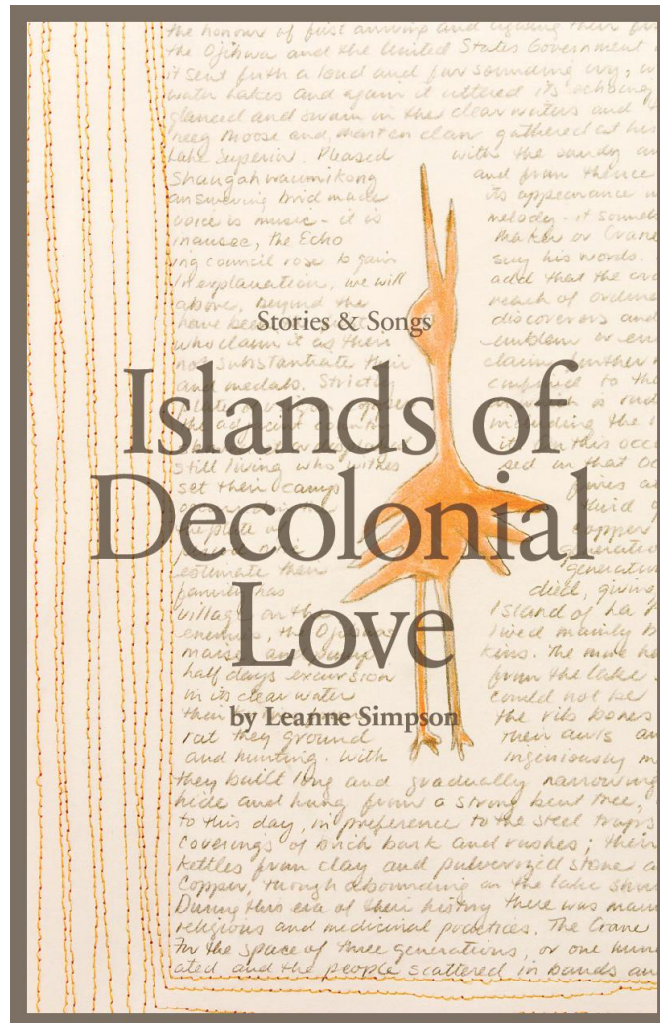


indinawemaaganidog / all of my relatives



“indinawemaaganidog / all of my relatives” from *Islands of Decolonial Love*.

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From the counter-cover of the book: “Leanne Betasamosake Simpson’s lovingly drawn characters work hard to preserve their innocence in a world where irony and cynicism would be easier. They spend a lot of time travelling: on land, on the water, through space and time—in cars, trucks, fishing boats, canoes, and in their minds: between bars, forests, reservations, curling rings, kitchens, lakes, and highways. These exquisitely rendered journeys become symbols for our desire to understand and never stop learning, no matter the cost. There is heartbreak here but also many moments of fleeting grace, and a wry humor that promises to keep us safe”

—Ursula Pflug

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i am standing on the wharf in cap saint louis just wondering, when a guy i've never met shows up. you should know i make it a policy not to talk to people unless absolutely necessary which is judgmental and damaged and yes i miss out on possibility, but at the same time tricky people do manage on occasion to penetrate my aural perimeter. it all works out in the end. sort of.

so etienne shows up and says allo and obviously he knows i'm not suppose to be there so i'm suspicious of what he wants. i tell him i want to see the seal colony even though that's not what i want and that's not what i am looking for. he immediately says he'll take me. i ask how much. he says for free.

fine.

nothing in life is free. the best things in life are free. there is no such thing as a free lunch.

we walk down the dock and he offers his hand so i can step down onto the deck of the boat. of course i refuse and step down onto stacked broken plastic bins on my own because we need to get a few things straight right from the beginning and this is one of them.

he starts the engine and i'm in the back with the gear so we can't talk. it's sunny and it's windy and it's perfect and as we drive away from the shore i think about dexter and all the possible scenarios. he interrupts, offering me a coors light iced tea and i take one on impulsive even though it's only ten thirty in the morning and coors light is always gross. Suddenly we're a mile off shore in the atlantic.

we drive past a kayaker and kumbaya plays in my head and i stand up and wave like a happy person so he'll remember me when the cops question him later.

it's only a few more minutes to the seals which are herded on a sand bar so they can catch the fish moving into the river with big tides. we get close and they stampede into the sea reminding me of dogs and sheep and buffalo and etienne ask me if i want to go farther.

with the same impulse as the coors light iced tea, i say yes and he says he knows this place where there is a school of mackerel. we could fish because last night he was there and he caught a thousand pounds just jigging for them. i decide he is mi'kmaq because he could be and even though that probably means nothing it makes me feel less nervous.

on the way to the mackerel, etienne tells me how the feds kicked his family out of the park and paid them three hundred and fifty bucks for their land in 1968 and then they bulldozed the house. i tell etienne that i know how that feels but i don't think he believes me because he thinks i'm from toronto and i'm rich and judgmental and full of shit because that's what people think when you say the word "ontario".

etienne gets out the lines and in two minutes we know we're on the school because we're pulling in mackerel easy. he watches as i hold the hook and snap the fish into the garbage pail, which is my

reveal. it's sunny and it's windy and it's perfect and the arms of the day are wide open and no one has to be anywhere. i see a northern gannet and i love gannets because they can disconnect their wings before they plummet into the sea after a fish. imagine disconnecting a body part! the gannet swims over to the boat smelling the fish blood and etienne hands the gannet a fish and says "the bird is my family, all of this, the fish, the seals, the water—this is my family," which is his reveal.

our eyes meet because now he has my attention. i walk over and hug him and he is the kind of person that can give and receive a real hug and i'm not one of those people because my alarm system goes off when people touch me and i freeze up and shut down. this time that doesn't happen. i decide to kiss him and it's perfect and easy and we make out void of awkwardness but with a clearly defined beginning and a clearly defined ending. then he drives back to shore while i gut the fish in the back of the boat using his terrifyingly sharp knife, feeding the guts to the gulls and the gannets. he drops me off on the dock. we thank each other. we say goodbye and i pay attention to each step, instead of looking back.

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Watch ↪ [HERE](#) Leanne Betasamisake Simpson performing "Islands of Decolonial Love"

## For more about Leanne Betasamisake Simpson and her art

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson is a renowned Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, writer and artist, who has been widely recognized as one of the most compelling Indigenous voices of her generation. Her work breaks open the intersections between politics, story and song—bringing audiences into a rich and layered world of sound, light, and sovereign creativity.

- Here you can find [Islands of Decolonial Love](#), ARP Books.
- Author's [website](#)