

i'll let your warmth seep into my bones
i'll let your light strip away the dark
i'll let your spring suffocate my winter
i'll let you fill the holes in my bark

build me a never-ending fire
play songs i've already heard
tell me stories about caribou & skateboards
fill my silence with pretty words

there's nothing in this
that isn't love

AKIDEN BOREAL

The brochure for Akiden Boreal is cluttered with words, a pamphlet of the kind that has too much information and in a font demanding a reader's commitment. But we all read it anyway, and saved it, and passed it around to our friends who get what it's pushing and act nonchalant for those who don't. We hovered over it while it was passed from sweaty hand to sweaty hand, babysitting it until we could get it safely taped back onto the fridge, behind the magnetized pile of shit we can't lose and have nowhere else to put.

Akiden means "vagina." Literally, I think it means "earth place" or "land place," though I'm not completely confident about the meaning of the "den" part of the word and there is no one left to ask. I think about that word a lot because I approach my vagina as a decolonizing project and because metaphors are excellent hiding places. The brochure says that you can't take any expectations into the Akiden. That whatever happens, happens. That this could be your first and only time in the natural world, and you just have to accept whatever experience you have. For some it's profoundly spiritual. For others it's just full-on traumatic, and still others feel nothing. The brochure says that learning takes place either way. That the teacher, the Akinomaaget, will teach whatever way it goes.

I've read and re-read the Akiden Boreal brochure every night for the past six months and so has Migizi. The words "last place of its kind" are seared into my heart. A combination of fear verging on horror mixes with fleeting placidity when I get to the "Tips for a Great Visit" section. I'm worried that I'll have a panic attack or some sort of a meltdown and fuck up my only chance in this place. The brochure warns in stilted legalese that there's a "sizable" percentage of people who visit the Akiden network and never recover. They spend the rest of their lives trying to get back in. This kind of desperation is a friend of mine and I know myself well enough to know that it is

perhaps better not to play russian roulette with myself like this and with Migizi. I also know myself well enough to know I will.

When I asked Migizi to do this with me last year he said yes, seemingly without taking the time to feel the weight of "yes" on the decaying cartilage that barely holds life together. People do all kinds of shit in the Akiden network, and in the tiny moment he said yes, it was unclear what he was saying yes to, exactly.

The network was initially set up for ceremony, but when people thought about it, there are all kinds of things we can't do anymore and all kinds of those things can be thought of as ceremony — having a fire, sharing food, making love, even just sitting with things for a few hours.

I decided ahead of time not to ask Migizi questions about our visit to the network or about anything else that I didn't want answers to. And you should know that I'm not sorry. We are from people that have been forced to give up everything and we have this one opportunity to give something to ourselves and we're going to take it. We are fucking taking it. Even though occupation anxiety has worn our self-worth down to frayed wires. Even though there is risk. After all, everything we are afraid of has already happened.

The confirmation number for my reservation at Akiden Boreal is written on a slip of paper, scotch-taped to the fridge, behind the brochure that is also taped to the fridge, hidden in plain sight. It is for three hours on June 21. I also memorized the confirmation number because I was confident I'd lose the slip, and on the same day I scratched it into the right front bumper of my car in case of early-onset dementia. I'm not good at looking after important pieces of paper so I also wrote it on the eavestrough on the left side of the house, because houses and cars are harder to lose than paper and no one will think to look there.

The number is ten years old now, booked on the blind faith of

youth, in hopes that I'd have enough of a credit rating to borrow the money to pay for the three hours. Blind faith rarely pays off, but this time it did, and I do. Barely. The bank says it will take me the rest of my life to pay off the loan, but it doesn't matter. No one gives a shit about owing money anymore.

I arrived a day early in accordance to the anxiety-management plan I made, as was suggested in the brochure. I booked a massage at the hotel, spent some time in the sauna and steam room, ate leafy green vegetables, did yoga and cardio, just like a white lady. I was still carrying a lot of frightened that the two of us will just be caught up in awkwardness and we won't be able to relax into this place. The brochure suggested taking anxiety meds, and most people do because this is a more controlled strategy than self-medicating with drugs and alcohol. I wanted to be the kind of person that could melt into this experience fully present. I wanted to be that kind of person, but I knew in my core I'm not. I'm the kind of person that actually needs to self-medicate in order to not fuck up important things.

Migizi and I met at the hotel bar that night for a few drinks and to reconnect before the visit. It was graceless at first for sure. But after the first bottle of wine I could see him breathing more easily. He stretched out his legs under the table and let them touch mine. My eye contact was less jolted. He seemed more confident as the night went on, and the silently voiced "you're not good enough," which marinates in the bones of my inner ear and pricks at my edges, was a little quieter.

