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*Goodbye, Snaug*

#### CONTRIBUTOR'S NOTE

BEFORE 1800, "Downriver Halkomelem"-speaking peoples, my ancestors, inhabited the city of Vancouver. By 1812, the Halkomelem had endured three epidemics caught as a result of the east-west and north-south Indigenous trade routes. At that time, the Halkomelem were part of a group of five friendly tribes (according to court records in the case of *Mathias vs. the Queen*). Following the epidemics the Tselil Waruth or Downriver Halkomelem were reduced to forty-one souls and invited the Squamish to occupy the Burrard Inlet. They did so. One group led by Khahtsahlanogh, from Lil'wat, occupied what is now False Creek. False Creek or Snaug (meaning sandbar), known to all the neighbouring friendly tribes as the "supermarket of the nation," became a reserve some fifty years after white settlement began. It was sold between 1913 and 1916, and Khahtsahlano, the son of Khahtsahlanogh, and his remaining members were forced to move. This sale was declared illegal in a court case at the turn of the millennium. Although the Tselil Waruth and the Musqueam originally shared the territory, the courts ruled that the Squamish, because they were the only ones to permanently occupy the village, "owned" it. I am related to Khahtsahlano and the Tselil Waruth

people, and I had always wanted to write the story of Khahshlano. He was still alive when I was a child and was much respected by the Squamish, Musqueam, and Tsleil-Watuth people as one of the founders of the Allied Tribes of B.C., a group that sought redress for the illegal land grabs by British Columbia in the decades following Confederation. There is still an unresolved ongoing court case involving the Canadian Pacific Railway station at Terminal Avenue and Main Street in False Creek and the Squamish Band.

Researching this story has been both painful and enlightening. For one thing, the formerly friendly tribes that once shared the territory are not quite so friendly with one another today. The Tsleil-Watuth and the Musqueam sued the Squamish Band Council, all three claiming ownership of Snaug, and the Tsleil-Watuth and the Musqueam lost. The case has convinced me that Canada must face its history through the eyes of those who have been excluded and disadvantaged as a result of it. Severely weakened by epidemic after epidemic and legally excluded from land purchases in the new nation of Canada, the First Nations people have had to make desperate and unfair decisions to assure their survival. The forfeiture of the right to Snaug is, hopefully, the last desperate measure we will need to take before we can be assured of our survival in Canada.

*Goodbye, Snaug*



Raven has never left this place, but sometimes it feels like she has been negligent, maybe even a little dense. Raven shaped us; we are built for transformation. Our stories prepare us for it. Find freedom in the context you inherit—every context is different: discover consequences and change from within, that is the challenge. Still, there is horror in having had change foisted upon you from outside. Raven did not prepare us for the past 150 years. She must have fallen asleep some time around the first smallpox epidemic, when the Tsleil-Watuth Nation nearly perished, and I am not sure she ever woke up.

The halls of this institution are empty. The bright white fluorescent bulbs that dot the ceiling are hidden behind great long light fixtures dimming its length. Not unlike the dimness of a longhouse, but it doesn't feel the same. The dimness of the hallway isn't brightened by a fire in the centre nor warmed by the smell of cedar all around you. There are no electric lights in the longhouse, and so the dimness is natural. The presence of lights coupled with dimness makes the place seem eerie. I trudge down the dim hallway; my small hands clutch a bright white envelope. Generally, letters from "the Queen in right of Canada" are drearily empty: enclosed in

brown envelopes, but this is from a new government—my own government, the Squamish First Nation government. Its colour is an irony. I received it yesterday, broke into a sweat and a bottle of white wine within five minutes of its receipt. It didn't help. I already knew the contents—even before Canada Post managed to deliver it; Canadian mail is notoriously slow. The television and radio stations were so full of the news that there was no doubt in my mind that this was my government's official letter informing me that "a deal had been brokered." The Squamish Nation had won the Snaug lawsuit and surrendered any further claim for a fee. The numbers are staggering: \$92 million. That is more than triple our total GNP, wages and businesses combined.

