Bone Dance Short Guide

Bone Dance by Martha Brooks

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Overview

Bone Dance (1997) tells the story of two Manitoba teens struggling with grief and loss, and trying to come to terms with the passage from youth to adulthood. Both seventeen years old, Alexandra Sinclair and Lonny LaFreniere meet when Alex comes to inspect the land she has inherited from a father she never knew. Lonny, possessed of a guilty secret, fears the land and fears the spirit visions he has had since his mother's death. He holds himself aloof from intimacy. Alex is on her own quest; she needs to know what this land and this place can tell her about her father. Both Lonny and Alex need to resolve their mixed feelings before they can know themselves and move on with their lives. The novel gently traces how the separate journeys gradually come together as Alex and Lonny help one another to find healing and love. At the heart of the book is a quiet insistence on the connectedness of land, spirit, and body.

The novel won both the Canadian Library Association Young Adult Book Award and the Ruth Schwartz Award, and was selected as an ALA Best Book for Young Adults.

About the Author

In an Emergency Librarian interview, Martha Brooks claims that "isolation gives you an artist's eye and makes you an observer because you feel as though you're really on the outside." She knows of what she speaks. Although she was born in the city of Winnipeg, Manitoba, in 1944, Brooks lived the first seventeen years of her life on the grounds of the Manitoba Sanitarium for tuberculosis patients at Ninette, where her father, Alfred Leroy Paine, was the superintendent and chief surgeon. Her mother, Theodis (maiden name Marteinsson), also worked at the sanitarium, as a nurse. There were few other children in Ninette, and Brooks's older sister left the community for university when Brooks was nine. Brooks herself was ill for long periods as a child, but she found great comfort and pleasure in books, such as The Wind in the Willows, the Pooh books, and The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. This early solitude, as well as the exposure to the fight against disease and death, was formative; this is where Brooks developed her artistic vision and her understanding of the importance of hope.

Brooks did not always know she would be a writer; although she knew she was an artist, she did not know her medium. As a child she enjoyed dance, studying ballet with the Russian wife of one of the sanitarium doctors. She also studied voice, and today she continues to pursue a second career as a jazz singer. She also wrote poetry in high school. After completing her secondary studies at St. Michael's Academy in Brandon, Manitoba, Brooks moved to Winnipeg and took up a number of jobs: modeling, acting in summer stock, and working as a secretary. In 1967 she married Brian Brooks, the owner and operator of an advertising and public relations firm. After the birth of her daughter, Kirsten, Brooks began to take up writing. She initially worked on a fantasy novel, but her heart was with literary realism, and she was drawn to the form of the short story.

Her first published work, A Hill for Looking (1982), is a series of autobiographical stories about 10-yearold Martha Paine, living on the grounds of the Manitoba tuberculosis sanatorium in the 1950s. However, it was in her second published work, Paradise Cafe and Other Stories (1988), that Brooks found her subject and her audience. She struggled initially to find a publisher: adult publishers would say the stories had a "teenage voice," and young adult publishers worried that the stories would appeal more to adults. Once published, however, the collection received many honors and broke ground for other collections of young adult short fiction. Brooks finds her inspiration in her own reading as well as in her daughter; she notes that it is no accident that as her daughter has aged, so have her protagonists. She continues her connection with young people by teaching and mentoring young writers. In Quill and Quire, Brooks comments that writing about 17-year-olds is particularly interesting because it allows her to explore the often difficult space between young adulthood and adulthood.

Bone Dance comes from a different place than Brooks' previous fiction. Before beginning to write it, Brooks went on a four-day retreat to an isolated cabin owned by her family. She fasted and prayed during this period, looking for a vision for herself and for the book. Initially, she had conceived of the book as an exploration of initiation rites,

inspired by Amerindian cultures. The process became her own vision quest, and the resulting novel is imbued with spirituality and a sense of the sacredness of the earth.

Brooks was inspired by the vision of Frank Fools Crow, a nephew of the great Sioux visionary Black Elk; he spoke of "becoming little hollow bones," a conduit for the light of the Creator. In seeking to achieve this state, Brooks has written a novel in which, as she notes in Children's Book News, she tries to give "something [back] to the native community, something precious that had been taken from them." In the Acknowledgments at the back of the book, Brooks honors "the spirits of the ancestors who guided [her] waking visions and nighttime dreams and never once gave up on this willing but frequently dense translator."

