

**on/*me***

by

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## **On How to Keep on Living**

### */ Passing*

i move through the world passing—

as mentally well  
as a white woman  
as over my grief  
as successful

i am none of these things,  
at least not fully

## On Identity

### */ Origin of a Designation*

i hadn't heard the term *white passing* until recently  
it wasn't something i grew up with—*white passing*,  
said like bad words, strung together to hurt, to designate, to demarcate

like i should be something other than white  
like i should have skin other than what i have  
like i was called *white buffalo* growing up, a difference in the lineup of cousins

marked but not known why

mixed blood

métis

half-breed

hybrid

off reserve

scottish

indian

steinhauer

a part of the land

aboriginal

cunningham

quantifiable

belgian

a bill c

indigenous

cree

calahasian

urban

non-speaker

prairie dweller

native

status card holder

the buck stops with me,  
my mom always said that to my sisters and me growing up

the buck stops with me,  
as if to say  
you are not indian in the government's eyes  
you are not indian in the people's eyes  
you are not  
indian

but then why do i hear cree in my dreams?

## **On Mental Illness**

### */ Lists*

Francine:

general anxiety disorder  
possible borderline personality disorder  
bipolar ii disorder  
depression  
ptsd

family (a combination or singular):

general anxiety disorder  
borderline personality disorder  
bipolar disorder  
multiple personality disorder  
schizophrenia  
paranoid schizophrenia  
ptsd  
attempted suicide  
suicide  
addiction (alcoholism, drug abuse, gambling)

## **On Teasing**

*/ Aunties*

head thrown back in laughter,  
hands out whacking shoulders

## **On TV**

### */ Pocahontas*

going to my granny and grandpa's  
so proud to show them  
other natives on tv  
they were sad

## On Grief

### */ Hospital Visits*

my mother never had a chance to be white passing  
she was always known by the brown in her skin,  
the cree in her features,  
what strangers thought she was,  
never known for the unseen qualities, the details  
her faith, her garden lush in summer, her laughter that burst through spaces  
what was seen was beyond her control  
people's perceptions  
what they thought they knew

when i was a teenager we moved to a small town in the north  
it was during the oka crisis  
protests strung along the country  
my mom, scared to go outside  
    these people will think i'm one of them, the bad indians,  
    the protesting indians  
she was afraid, see,  
of getting insults hurled at her, beaten up  
in a new place with faces that didn't know her details  
that only knew the colour of her skin

when she got sick, really really sick,  
she went to the hospital  
and they didn't see the details then either  
so used to "fixing up" the problem brown people  
they didn't see the real her  
so they sent her away  
and so she came back  
again  
and again  
and again  
and they always sent her away  
pneumonia  
that's what they called her lung cancer until she couldn't breathe anymore



until it was stage iv and in her back and brain  
because by then they couldn't deny her anymore  
they couldn't see her as a drunk indian, someone to be forgotten  
because they knew then  
it was the tumour in her brain, not her skin colour,  
that was the problem  
but even then, when they knew,  
they wouldn't give her morphine for the pain  
still convinced she was her skin colour and their perception  
she had to fight for relief  
she had to fight for them to see the details  
never mind my mom never drank,  
didn't smoke, didn't do drugs, hardly ever swore, was a christian  
none of those details mattered  
and after the first stirrings of pain in her chest twelve months before  
she was gone

## **On Tradition**

### */ Language*

*kikwây*, my girl

*âstam*, now

*wah wah*, you silly girl

*namoya, êhê, awas*

but i always knew there was more

i listened to it being spoken around the table

a secret language i was supposed to be a part of