As I lay in my wine-soaked state, I thought about the future of the Squamish Nation: development dollars, cultural dollars, maybe even language dollars, healing dollars. I had no right to feel this depressed, to want to be this intoxicated, to want to remove myself from this decision, this moment, or this world. I had no right to want to curse the century in which I was born, the political times in which I live, and certainly I had no right to hate the decision makers, my elected officials, for having brokered the deal. In fact, until we vote on it, until we ratify it, it is a deal only in theory. While the wine sloshed its way through the veins in my body to the blood in my brain, pictures of Snaug rolled about. Snaug is now called False Creek. When the Squamish moved there to be closer to the colonial centre, the water was deeper and stretched from the sea to what is now Clark Drive in the east; it covered the current streets from Second Avenue in the south to just below Dunsmuir in the north. There was a sandbar in the middle of it; hence the name Snaug.

I lay on my couch, Russell Wallace's CD *Tokkam* blaring in the background—Christ, our songs are sad, even the happy ones. Tears rolled down my face. I joined the ranks of ancestors I was trying not to think about. Wine-soaked and howling out old Hank Williams crying songs, laughing in between, tears sloshing across the laughter lines. The '50s. My Tā'ah intervened. Eyes narrowed, she ended the party, cleared out the house, sending all those who had had a little too much to drink home. She

confiscated keys from those who were drunk, making sure only the sober drove the block to the reserve. "None of my children are going to get pinched and end up in hoosegow."

My brain, addled with the memory, pulled up another drunken soirée, maybe the first one. A group of men gathered around a whisky keg, their children raped by settlers: they drank until they perished. It was our first run at suicide, and I wondered what inspired their descendants to want to participate in the new society in any way, shape, or form. "Find freedom in the context you inherit." From the shadows Khahsahlano emerged, eyes dead blind and yet still twinkling, calling out, "Sweetheart, they were so hungry, so thirsty that they drank up almost the whole of Snaug with their dredging machines. They built mills at Yalatown and piled up garbage at the edges of our old supermarket—Snaug, False Creek was so dirty that eventually even the white mans became concerned." I have seen archival pictures of it. They dumped barrels of toxic chemical waste from sawmills, food waste from restaurants, taverns, and tea houses; thousands of metric tons of human sewage joined the other waste daily.

I was drunk. Drunk enough to apologize for my nation, so much good can come of this . . . So why the need for wine to stem the rage?

"The magic of the white man is that he can change everything, everywhere. He even changed the food we eat." Khahsahlano faced False Creek from the edge of Burrard Inlet, holding his white cane delicately in his hand as he spoke to me. The inlet was almost a mile across at that time, but the dredging and draining of the water shrank it. Even after he died in 1967, the dredging and altering of our homeland was not over. The shoreline is gone; in its place are industries squatting where the sea once was. Lonsdale quay juts out into the tide and elsewhere cemented and land-filled structures occupy the inlet. The sea asparagus that grew in the sand along the shore is gone. There is no more of the camas we once ate. All the berries, medicines, and wild foods are gone. "The womans took care of the food," he said. And now we go to schools like this one and then go to work in other schools, businesses, in band offices or anyplace that we can, so we can purchase food in modern supermarkets. Khahsahlano

was about to say something else. “Go away,” I hollered at his picture, and suddenly I was sober.

Snaug is in Musqueam territory, it occurred to me, just across the inlet from Tseil Wautuh, but the Squamish were the only ones to occupy it year-round—some say as early as 1821, others 1824, still others peg the date as somewhere around the 1850s. Before that it was a common garden shared by all the friendly tribes in the area. The fish swam there, taking a breather from their ocean playgrounds, ducks gathered, women cultivated camas fields and berries abounded. On the sandbar, Musqueam, Tseil Wautuh, and Squamish women tilled the oyster and clam beds to encourage reproduction. Wild cabbage, mushrooms, and other plants were tilled and hoed as well. Summer after summer the nations gathered to harvest, probably to plan marriages, play a few rounds of that old gambling game *lahal*.

Not long after the first smallpox epidemic all but decimated the Tseil Wautuh people, the Squamish people came down from their river homes where the snow fell deep all winter to establish a permanent home at False Creek. Chief George—Chipkaym—built the big longhouse. Khahsahlanogh was a young man then. His son, Khahsahlahno, was born there. Khahsahlahno grew up and married Swanamnia there. Their children were born there.