Setting

A work that blends realism and fantasy, Bone Dance uses the material world to ground explorations of the spirit world. It opens emphatically in the middle: "In the middle of the night, in the middle of [Alex's] eleventh-grade year, in the middle of Manitoba's coldest winter for a century. . . ."The middle is a good place from which to make connections. Both Lonny and Alex have visions. Alex's stem from the death of her beloved Cree grandfather. Lonny is visited by his mother's spirit. Brooks refuses to exaggerate or embellish the spiritual element of the visions: Alex has one vision while standing in the middle of Harmony Drugs, holding a box of tampons and a bottle of hair spray. Her grandfather is wearing his Tansi lumber cap along with his caribou skins. This mixing of the material and the spirit worlds lends credence to the book's spirituality.

The novel initially moves back and forth between Alex's life in Winnipeg and Lonny's in Lacs des Placottes. Eventually, though, the land inherited by Alex becomes the physical and spiritual center of the novel: Lonny's secret began here, and this place is Alex's only connection to her father. At least one reviewer has complained about the lack of physical description in the novel, but this criticism seems to miss the point.

The most important aspect of the LaFreniere land is its connection to the spirit world, something that cannot be rendered in realistic detail. There is a native burial ground on the land, "old as time." Lonny's stepfather tells him that it is their responsibility to look after the land. Lonny is later visited by a vision of his dead mother, who tells him that "the land will wake up and tell [him] things." Other non- native writers have offended by attempting to write in detail of things they do not truly understand; Brooks respectfully maintains a distance.

This is not to say that the physicality of the land does not count. Alex must give herself over to the land to become close to her father. She comments on how time stretches at the cabin, and she learns to differ between clock-measured time and "wind time. Leaf time. Grass time. Lake time. Pulse-of-the-earth time." In one of the most powerful moments of connection, Alex finds her father in her sensual response to the land: as sometimes happens when one is utterly alone in nature, her hearing becomes preternaturally attuned to the world around her: the "hum of crickets, the drumming beak of the woodpecker, the sucking sound of heels in mossy mud. Sound of lapping waves on stone, sound of beetle legs on crispy leaf, sound of blood pulsing in ear, sound past silence...." This is an impressionistic landscape, not a naturalistic one.

Yet along with her sensitivity to the spiritual aspect of the land, Brooks also possesses a keen eye and ear for rural life.

Lonny and his stepfather eat venison soup, a staple from their freezer, which Thomas LaFreniere keeps stocked during hunting season. Lonny and his friends drive along miles of dusty roads, just to be doing something, or to be alone. The teens have drinking parties and gather at the town's one cafe for burgers and coffee; they hang out at the gas station. Neighbors follow a code of country propriety. They look after one

another; when Alex arrives, Thomas LaFreniere helps her get settled and makes Lonny get her some safe drinking water. Neighbors also respect one another's privacy; no one wants to hurt Lonny's stepfather by talking directly about the sale of his land. When Lonny's mother loses her baby, their neighbor Deena offers tactful sympathy.

Similarly, Alex's world in Winnipeg is realistically if briefly sketched. Alex and her friends reflect the cultural mix of Winnipeg's young people: First Nations, Metis, and non-natives. As they prepare for graduation, the teens have parties, worry about where they are going in their lives, and share confidences. Brooks' young people are real. They face their futures in this small city with uncertainty and hope. The dialogue and depiction of the teens' experience is true to life. Alex and her best friend fight and then make up over food: a pizza, cola, and a bag of chocolate creams. The girls experiment with Gypsy Gold nail polish and navigate emotional dramas. At their graduation dance, one of her friends says to Alex, "It's this night. I don't know. I felt so good. And now I feel like crap. Know what I mean? Nothing feels real." These young people are at a threshold, unwilling and unable to move backward, but unsure of the way forward.

Social Sensitivity

Brooks' characters never lose their dignity as they move through a difficult period during their transition from young adulthood to adulthood. While there are humorous moments (a drunken Peter announcing that Serena is a goddess and he a sad Adonis), it is never at the expense of young characters. There is great compassion here; as Brooks notes in Quill and Quire, "you're really up against it at that age." She feels it is very important to offer hope in literature for young adults.

