

Madeline Kerr

Finding Cris

A Short Story

Her raven black hair tangles in the wind, in her jacket. The city is alive, pulsing with electricity as commuters push their way through the busy Toronto streets. The excitement of the holiday season has set itself in the city's heart. Ads for hanukkah toys, Swedish Christmas songs playing somewhere in the distance and Dvali lights draped over the wildlife on skyscrapers add to festivities. Above her there are tall, sleek skyscrapers, covered in lush green plant life bustling with commutes using the city's relatively new sky walk ways. The quote "By dint of building well, you get to be a good architect" by Aristotle was a simple quote that the city had followed nicely.

Her legs scissor as she weaves herself through the bustle of commuters. The city's smell of smog and fast food mornings engulf the air around her as she steps a heeled boot of the sidewalk, only to swerve her way around some man to make a left in her hurried direction. The crowd feels fluid, moving this way and that almost like the brilliant lake they lived next to. Each person, each particle in the fluid of commuters, city goes, filled with their own magnetic energy but also the mass of their burdens. But ultimately cohesive forces bind everyone on that walkway together, forces maybe greater than anyone would ever understand. People, nature, attraction, silly little things.

She starts up one of the buildings, one with lush green ferns, dusted with snow. Up the elevator packed with people she can see the beautiful streets of Toronto. Well, not really streets anymore. Where roads once belonged to gas and diesel cars, there are now lush flower beds, extending along the paths that are a beautiful symbol of regrowth. Hovering and commuting over the once streets and boulevards are *Edisons*, or electric drones that can carry about 20 people. No one owns their own car, it's pointless and wasteless. Or that's what she's been told about the *Edisons*. The elevator dings and she weaves her way around scenic Miyawaki forests, rich with native plants that bring the office space to life. The office space is filled with excitement as today is the last day before the holiday break.

The woman enters a small office space and sets her jacket and self warming gloves aside. Crista, or Cris as everyone calls her, has had a privileged life, she will not deny that. Her parents, always supporting her, giving her everything, whether it was vacations on airships, or supporting her through University. As Cris looks around her office, which consists of one wooden desk in which she now sits at, a filing cabinet and many plants to keep up to date with the building green air policy, she feels relief that at least she's made it here. It's a homely, nice office which has a sense of familiarity which comes with having worked as one of the lead planners for this architectural advancement firm, *Foster* for almost 5 months. The company was started in order to pursue greener and more eco-focused city planning and design. It even has all those cringy "The green future is Foster" videos with the inspiring voiceover and whatnot. The whole nine yards of technological advancement and Cris is right in the middle. This company had pioneered green tech for the city, completely revamping outdated pollution contributors.

The unique thing about their own city was the lake, how they could use the winds and water of the lake to create green energy. Even Foster's material plant was run all by hydro energy, harnessed from one of the city's powerful hydro turbines.

Probably her favourite project, though, was one that took her to the coast of Florida, making energy efficient buildings that could self-sustain during a natural disaster. She may still dream about that project in her grave.

The day continues on with wrap-up for endless projects in preparation for the Holidays, a call comes in, which Cris taps on her ear bud to receive.

The scratchy tone of the phone lines indicate the call is from outside an urban area, somewhere with less exact networking that a modernised city would have. As Cris is about to hang up, mildly frustrated with the disruption, a voice, unfamiliar and low, speaks through her ear bud.

"Crista Cavy?" The woman's voice is unsure, breaking ever so slightly on the vowel of her last name.

"This is her," Cris responds, now also unsure of the caller's intentions, as she obviously knows more about Cris than Cris knows about her.

"This is Morgan, calling from the Six Nations Inpatient Care centre...Kateri Irving has you on her list of family contacts-"

"Ya, I think you have the wrong..." Cris sits frozen. People say you can feel life-altering things coming, but if you were to ask Cris, it's whiplash. Right in the face, so obvious you feel stupid, but it's right there looming over you now. Cris swallows and with shaky hands and reopens her laptop. Whether or not she knew this would eventually happen, she is heading to Six Nations, to face maybe the most self confirming experience of her existence.

Winter is underrated, Cris thinks as the electro-train wizzes by the lush landscapes just outside Mississauga. The lush green landscape, although now green this time of year, is submerged in this beautiful powder. Snowflakes drift down slowly, perfect enough to be a picture. The lady with the food trolley wanders by offering jelly nutrition squares, with different flavours and energy benefits, but Cris is too nervous to eat. Though the pretty eco packaging reminds her of her fun trips to modern Singapore.

A sign wizzes by outside the window, Cris looks at it just long enough for her to read '*You are now on the land belonging to the Six Nations*'.

