NOT MY GIRL

Christy Jordan-Fenton & Margaret Pokiak-Fenton
Art by Gabrielle Grimard

Margaret with her parents, around 1937
It was as though the wings of one thousand birds soared in my heart, propelling me back to my family. I leapt over the side of the boat and ran toward my mother.
Her face remained as still as stone.

“Not my girl!” she called in what little English she knew. The birds in my heart fell from their sky.
I caught a glint of my own reflection in my mother’s hard eyes. The long braids she had once lovingly plaited had been cut away, along with everything she remembered of me.

I had grown tall and very thin from two years of hard chores and poor meals at the outsiders’ school.
When I left for Aklavik, I was just eight. Now I was ten. In that time I had learned how to add numbers and how to read books. I had perfect table manners and knew when to say my prayers. I could speak English and French. But I no longer knew the words in my own language to tell my mother that I was her girl.

“Not my girl!” rang out again like the slap of a ruler on a desk.
Dedications

For my three little Inspirations. And for Marty Simon and Debra Grant, two beautiful souls who have each created safe places for healing—Christy

For all the children still trying to find their way home. May you each discover a way to step out from the darkness behind you into the light ahead—Margaret

For my children—Gabrielle

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© 2014 Gabrielle Grimard (illustrations)

Edited by Debbie Rogosin
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