The process of building identity is a crucial one for the young adult. Here, Brooks shows that we are connected to our heritage and to our environment, yet we also have a responsibility to learn how to tell our own stories, and to reach out to others.

Many of Alex's and Lonny's concerns transcend cultural difference: the process of maturation, the desire to know oneself and one's heritage, and the ability to work through grief. Yet the characters' experiences take place within a culturally specific framework, which she handles with great sensitivity.

Another of the real strengths of this novel is its frank treatment of contemporary life.

Some might feel that this makes the book unsuitable for some readers, but the book is very realistic in its portrayal of families and young adults. Alex's mother is abandoned by her husband. We know nothing about Lonny's biological father. Serena's dad walks out on his family for the third time in two years. The majority of the families in this book are "nontraditional"; that is, they are single-parent and blended families. Some of them are also biracial. The young people neither live in idealized families, nor do they behave like ideal teens. They drink at parties, and in one instance, Lonny and his friends break into Earl McKay's cabin while it is deserted. Sometimes the young people have a hard time communicating with adults. Alex and her mother love one another deeply, but there are vast silences in their lives because of what they cannot tell one another.

Brooks is equally frank about sexuality.

After Alex first sees Peter Shingoose, dancing at a powwow, she becomes aware of her sexuality. Previously, she had been bored by boys who "stuck their tongues in [her] mouth, grabbed [her], played stupid mind games...." However, seeing Peter makes her want him to touch her. Readers will identify with Alex's thoughts on trading popularity with boys for independence, and with her difficulty in dealing with her body's messages. Lonny is already sexually active.

Brooks makes sure to mention condoms at one point, a reminder of safe sex. Yet there is a key lesson that Lonny learns about sex: without love and a feeling of respect for the other person, sex is empty. When he kisses Alex and sees her get "that" look, he wants to protect her. The novel addresses young adult sexuality with sympathy; there is no shame here, just an acknowledgment that young adults have sexual feelings, and a suggestion that these are best accompanied by a sense of responsibility and respect.

Literary Qualities

The structure of Bone Dance reflects its themes. It is nonlinear, shifting in point of view between Alex and Lonny, moving between the past and the present. The novel is separated into two balanced parts: "The Spirits" and "The Legacy." The first section moves between locations, in and out of time, to describe the haunting of Alex and Lonny by visions and ghosts. In the second section, Alex moves to her father's cabin and the two young people find themselves by coming to terms with themselves as products of their heritage.

Brooks makes extensive use of motifs to link characters and moments. In her efforts to respect the First Nations motifs, she does not provide a great deal of detail but she does honor the world view. One of her book's prominent motifs is the buffalo.

Alex's grandfather tells her she has buffalo hair. The buffalo is one of the Creator's greatest gifts to the First Nations people and is a figure of power. Alex's grandfather tells of how a buffalo vision-helped him deal with his grief over the loss of his wife.

He had to learn to appreciate the natural world around him again, to be grateful for the Creator's gifts. This is later a part of Alex's healing also, as she lives in her father's cabin, close to the land. Grandfather tells Alex that someone with buffalo medicine will come to her. When she meets Lonny, she recognizes that he is the one, even though she finds it hard to accept. As Lonny says, he is always bringing her gifts that are hard to give and harder to receive.

Alex has a vision of her grandfather blessing Lonny. After cleansing tears that come from his stepfather's forgiveness, Lonny himself has a buffalo vision. The buffalo represents strength and generosity. Both Alex and Lonny possess buffalo medicine.

Darkness and light are other key motifs.

In the opening of the novel, as he is dying, Alex's grandfather calls her to tell her he is afraid of the dark. This poignant moment, based on a real experience Brooks had with her mother, who struggled with Alzheimer's, resonates throughout the remainder of the book. Lonny's frightening visions, when he thinks he is being punished by the ancestors, are dark. Moments of fear and doubt occur usually at night. Correspondingly, moments of deepest connection occur during the day, often in bright sunlight. In a central vision, Grandfather and Old Man Raven urge Alex to let herself go, to fall into the dark that frightens her. She finds, instead, that she is safely held by lines, and that the deeper she goes, the more light there is. At the end of the novel, Lonny and Alex go up Medicine Bluff at night to scatter her father's ashes. There, in darkness and under the moonlight, they scatter Earl McKay's ashes on the burial ground, celebrating connectedness and life. Just as light can be swallowed by darkness, darkness can give way to light.

