in all directions, each heading to a favourite spot you'd sneak to with one that claimed you, one you held close, counting stars between lip sharing, never taking that same path when night became dawn. You hold those walking memories close, even after drifting apart. Seasons changed, lovers too, paths never did.

A boy, now a man, slips into the shadows of the alleys, escaping for a time the sounds of the city. The silence follows you as you walk on a path made of concrete and asphalt. Steps make no sound, a leftover gift from the past, slipping past sleeping "not in my neighbourhood" seekers of a place to rest. Some stir, some sit up, lighting another hit of forgetfulness, listening for the sound of clothes being removed, a giggle, someone might see, who cares conversations. The sudden sound of a siren, you quicken your steps, to leave this place of sorrow. Finding yourself on the path by the river, counting shelters hidden beneath the canopy of trees, piles of discarded clothes and garbage left behind when forced to move. There's always another place along the river that will welcome you, no questions asked except one, "which path did you take?"

Many paths, but I only took one trail.

I remember those times, years have passed, all those paths I walked over, all branching from one trail, a trail that identified me and those paths that shaped me.

Regrets, some, not many, because in all those paths I have walked on, I always met someone new that left a little bit of who they were within me, a little ember still glowing in my heart and mind. I didn't/don't judge them or criticize them for the path they walked on because the path I've walked on was never smooth too.

DUNCAN MERCREDI is Cree/Metis, born in Misipawistik (Grand Rapids, Manitoba), poet/storyteller (oral traditional style), who is now living in Winnipeg, Manitoba and a member of the Indigenous Writers Collective of Manitoba, based in Winnipeg.