Now it's 10 a.m. and we've each had two cups of coffee, one at the hotel and one in the waiting room at the security check-in. You have to arrive two hours before your scheduled appointment to make sure there is ample time for the scanning process. Last year some activists burnt down the Cerrado, a tropical savannah habitat in Brazil, by sneaking in an old-style flint. They wanted open access, which I want too. But in the process, they disappeared the last members of the tropical savannah choir.

I'm watching to see if Migizi is nervous too, but he is good at holding his cards close to his chest. He drank three shots of whiskey from a silver flask just outside the scanning room before we came in. I had two because I'm desperate to be able to feel this place. I tell myself our Ancestors would be ok with that; after all, we're going to be someone's Ancestors some day, and I'd want my grandchildren to do whatever they had to do to experience this. Compassion and empathy have to win at some point.

We clear security and wait in the holding room until the Watcher comes in to unlock the door to the site. She does so at exactly noon. I walk inside and am immediately hit with the smell of cedar. It's real cedar, not synthetic, and according to the brochure that means it comes with a feeling, not just a smell. The brochure says to be prepared for feelings and to let them wash over you like the warm waves of the ocean. This is the key to a good visit, the brochure insists.

I feel my body relaxing in spite of myself. The space seems immense even though I know my Ancestors would think this is ridiculous. The idea of finding the smallest amount of habitat that could sustain itself and then putting it in big glass jar without a lid. The glass dome. The edges.

I feel like crying. Actually I'm starting to cry and I know Migizi hates that and I hate that too and so I'm biting my lip but silent tears are falling all over my face anyway. Migizi licks the tears off my cheeks, takes my hand, and we walk to the centre of Akiden Boreal, where there is a circle of woven cedar, like our Ancestors might have done on the floor of a lodge. He opens his hand and he is holding two tiny dried red berries. I ask. He says they are from his Kobade, his great-grandmother, and they are called "raspberries." He says they are medicine and his family saved them for nearly one hundred years in case one of them ever got into Akiden Boreal. I ask him if they are hallucinogens. He says he thinks so. I'm becoming overwhelmed in the same way the brochure warned us and so I decide to eat one. We both do. Within minutes, I'm more relaxed and happier than

I've ever felt. I'm drowning in peacefulness and calm, and there is a knife of deep sadness being forcefully pulled out from deep in me.

Migizi reaches over and touches the skin on my lower back with just his fingertips. It feels like he's moving around the air very closest to my skin. I'm losing track of my body; the edges are dissolving and I'm a fugitive in a fragile vessel of feelings and smells and senses. My lungs draw in moist air to deeper reaches, my back is arching, my heart feels like it is floating out of my chest.

Then Migizi lies down on the cedar boughs, on his side, facing me. He puts his right hand on my cheek, and he kisses my lips. He's kissing my lips, and in doing so he is touching that part of me I've never shared with anyone, because I didn't know it was there. There is a yellow light around his body and I can feel it mixing with my light. Part of me is a pool of want. Part of me is a waterfall filling up that want almost faster than I can desire. At one point he stops and takes his clothes off, which he's never done before, because he's afraid I will see his self-hatred, the self-hatred we both share and pretend doesn't exist. And we're there, in the middle of Akiden Boreal. Naked. Embraced. Enmeshed. Crying. Convinced that being an Akiden addict for the rest of our lives is important, convinced that living as an addict, dying as an addict, is unconditionally worth it. Convinced that breaking all of our healthy connections to the city, the concrete and even the movement, for the chance to be here one more time before we die, is worth it. Because this is how our Ancestors would have wanted it.

dawn gets eaten by morning
one lick turns into three
aandeg just sits & surveys
i know she can't lie to me

BIG WATER

I'm lying in bed with my legs entangled in Kwe's. My chest is against the precious thin skin on her back and my arms hold her warm brown. I'm imagining us lying in smoky calm on cedar boughs instead of in this damp on Oakwood Avenue. I wish I could fall asleep like this, with her so close, but I'm too nervous when nice happens; I get more anxious than normal. I'm shallow breathing at her atlas and I'm worrying that my breath is too moist on the back of her neck and that it feels gross for her, maybe so gross that it will wake her up. So I roll over and check my phone, just in case.

There are eight new notifications from Signal, all from Niibish. She just made me switch from imessage to threema to Signal because Edward Snowden tweeted that Signal is the safest texting app, mostly because the code is open source and has been independently verified. I wonder if she knows what "code" and "open source" mean, but if anyone can be trusted about these things my money's on Snowden. Also I have no idea why she cares about internet security, but she clearly does. I have to look at my iphone every four minutes so I don't miss anything because I can't get the sound notifications to work on this app even though I've googled it. To be honest, this isn't actually that big of a problem because I look at my beloved screen every four minutes, whether or not the sound notifications are on anyway. We all do and we all lie about it.