The visions are a significant element of the novel. In Alex's visions, her grandfather and Old Man Raven teach her to know her own strength. In one vision, Old Man Raven

offers her roasted fish; she declines, saying she does not like fish. He replies that it is her vision, and the fish can taste like whatever she likes. Alex's visions are contrasted with Lonny's dreams of his mother. Lonny's dreams are frightening; they make him think of the ghosts he saw as a child. When his mother does try to show him that his healing will come from the land, he cannot understand what she means. Other characters also have visions. A vision inspires Lonny's step-father to advertise in the personals column, which brings Lonny and his mother into his life. Alex's father has a vision which led to his buying the land and building the cabin. The visions reflect the philosophy of First Nations teaching, which is that everything happens for a purpose.

The visions teach by experience; just because things occur within a dream framework does not make the lessons any the less real.

Lonny's and Alex's experiences are carefully woven to show the parallels in their lives. When Alex is in Winnipeg, she tries but fails to connect with Peter Shingoose.

Lonny's friend Charlene tries to offer him the kind of comfort Alex offers Peter. After Lonny meets Joe Dakotah, a healer who runs a sweat lodge, and is made uncomfortable by Joe's power, the narrative switches to Alex, who dreams she is in a sweat lodge with her grandfather and Old Man Raven.

To further show the similarities, Joe Dakotah has a key chain tag etched with a buffalo head, the animal which was so symbolic in Alex's grandfather's life.

Narrative tension is maintained not only by the question of whether Alex and Lonny will find that which they seek, but also by the stresses of their evolving relationship.

Lonny did not mail Alex her father's last letter. He must decide when and how to give it to her. When Lonny confesses to Alex that he desecrated the burial mound, as they sit on Medicine Bluff, he has one of his most vivid ghost dreams. As he opens his eyes to see Alex, real and beautiful, he spontaneously decides it is time. Then Alex has to come to terms with her anger, at her father and at Lonny. Wearing her father's leather jacket, she sees the land through his eyes. The peace she finds on the land "saturated with her father's life" allows her to forgive.

Brooks' style is intensely lyrical. Alex's eyes, "chokecherry-colored," look through Lonny's soul. The sound of poplar leaves in the breeze is the clicking of "old women's tongues." Alex's grandfather keeps a rock to remind him of his connection to the past, to those who have walked the land before him. The dripping of a faucet becomes the beat of drums. The pale morning light spreads itself over the land "like pure and god-given honey." Lyric descriptions of everyday items and moments brings magic to them, making their connection to a spirit world more believable.

The title, Bone Dance, refers not only to the "little hollow bones," but to Alex's scattering of her father's ashes. As she scatters the ashes, she dances and howls like a wolf.

This is linked to the book's opening; as Alex's grandfather lies dying, Alex and her friends run howling through the snow. We have come full circle, from death to dancing. Both moments link loss with joy and human with nature.

Themes and Characters

Alex Sinclair and Lonny LaFreniere are quite different from one another: Alex is loving and open, whereas Lonny has built walls to keep others at a distance. Nonetheless, they both have to learn how to grieve, and what limits to set on grief. They also struggle with identity. Alex has grown up with her mother, aunt, and grandfather.

Her heritage on her mother's side is Dene and Cree. Her father, whom she barely remembers, is white. She has grown up her mother's daughter, curious yet afraid to know more about her father. Because her mother will not discuss him with her, Alex speculates about the reasons behind his abandonment, alternately blaming herself and believing there to be a terrible secret about her father. Lonny has his own terrible secret. He believes that he killed his mother, and her death haunts him. Left with his step-father, Lonny wonders where he belongs.

The main theme of both Alex's and Lonny's stories is connectedness. Brooks provides two epigraphs at the beginning of the novel. The first, from Chief Seattle's address to the President of the United States, states that "[h]umankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web we do to ourselves. All things are bound together.

All things connect. Whatever befalls the Earth befalls the children of the Earth." The second epigraph is from Sharon Butala's The Perfections of the Morning, her meditation on living in Nature, written out of her experience of leaving the city to live on a ranch in southwestern Saskatchewan. It points to that which transcends the material world: "In the purity of the morning, I see how much more there is to the world than meets the eye... ."The two quotations taken together speak to connections between past and present, between humans and the natural world, and between the material and the spiritual.