“Only three duffles’ worth,” the skipper of the barge was shouting at the villagers. Swanamnia did her best to choke back the tears, fingering each garment, weighing its value, remembering the use of each, and choosing which one to bring and which to leave. Each spoon, handles lovingly carved by Khahsahlahno, each bowl, basket, and bent box had to be evaluated for size and affection. Each one required a decision. Her mind watched her husband’s hand sharpening his adze, carving the tops of each piece of cutlery, every bowl and box. She remembered gathering cedar roots, pounding them for hours and weaving each basket. Then she decided to fill as many baskets as the duffles could hold and leave the rest.

Swanamnia faced Burrard Inlet—she could not bear to look back. Her son winced. Khahsahlahno sat straight up. Several of the women

suppressed a gasp as they looked back to see that Snaug’s longhouses were on fire. The men who set the fires were cheering. Plumes of smoke affirmed that the settlers who kept coming in droves had crowded the Squamish out. This is an immigrant country. Over the next ten days the men stumbled about the Squamish reserve on the north shore, building homes and suppressing a terrible urge to return to Snaug to see the charred remains. Swanamnia watched as the men in her house fought for an acceptable response. Some private part of her knew they wanted to grieve, but there is no ceremony to grieve the loss of a village. She had no reference post for this new world where the interests of the immigrants took precedence over the interests of Indigenous residents. She had no way to understand that the new people’s right to declare us non-citizens unless we disenfranchised our right to be Squamish was inviolable. The burning of Snaug touched off a history of disenfranchisement and prohibition that was incomprehensible and impossible for Swanamnia to manage.

We tried, though. From Snaug to Whidbey Island and Vancouver Island, from Port Angeles to Seattle, the Squamish along with the Lummi of Washington State operated a ferry system until the Black Ball ferry lines bought it out in the 1930s.

Khahsahlahno’s head cocked to one side and he gave his wife a look that said, “No problem, we will think of something,” as the barge carried them out to sea. We were reserved and declared immigrants, children in the eyes of the law, wards of the government to be treated the same as the infirm or the insane. Khahsahlahno determined to fight this insult. It consumed his life. We could not gain citizenship or manage our own affairs unless we relinquished who we were: Squamish, Tseil Wautuh, Musqueam, Cree, or whatever nation we came from. Some of us did disenfranchise. But most of us stayed, stubbornly clinging to our original identity, fighting to participate in the new social order as Squamish.

Khahsahlahno struggled to find ways for us to participate. In 1905, he and a group of stalwart men marched all over the province of British Columbia to create the first modern organization of Aboriginal people. The Allied Tribes mastered colonial law despite prohibition and land

rights to secure and protect their position in this country. He familiarized himself with the colonial relations that Britain had with other countries. He was a serious rememberer who paid attention to the oracy of his past, the changing present, and the possibility of a future story. He stands there in this old photo just a little bent, his eyes exhibiting an endless sadness, handsomely dressed in the finest clothes Swanamiam had made for him. A deep hope lingers underneath the sadness, softening the melancholy. In the photograph marking their departure, his son stands in front of him, straight-backed, shoulders squared with that little frown of sweet trepidation on his face, the same frown my sister wears when she is afraid and trying to find her courage. Khahtsahlano and his son faced the future with the same grim determination that the Squamish Nation Band Council now deploys.

The wine grabbed reality, slopped it back and forth across the swaying room that blurred, and my wanders through Snaug were over for another day.

The hallways intervene again; I head for my office, cubby really. I am a TA bucking for my master's degree. This is a prestigious institution with a prestigious MA program in Indigenous government. I am not a star student, nor a profound teaching assistant. Not much about me seems memorable. I pursue course after course. I comply day after day with research requirements, course requirements, marking requirements, and the odd seminar requirement, but nothing that I do, say, or write seems relevant. I feel absurdly obedient. The result of all this study seems oddly mundane. Did Khahtsahlano ever feel mundane as he trudged about speaking to one family head, then another, talking up the Allied Tribes with Andy Paul? Not likely; at the time he consciously opposed colonial authority. He too studied this new world but with a singular purpose in mind: recreating freedom in the context that I was to inherit. Maybe, while he spoke to his little sweetheart, enumerating each significant non-existent landmark, vegetable patch, berry field, elk warren, duck pond, and fish habitat that had been destroyed by the newcomers, he felt this way. To what end did he tell an eight-year-old of a past bounty that can never again be regained?