Niibish wants to know where I am, why I'm not up yet, why I'm not texting her back, and she'd like my opinion on the stories in the *Toronto Star* and *Vice* this morning about the flood. "ARE THEY GETTING IT?" is the second-last text. The last text is another "Where are you? ffs."

Niibish is mad at me for making her text me instead of doing things the old way and she's right and I promised it's just a tool and that we'll still do things the right way once this crisis is over. She

typed in "PROMISE" in all caps like she was yelling. I texted back "of course," like she was insane for thinking otherwise. Kwe texts me "of course" when she wants me to think I'm insane for thinking otherwise too.

I get dressed, take the bus and then the subway to headquarters. Headquarters is high up, like Nishnaabeg Mount Olympus, so we can see Lake Ontario out of the window. Only I call it headquarters — really it's just a condo at Yonge and Dundas.

We call the lake Chi'Niibish, which means big water, and we share this brilliant peacemaker with the Mohawks. I call her Niibish for short and I'm the one that got her the iPhone and taught her how to text. I look out the south-facing window of the condo and see her dense blue. She is full, too full, and she's tipsy from the birth control pills, the plastics, the sewage, and the contraband that washes into her no matter what. She is too full and overflowing and no one saw this coming like no one saw Calgary flooding, even though every single one of us should have.

Five days ago she spilled over the boardwalk and flooded the Power Plant and Queens Quay, and we all got into Twitter fights about the waterfront. Six days ago, she crept over the Lakeshore and drank up Union Station, and we called New York City because remember the hurricane. We found new places to charge our devices. She smothered the beach. She bathed the train tracks and Oshawa carpooled. She's not angry even though she looks angry. She is full. She is full of sad. She wants us to see her, to see what we're doing to her, and change. That's the same thing that Kwe wants, so I know both the problem and the solution, and I know how much brave solutions like these require.

Niibish is just sitting and thinking and sporadically texting. They call it a crest, but not confidently because she should be receding by now. The math says receding and math is always confident, even when it's dead wrong. The weather is also confident when it

is happening, and the predictors are being fed a string of variables in which they can only predict unpredictability. The public is not happy.

Niibish is reflecting and no one knows how long reflecting takes or what the outcome will be. She is wondering if this is enough for us to stay woke. She is wondering what will happen if she recedes — *Will they just build a big wall? Will they just breathe relief? Will they reflect on things?*

Should this be a Braxton Hicks warning or creation?

While she's sitting and thinking she's also talking to Binesiwag. Those guys, hey. Only around in the summer, bringing big rains and big thunder and sometimes careless lightning and the fog that lets them do the things that need to get done and no one else wants to do. There's the crucial decision, which is always the same no matter what the question: Do we make the crisis bigger or smaller or keep it just the same?

I'm getting the log ready just in case. I've gathered my crew together and we're meeting where the nude beach used to be at Hanlan's Point to practise holding our breath and diving. Everyone sat on a log during the last big flood, until we came up with a plan to create a new world. Muskrat got a handful of earth from the bottom of the lake like a rock star because everyone had already tried and failed. I breathed. Turtle shared her back, and we put her name on the place in return. We all danced a new world into reality. We made Turtle Island and it wasn't so bad for a while. For a while we all got lost in the beauty of things, and the intelligence of hopeless romantics won the day. We're not so confident in our making powers this time around though. Our false consciousness is large, our anxiety set to panic, our depression waiting just around the corner. We're in a mid-life crisis, out of shape and overcompensating because it's too late to change any of that. Beaver's doing push-ups on the soggy grass. Bear's doing power squats and bragging about his seven-minute workout app and

the option of having a hippie with a whistle call out the next exercise. Muskrat is in his new wetsuit doing sit-ups, and not very good ones either. I'm wandering around the island instagramming pictures of big logs, deciding which one will be ours. And I'm texting Kwe, telling her that I love her, because she likes that, telling her to just stay in bed because I'll be back soon and we almost always survive.

how to steal a canoe

kwe is barefoot on the cement floor
singing to a warehouse
of stolen canoes

bruised bodies
dry skin
hurt ribs
dehydrated rage

akiwenzii says, "it's canoe jail"

the white skin of a tree is for slicing and feeling
& peeling & rolling & cutting & sewing
& pitching & floating & travelling

akiwenzii says, "oh you're so proud of your collection
of ndns. good job zhaaganash,
good job"

kwe is praying to those old ones by dipping her fingers
into a plastic bottle of water
& rubbing the drops on the spine of each canoe

soft words
wet fingers
wet backs

akiwenzii & kwe are looking each canoe in the eye
one whispers back, "take the young one and run"
kwe looks at akiwenzii