Alex encounters the spirit world through her grandfather. At the moment of his death, she is playing out in the snow with friends; her breath takes shape before her eyes and becomes a "spirit hand." Subsequently she has visions of her grandfather, who is sometimes accompanied by Old Man Raven. In the visions, she confronts her fears and learns that she has power and safety in her connections to others. Through her father's legacy, Alex learns that she is connected to the land, as well. In a final letter from her father, she discovers that he, too, had healing visions, and that in leaving, he had not rejected her. In appreciating these connections, Alex is able to reach out to Lonny.

Lonny initially rejects connectedness. He believes that his mother died because he and his friend Robert dug up bones from the burial ground on Medicine Bluff. Unable to share this with anyone, he has built high walls around himself. As one former girlfriend tells him, he takes without giving anything. When he is asked about his feelings, he denies having any. Unlike Alex, Lonny fears the visions of his mother, and the ghosts he believes haunt him, so he refuses to see that he is connected to the land. Lonny's isolation is broken only when he finally can tell his story: to Alex, to his family's good

friend Deena, and to his stepfather. In doing so he mends broken connections and makes new ones. As he learns, all it takes is moving "just one inch."

The visions that teach connectedness are manifestations of love: the love of Alex's grandfather, and the love of Alex's mother.

Love is another major theme in this novel: Alex learns that her father did indeed love her and Lonny recognizes the love that Deena and his step-father have for him.

Most importantly, though, Alex and Lonny come to love one another. Neither Alex nor Lonny makes impassioned speeches; rather, they tell each other their stories, and it is upon these stories that their love is built.

Stories are how we make sense of our experiences and our relationships. This storytelling creates a deeper intimacy than the sex Lonny has experienced with other girls.

This is not to say that there is no passion between Lonny and Alex: they are described as making contact "like lightning bugs."

However, there is tenderness, too. Lonny cares enough about Alex to halt their lovemaking so that they can talk and get emotionally close as well as physically close.

Brooks is careful not to suggest trite themes, such as "love heals all wounds." Instead, she shows us that we learn to love by learning who we are and how to share ourselves.

The novel moves according to natural rhythms. It opens in winter, with the death of Alex's grandfather, and ends in the summertime, with a celebration of life and death as Alex and Lonny scatter her father's ashes on the land that brought them together.

Everything is cyclical. Death is a part of life, and joy can follow sorrow. This is another important message in this book. Middles and thresholds make the connections between where we have been, where we stand, and where we are going. In an echo of the book's interest in relationships between generations, it is dedicated to Brooks' daughter and father.

Lonny and Alex are the two most fully realized characters in the novel. Nonetheless, there are several important secondary characters. Alex's grandfather is a significant guide. He is the father figure in her life, providing love, support, humor, and hope.

Many of Alex's stories are from her grandfather. The teachings presented in Alex's visions of her grandfather are relevant to the book's themes. Lonny's stepfather is another significant figure. His grieving for Lonny's mother provides a foil for Lonny's grieving. After Lonny finally talks with Thomas about his fears, Thomas offers Lonny the forgiveness he needs. Thomas tells Lonny he will be okay, and Lonny realizes that Thomas will also be okay. Thomas also provides a key link between Alex and her father, telling her stories about Earl McKay. Finally, Deena, the LaFrenieres' close friend and

owner of the local cafe, plays a major role in Lonny's recovery. She is that person every young adult needs: an adult who really listens.

Even the minor characters are drawn with vivid strokes. Peter Shingoose, the young man on whom Alex develops a crush, is much like Lonny: seeming to have everything, he is a little lost, not sure about his future. Alex's mother puts on perfume every morning, even to go to work in her home office, and hides her pain every time Alex gets a letter from her father. Alex's sharp-tongued Aunt Francine goes to WalMart to buy towels she does not need and worries about her niece. Robert Lang, who eternally hopes that Tammy Martel will sleep with him, has a dog named Dunderhead.

Topics for Discussion

1. How do the epigraphs from Chief Seattle and Sharon Butala influence your reading of the novel?

2. Both Alex and Lonny have lost a parent; compare how they deal with their grief.

3. Why is it that Alex and her mother cannot talk about her father? What impact does this have on Alex?

4. Discuss the relationship between Alex and Peter. Why, if they are attracted to one another, do they not go out together? What makes Peter go out with Serena?