Opening the envelope begins to take on the sensation of treasonous behaviour. I set it aside and wonder about the coursework I chose during my school years. I am Squamish, descended from Squamish chieftains—no, that is only partly true. I am descended from chieftains and I have plenty of Squamish relatives, but I married a Sto:loh, so really I am Sto:loh. Identity can be so confusing. For a long time the Tsleil Wauruth spoke mainly Squamish—somehow they were considered part of the Squamish Band, despite the fact that they never did amalgamate. It turns out they spoke “Downriver Halkomelem” before the first smallpox killed them, and later many began speaking Squamish. Some have gone back to speaking Halkomelem while others still speak Squamish. I am not sure who we really are collectively and I wonder why I did not choose to study this territory, its history, and the identity changes that this history has wrought on us all. The office closes in on me. The walls crawl toward me, slow and easy, crowding me; I want to run, to reach for another bottle of wine, but this here is the university and I must prepare for class—and there is no wine here, no false relief. I have only my wit, my will, and my sober nightmare. I look up: the same picture of Khahtsahlano and his son that adorns my office wall hangs in my living room at home. I must be obsessed with him. Why have I not noticed this obsession before?

I love this photo of him. I fell in love with the jackets of the two men, so much so that I learned to weave. I wanted to replicate that jacket. Khahtsahlano's jacket was among the first to be made from sheep's wool. His father's was made of dog and mountain goat hair. Coast Salish women bred a beautiful dog with long and curly hair for this purpose. Every summer the mountain goats left their hillside homes to shed their fur on the lowlands of what is now to be the Sea to Sky Highway. They rubbed their bodies against long thorns, and all the women had to do was collect it, spin the dog and goat together, and weave the clothes. The settlers shot dogs and goats until our dogs were extinct and the goats were an endangered species. The object: force the Natives to purchase Hudson's Bay sheep's wool blankets. The northerners switched to the black and red Hudson's Bay blankets, but we carried on with our weaving, using sheep's wool for a

time; then when cash was scarce we shopped at local second-hand shops or we went without. Swanamia put a lot of love into those jackets. She took the time to trim them with fur, feathers, shells, and fringe. She loved those two men. Some of the women took to knitting the Cowichan sweaters so popular among non-Indigenous people, but I could not choose knitting over weaving. I fell in love with the zigzag weft, the lightning strikes of those jackets, and for a time got lost in the process of weaving until my back gave out.

The injury inspired me to return to school to attend this university and to leave North Van. I took this old archive photo—photocopy, really—with me. Every now and then I speak to Khahtsahlano, promise him I will return.

My class tutorial is about current events. I must read the letter—keep abreast of new events—and prepare to teach. I detach, open, and read the notice of the agreement. I am informed that this information is a courtesy; being Sto:loh, I have no real claim to the agreement, but because ancestry is so important, all descendants of False Creek are hereby informed . . .

I look at the students and remember: this memory is for Chief George, Chief Khahtsahlano, and my Ta'ah, who never stopped dreaming of Snaug.

Song rolled out as the women picked berries near what is now John Hendry Park. In between songs they told old stories, many risqué and hilarious. Laughter punctuated the air; beside them were the biggest trees in the world, sixteen feet in diameter and averaging four hundred feet in height. Other women at Snaug tended the drying racks and smoke shacks in the village. Inside them clams, sturgeons, oolichans, sockeye, spring salmon were being cured for winter stock. Men from Squamish, Musqueam, and Tsleil Waututh joined the men at Snaug to hunt and trap ducks, geese, grouse, deer, and elk. Elk is the prettiest of all red meats. You have to see it roasted and thinly sliced to appreciate its beauty and the taste—the taste is extraordinary. The camas fields bloomed bounteous at Snaug, and every spring the women culled the white ones in favour of the blue and hoed them. Children clucked at their long woven skirts. There

is no difference between a white camas and a blue, except that the blue flowers are so much more gorgeous. It is the kind of blue that adorns the sky when it teases just before a good rain. Khahtsahlano's father, Khahtsahlano, remembered those trees. On days when he carved out a new spoon, box, or bowl, he would stare sadly at the empty forest and resent the new houses in its place. Chief George, sweet and gentle Chief George—Chipkaym—chose Snaug for its proximity to the mills and because he was no stranger to the place.

