



CHAPTER SAMPLER



Two Tricksters

Find Friendship



Johnny Aitken
and Jess Willows

illustrated by Alyssa Koski

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Published in Canada and the United States in 2025 by Orca Book Publishers.
orcabook.com

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Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: Two tricksters find friendship / Johnny Aitken and

Jess Willows ; illustrated by Alyssa Koski.

Names: Aitken, Johnny, author. | Willows, Jess, author. | Koski, Alyssa, illustrator.

Series: Orca echoes.

Description: Series statement: Orca echoes

Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 20240388127 | Canadiana (ebook) 20240388135 |
ISBN 9781459839281 (softcover) | ISBN 9781459839298 (PDF) | ISBN 9781459839304 (EPUB)

Subjects: LCGFT: Novels.

Classification: LCC PS8601.I84 T86 2025 | DDC jC813/.6—dc23

Library of Congress Control Number: 2024938991

Summary: After a young girl moves to a small island community, she and a local Indigenous boy form a strong friendship over the summer. When they begin the fourth grade together, the two find adventure while navigating the challenges and prejudices of their lives.

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Orca Book Publishers gratefully acknowledges the support for its publishing programs provided by the following agencies: the Government of Canada, the Canada Council for the Arts and the Province of British Columbia through the BC Arts Council and the Book Publishing Tax Credit.

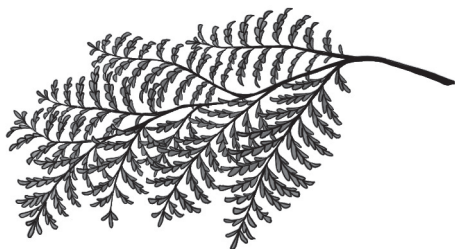
Cover and interior artwork by Alyssa Koski.

Design by Dahlia Yuen.

Printed and bound in Canada.

For our husbands and our dear friend AJ





CHAPTER ONE

Jessie can see Johnny walking into town from the reserve. She knows his focused walk and that he is always on time. She is waiting in front of her house and smiles as he runs to meet her. When they are side by side, they walk together on the quiet roadside, cedar and fir trees towering over them. They walk in silence, listening to the sounds of their feet on the gravel and the birds singing, feeling the warmth of the sun, enjoying just being together.



“Well, this is it!” says Jessie brightly, breaking the silence. “The last day of the summer break before fourth grade starts. So what do you want to do today, Johnny?”

Johnny does not respond right away. He is thinking, and he looks a little sad.

Jessie notices that he seems a little distracted. She knows he will eventually tell her what’s on his mind.

After a bit he replies, “Let’s just walk for a while longer and then decide.”

They walk past a few houses with big trees in the yards and lots of space between the driveways. The two friends continue walking into town, passing the gas station and the community library. Jessie still giggles about the term *town*, as she is used to the word referring to the kind of big city she lived in before she

moved here. This “town” has a few stores, the bakery and a post office. That’s it! It’s a small community on a small island.

They both live on the island. Jessie lives just outside of town, and Johnny lives on the reserve.

After a while Johnny says, “Let’s hike up the hill and then go down to Emma’s Beach to look for treasures!” There’s only one hill to hike up, so Jessie knows exactly what he means.

“That’s a great idea!” she says. “Should we pack a lunch? Oh, I know—let’s just buy a couple of sandwiches from the bakery.”

“I have no money.”

“No problem. We’ll just use Dad’s account,” Jessie says.

Johnny looks at her, grateful for the offer. But she does this all the time.

“Are you sure you won’t get in trouble?” he asks.

“Nah,” she says.

The sweet smell of cinnamon buns reaches them even before they can see the bakery. Sitting outside the bakery is Jim, a retired fire chief who is well known to almost everyone in town, including Johnny and Jessie. He is often at the bakery, sitting outside in his brightly colored golf shirts and socks and sandals, telling jokes and teasing anyone who walks by.

“I’ll just wait out here,” Johnny says.

Jessie nods as she opens the squeaky screen door and walks inside, the door snapping shut behind her.