5. Lonny knows his mother died of a weak heart, yet he still feels responsible for her death. What makes him feel this way? Is her ghost punishing him?

6. Discuss how Alex's visions develop.

What is her grandfather's spirit trying to teach her?

7. Compare the father figures in the novel: Earl McKay, Alex's grandfather, and Lonny's step-father. What do these men's relationships with Alex and Lonny tell us about fatherhood?

8. Lonny watches over Alex during her first night at the cabin. Later, even though he is attracted to her, he does not want to rush into having sex with her. Why does he feel protective towards her?

9. Why does Joe Dakotah make Lonny uncomfortable?

10. Focus on the times when Alex tries to understand her father. How do his personal possessions help? How does being outside in nature help? What does his final letter teach her?

11. In the second-to-last chapter, Alex tells Lonny a story about a sparrow she rescued one winter. Why does she tell this story at this time? What lesson does the story teach?

12. What is the buffalo magic Alex's grandfather describes? Find as many references to buffaloes as you can. How are they connected? What is their purpose in the story?

13. Discuss Brooks' use of visions, dreams, and memories. How do they enrich the story? Would the novel be better with a linear narrative, from beginning to end?

How would Alex's and Lonny's stories interweave with a linear structure?

14. How are the titles of the two sections of the book appropriate?

Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. His friend Charlene asks Lonny if he uses the medicine wheel. What is the medicine wheel? How does it apply to different elements of this novel?

2. Joe Dakotah runs a sweat lodge. How is it used in healing? What might Lonny experience in a sweat lodge?

3. What are the stages of grieving? How do Alex's and Lonny's behavior correspond with these stages? Are their reactions to their losses realistic?

4. Who was Chief Seattle? Find and read his whole speech. How is it applicable to themes in Bone Dance?

5. Explore changing definitions of the family. How many different kinds of families are there in Bone Dance? What are their strengths? Their weaknesses? What do they teach us about the idea of family?

6. Is it appropriate for a non-native person to write about native spirituality?

There is a great deal of literature on this debate. Find two opposing discussions on this topic and apply them to Bone Dance.

7. Medicine Bluff is a sacred site. Why is it so important to respect and protect the burial ground? What do First Nations people think about archeology and digging up their past?

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"Brooks, Martha." In Contemporary Authors, vol. 136. Detroit: Gale, 1992. A brief biographical article, somewhat dated now, whose awards section offers a detailed description of the writing of Bone Dance.

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Jenkinson, Dave. "Portraits: Martha Brooks, Award-Winning YA Author." Emergency Librarian 22.1 (1994): 61-64. A lengthy interview with excellent autobiographical material.

Steffler, Margaret. "Dancing with the Past."

Canadian Children's Literature (summer, 1999): 109-110. Mixed review of Bone Dance: finds descriptions of spirits lacking in detail, but admires portrayal of relationships.

Taxel, Joel, Dennis Sumara, and Margaret Finders. "Books for Adolescents: Love and Relationships." Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy 42.7 (1999): 592. Review of three novels, including Bone Dance.

Sumara offers a sophisticated discussion of the themes of love and identity formation.

Related Titles/Adaptations

Bone Dance's spirituality is unique among Brooks' works, but her sympathetic and sensitive portrayal of young adults is not.

Readers interested in the themes of grief and loss might enjoy the stories in Paradise Cafe and Other Stories. Similarly, the stories in Traveling On into the Light and Other Stories address moments of connection as powerful as those in Bone Dance. Her most recent novel, Being with Henry, depicts the relationship between Laker Wyatt, kicked out of his house for fighting with his stepfather, and Henry Olsen, an eighty-threeyear-old man who has trouble getting along with his own family. Once again Brooks deals with themes of trust, cross-generational relationships, and love.

Readers who enjoyed the treatment of nature in Bone Dance might enjoy Terri Windling's fantasy novel, The Wood Wife.

Poet Maggie Black moves to the American southwest, where she becomes caught up in a mysterious legacy, finds unexpected love, and learns how to connect with the land. Another novel which blends themes of love and connection with the environment is Welwyn Wilton Katz's Whale Singer.

There are also some good books by First Nations writers about going home, and about finding one's place with nature and in a community. Thomas King (Cherokee) treats these themes humorously in Medicine River. Beth Brant (Mohawk) has a short story collection called Food and Spirits.

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