By 1907, the end of Chief George's life, the trees had fallen, the villagers at Lumberman's Arch were dead, and the settlers had transformed the Snaug supermarket into a garbage dump. The newcomers were so strange. On the one hand, they erected sawmills that in disciplined and orderly fashion transformed trees into boards for the world market quickly, efficiently, and impressively. On the other hand, they threw things away in massive quantities. The Squamish came to watch. Many like Paddy George bought teams of horses and culled timber from the backwoods like the white man—well, not exactly like them; Paddy could not bring himself to kill the young ones. "Space logging," they call it now. But still some managed to eke out a living. Despite all the prohibition laws they found some freedom in the context they inherited.

"The settlers were a dry riverbed possessing a thirst that was never slaked." A film of tears filled Khahtsahlano's eyes and his voice softened as he spoke. "After the trees came down, houses went up, more mills, hotels, shantytowns until we were vastly outnumbered and pressured to leave. B.C. was so white then. So many places were forbidden to Indians, dogs, Blacks, Jews, and Chinamans." At one time Khahtsahlano could remember the names of the men that came, first a hundred, then a thousand; after that he stopped wanting to know who they were. "They were a strange lot—most of the men never brought women to this place. The Yaletown men were CPR men, drifters, and squatters on the north shore of the creek. They helped drain one third of it, so that the railroad—the CPR—could build a station, but they didn't bring women," he said as he stared longingly across the inlet at his beloved Snaug.

The students lean on their desks, barely awake. Almost half of them are First Nations. I call myself to attention: I have totally lost my professional distance from the subject; my discipline, my pretension to objectivity writhes on the floor in front of me and I realize we are not the same people any more. I am not in a longhouse. I am not a speaker. I am a TA in a western institution. Suddenly the fluorescent lights offend, the dry perfect room temperature insults, and the very space mocks. A wave of pain passes through me, and I nearly lunge forward fighting it. Get a grip. This is what you wanted. Get a grip. This is what you slogged through tons of insulting documents for: Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Melville . . . alternatives to solve the Indian problem, assassination, enslavement . . . disease, integration, boarding school, removal . . . I am staggering under my own weight. My eyes bulge, my muscles pulse, my saliva trickles out the side of my mouth. I am not like Khahrsahlano. I am not like Ta'ah. I was brought up in the same tradition of change, of love of transformation, of appreciation for what is new, but I was not there when Snaug was a garden. Now it is a series of bridge ramparts, an emptied False Creek, emptied of Squamish people and occupied by industry, apartment dwellings, the Granville Island tourist centre, and the Science centre. I was not there when Squamish men formed unions like white men, built mills like white men, worked like white men, and finally—unlike white men—were outlawed from full participation. I can't bear all this reality. I am soft like George but without whatever sweet thread of hope wove its way through his body to form some streeley fabric.

I awake surrounded by my students, their tears drip onto my cheeks. Oh my Gawd, they love me.

"It's OK, I just fainted."

"You were saying you were not like Khahrsahlano, like Ta'ah. Who are they?" The room opens up; the walls stop threatening. I know how Moses must have felt when he watched the sea part, the relief palpable, measurable, sweet, and welcome.

"That's just it. I thought I knew who I was. I know the dates. I know the events, but I don't know who they were, and I can't know who I am

without knowing who they were, and I can't say goodbye to Snaug and I need to say goodbye. Oh Gawd, help me."

"Well, I am not real sure that clears things up," Terese responds, her blond hair hanging close to my face. Some of the students look like they want to laugh: a couple of First Nations students go ahead and chuckle.