To be frank, Cris felt completely disconnected with her roots. She could feel it when she looked at the land, the lake, everything drew her to the earth. She understood the need to protect it, she could stare at the sun, the stars, and feel the rawness of the connection, the entire world calling out to her. But boundaries held her back.

Instead of helping the physical land, she worked with a modernising company, using what she could of herself to better the environment, it was the least she owed it. When the call came in about a relative from the care centre she knew that maybe this could create something in her.

Sure, everybody is accepting but there's a certain wall, a boundary people put up against you if you look different no matter what. What made it worse is that she couldn't even understand the things people saw and judged her as. Her mom and dad, *adoptive mom and dad*, were kind brilliant souls that she would always love and appreciate but even they could sense that difference. Sometimes it was small but sometimes it bubbled, becoming so apparent it hurt.

When elders would teach in her elementary years, heads would turn towards her, as everyone made what they thought was obviously a big connection. And little Crista would sit there like an imposter embarrassed of her lack of knowledge on the subjects that her and her peers were being taught. And maybe that's why she had picked up that call earlier in her day. With more research Six nations was created two small towns and a reserve (which she had learned about in class years ago, land set aside for indigenous that ultimately segregated them from others).

As she steps off the train Cris takes in the view. The town is small yet still modernised, filled with bright colored buildings, with snow topped roves. The *Edisons* are a bit older, maybe ten years, but Cris gets in one relatively new, next to a blonde haired woman with a small child. The pixelated screen says the hospital is seven stops away. *Seven. Six.* Butterflies emerge in her stomach.

At the hospital, heart racing, she is directed to room 204 by an automated front desk bot.

On entering the room Cris' heart sinks. Death has a certain aura about it, looming over a room encroaching on beautiful life, its presence so obvious it's physically painful. The woman in the bed is sick. It's plastered all over her face. With sullen cheeks and a colourless face, Cris can barely stand to look at her. But this woman is very much alive breathing in shaky breaths each minute. Cris suddenly feels very exposed standing in front of this absolute stranger.

"Nya:wëh sgë:nö" the woman says, with more force and projection than you would expect from someone who's clearly dying. The girl, sitting at her side, who Cris barely noticed after studying the women in the bed, stands up to help the fragile women rise.

"I'm Laura," the woman outside the bed mutters as she continues to help the woman adjust herself. "And this is my mother Kateri."

Laura has shoulder length black hair, and sharp features, too piercing to be a picture of traditional beauty, but there's something about her so enticing and raw, you find yourself drawn to her.

Cris feels there is an explanation of her presence in order, so she speaks.

"I got a call from this hospital this morning, I'm your emergency contact. I didn't even think you knew me." Cris feels like she needs to add more, but stops there.

"You know you're adopted," Kateri says, as a statement, not a question. There is something so captivating in the way she speaks, the way she is able to command a room even in her feeble state.

"Yes, but obviously you know I exist considering you have me as an emergency contact," Cris says, slightly raising her voice. "So I'm what to you?" Cris asks, feeling a weight off her shoulders as the words leave her mouth.

“You're lost,” Kateri states, her eyes burning into Cris’. “But you’re my daughter.”

Cris can feel her breath simply evaporate, and she stands there completely still, feeling so...empty.

And so they walk. Even in Kateri’s state they walk. And Cris learns. About Kateri, about her life here. And through Laura she learns about the life she could’ve had. If she was born a bit later, when Kateri was older and a bit more well off. As they walk throughout the town to the lake Cris feels a sense of community rich with connection and contribution.

As they draw nearer to the water, the Grand River, Laura explains, is extremely important to her family, not only because of its hydro dam in which the town gets most of their electricity. As they approach the treeline she can feel her eyes prick with tears. The landscape is vast, with a beautiful horizon of the frozen river stretching unobstructed for kilometres. As Kateri looks out she lets out a shiver, which judging by the layers of jackets she has on is not from the cold. Maybe this view will always be special, no matter how many times it has engulfed you. Kateri decides to walk a bit more down the shoreline, so Cris and Laura are left to converse. Somehow they get on the topic of the climate crisis.

“Your tech firms think you're so amazing saving the planet and all, but we’d been calling for change for years. Your own great grandmother was a water warrior. You had the blueprint to reverse the climate crisis the industrial world put us in, where do you think they got it from?” Cris doesn’t enjoy the use of *you* as if she had been the white leaders, only caring about financial gain. But it’s true, she was so industrial focused.

“But we’ve grown. And we’ll grow together.” Laura brings Cris in for an embrace, and Kateri joins the hug, three Seneca women connecting at the most primary connection in the world, water. Life really is a beautiful malicious cycle.