"Snaug is a village we just forfeited any claim to, and I must say goodbye."

"Doesn't that require some sort of ceremony?" Hilda asks. She is Nu'chalnuh, and although they are a different nation from mine, the ceremonial requirements are close.

"Yes," I answer.

"This is a cultural class—shouldn't we go with you?"

They lift me so tenderly I feel like a saint. This is the beginning of something. I need to know what is ending so that I can appreciate and identify with the beginning. Their apathetic stares have been replaced by a deep concern. Their apathy must have been a mask, a mask of professionalism, a mask covering fear, a mask to hide whatever dangers lurk in learning about the horrors of colonialism. The students must face themselves. I am their teacher. The goal of every adult among us is to face ourselves—our greatest enemy. I am responsible as their teacher to help them do that, but I am ill equipped. Still, Hilda is right. This is a cultural class and they ought to be there when I say goodbye. In some incomprehensible way it feels as though their presence would somehow ease the forfeiture and make it right.

I reconjure the stretch of trees to the west and south of Snaug for the class, the wind whispering songs of future to the residents. The Oblares arrived singing Gregorian chants of false promise. The millwrights arrived singing chants of profit and we bit, hook, line, and sinker. How could we anticipate that we would be excluded if our success exceeded the success of the white man? How could we know that they came homeless, poor, unsafe, and unprotected? Yaletowners accepted their designation as "squatters." This struck the Squamish at first as incredible. Chief George had no way of understanding squatting. It took some time



for the younger men like Khahtshlahno to explain to Chief George the concept of “ownership” of the white man, the laws governing ownership, the business of property. Sometimes he resorted to English because the language did not suffice. “B.C. is Indian land, but the government regarded Snaug citizens as squatters until a reserve was established.” Andy Paul explained the law, its hypocrisy, and its strangeness to old Chief George. “Not all white man were granted land and not all were granted the same amounts. But those who did purchase or receive land grants were white. The minimum land grant to white men during pre-emption was three hundred acres; for us, it was a maximum of ten acres per family.”

“What has this got to do with Snaug and, more important, with this class?” someone asks. I have been speaking aloud.

“There is so much more to history than meets the eye. We need to know what happened, and what happened has nothing to do with the dates, the events, and the gentlemen involved, it has to do with impact.” A sole student, eyes lifted slightly skyward, lips pursed innocent and inviting, strokes my arm.

They all pull their seats forward. “We need to finish this story.” They nod, as if for the first time they seem to know what’s going on. Even the white students nod, affirming that they too understand.

As I get ready to head for the ferry terminal, it dawns on me that no one in this country has to deal with ancestry in quite the way we must. The new immigrants of today come from independent countries, some wealthy, some poor, but all but a few have risen from under the yoke of colonialism. They have nations as origins. Their home countries belong to the United Nations or NATO or other such international organizations. We do not, and this court case indicates we never will. The United Nations is debating an “Indigenous right to self-government” declaration, but Indigenous people will never be able to acquire the place other nations hold. Canadians do not have to face that they are still classically colonized, that because settlement is a *fait accompli*, we can only negotiate the best real estate deal possible. Indigenous people must face this, while the eyes of our ancestors, who fought against colonial conquest and lost, glare down upon us.

“This is an immigrant nation,” Prime Minister Chrétien said after the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York were felled. “We will continue to be an immigrant nation.” How do we deal with this, the non-immigrants who for more than a century were rendered foreigners, prohibited from participation? The money for Snaug will be put in trust. To access it, we must submit a plan of how we intend to spend it. The Squamish Nation gets to pick the trustees but, like our ancestors, we must have trustees independent of the nation. Our money is still one step removed from our control.

This story is somehow connected to another story, more important than the one going on now. Surrender or dig up the hatchet. The Squamish Nation has chosen surrender. Which way will my journey take me? Do I dare remember Snaug as a Squamish, Musqueam, Ts’elil Waruth supermarket? Do I dare desire the restoration of the grand trees to the left and in the rear of Snaug? Do I dare say goodbye?

The ferry lunges from the berth. Students surround me. We are on a mission. We travel to Snaug, False Creek, and Vancouver to say goodbye. In one sense I have no choice; in another, I chose the people who made the deal. In our own cultural sensibility there is no choice. There are fifteen thousand non-Indigenous people living at Snaug, and we have never granted ourselves the right to remove people from their homes. We must say goodbye.

In this goodbye we will remember Snaug before the draining of False Creek. We will honour the dead: the stanchions of fir, spruce, and cedar and the gardens of Snaug. We will dream of the new False Creek, the dry lands, the new parks, and the acres of grass and houses. We will accept what Granville Island has become and honour Patry Rivard, the First Nations woman who was the first to forge a successful business in the heart of it. We will struggle to appreciate the little ferries that cross the creek. We will salute Chief George—Chipkaym—and Khahtshlahnogh, who embraced the vision of this burgeoning new nation. I will pray for my personal inability to fully commit to that vision.

The wind catches the tobacco as it floats to the water, lifts it, and as we watch it float, a lone Chinese woman crosses in front and smiles.

I smile too. Li Ka Shing, a multibillionaire, rose as the owner and developer of False Creek. He is Chinese, and he didn't live here when he bought it. I don't know if he lives here now, but for whatever reason I love the sound of his name: "Everything begins with song," Ta'ah says. His name is a song. It rolls off the tongue, sweetens the palate before the sound hits the air. It is such an irony that the first "non-citizen immigrant residents" should now possess the power to determine the destiny of our beloved Snaug. I know it shouldn't, but somehow it makes me happy, like knowing that Black Indians now people the Long Island Reservation in New York State.

The Chinese were subjected to a head tax for decades. Until sixty years ago they were banned from living outside Chinatown, though I met Garrick Chui's mother, who grew up at the Musqueam Reserve. Their economic activity was restricted to laundry businesses and tea houses. Once white men burned Chinatown to the ground. For decades Chinese men could not bring their families from China to Canada. Periodic riots in the previous century killed some of them and terrorized all of them. Underneath some parts of Chinatown they built underground tunnels to hide in as protection against marauding white citizens, who were never punished for killing Chinese. Like the Squamish, they endured quietly until assuming citizenship in 1948. For one of them to become the owner of this choice piece of real estate is sweet irony. "It was sold for a song by Premier Vander Zalm," the court records read. That too is a piece of painful, yet poetic, justice. I want to attend the Chinese parade, celebrate Chinese New Year, not for Li Ka Shing but because one of life's ironies has given me hope. Five thousand miles from here, a group of Mi'kmaq bought land in Newfoundland and gained reservation rights. Another irony: They thought they had killed them all, and 350 years later, there they were, purchasing the land and setting up a reservation. There is hope in irony.

I am not through with Canada. I am not a partner in its construction, but neither am I its enemy. Canada has opened the door. Indigenous people are no longer "immigrants" to be disenfranchised, forbidden,

prohibited, outlawed, or precluded from the protective laws of this country. But we are a long way from being participants. I am not eager to be a part of an environmentally offensive society that can preach "Thou shalt not kill" and then make war on people, plants, and animals to protect and advance financial gain. The hypocrisy marring Canada's behaviour toward us is still evident, but it struggles for maturity, and while it struggles for maturity I accord myself a place. This place is still at the bottom, as the last people to be afforded a place at the banquet table where the guests have been partaking for over five hundred years; but still there it is, the chair empty and hoping I will feel inclined to sit in it. The invitation is fraught with difficulties. Although today I must say goodbye, tomorrow I may just buy one of the townhouses slated for completion in 2010. Today I am entitled to dream. Khahtsahlano dreamed of being buried at Snaug. I dream of living there.

We move to the unfinished longhouse at the centre of Granville Island, a ragged group of students and their teacher. I break into song: Chief Dan George's prayer song. "Goodbye, Snaug," I boom out in as big a voice as I can muster. The passing crowd jerks to a split-second halt, gives us a bewildered glance, frowns, sidesteps us, and then moves on. The students laugh.

"Indians really will laugh at anything," I say as the tears stream across my face. The sun shines bright and turns the sky camas blue as we drift toward the Co-op restaurant to eat.