“Hey, Johnny, you going back to school?” Jim asks. Johnny nods. “Jessie’s buying you lunch again, eh?”

Johnny looks down, puts his hands in his pockets and doesn't say anything.

Jessie glances outside and notices that Johnny looks uncomfortable. She puts the sandwiches in her backpack and goes outside. "Let's get going, Johnny! See ya, Jim!" she says.

Jim nods to them, and the two friends head on down the road.

"What was Jim asking?" Jessie asks.

"Doesn't matter. It's not important," Johnny says. "Let's just go."

As they walk on toward the hill, a few people they know drive by and wave hello.

Johnny spies his auntie Joy's rusty little blue truck clunking and sputtering down the road, dodging potholes. Johnny can barely see his grannie Annie in the passenger seat.

“Quick, let’s hide!” Johnny says with a smile. Jessie laughs as they both dive into a patch of dusty salal and duck down. They disappear into the dense green leaves, easily hidden from view.



Auntie Joy slams on the truck's squeaky brakes, dust flies, and she gets out of the truck. She pretends to look around, as if she didn't just see the two of them dash into the salal and hide. "Did I see someone just now? Was that Johnny and Jessie?" she calls out in a singsong voice.

She hears giggling from the salal patch. Then the two friends pop up and come out and give her a hug. They see Grannie Annie smiling at them in the truck.

"Where are you off to today?" Auntie Joy asks.

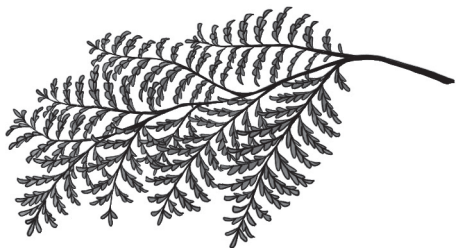
"Up the hill to have lunch, then down to the beach," Johnny replies. "What are you two doing?"

"I'm taking Grannie Annie to an appointment and then to the Elders' lunch at the Bighouse."

“Sounds great,” Johnny says as he blows his grannie kisses. Jessie smiles and waves at her. Annie waves back.

“Enjoy, you two! See you later!” Joy calls as she gets back in the truck and drives away. *Beep, beep.*

Johnny and Jessie continue on their way as the dust slowly settles. They pass salmonberry bushes and flowering ocean spray as they get closer to the trail that leads up the hill. Jessie remembers eating salmonberries here with Johnny earlier in the summer. They were yummy but different from any berry she had eaten before! They hear Raven call in the distance.



CHAPTER TWO

At the trailhead Johnny and Jessie start their hike, surrounded by fir, maple and cedar trees. They can smell the sweetness of sap in the air. They stop to pick salal berries to add to their lunches. Johnny reaches into the salal and picks some nice plump berries, which he hands to Jessie.

“These berries taste way better today than last time we were here! They are nice and juicy, and sweeter this time!” Jessie exclaims.

“Yep, this is the right time to pick them—end of summer,” he says.

Jessie notices that he seems sad again for a moment, but she doesn’t say anything.

When they reach the ridge at the top of the hill, the sky is bright blue all around them. It’s a hot late-summer day.

“Let’s eat!” Jessie says.

“Sure!” Johnny replies. They find an open area where they can sit with a clear view of the nearby islands. Some are smaller and some are bigger than their island. A number of sailboats and a ferry are visible in the pass. It’s a calm day, and the ocean is shimmering in the distance.

Jessie unpacks the sandwiches, berries and a surprise—a whole cinnamon bun to share between them. Johnny’s face breaks



into a huge smile. He was really hoping she had bought a cinnamon bun.

They both enjoy their lunch, watching everything around them. The sun is shining brightly.

“Hey,” Jessie says, “why does it look like there is a line in the ocean, with one side brown and the other side blue?”

“It’s river water,” Johnny replies.

“What do you mean?”

“Grannie Annie says that the river water floats on top of the salty ocean water,” Johnny explains.

“Oh! That’s cool!!”

When Johnny and Jessie finish eating, they slowly start walking down the hill toward Emma’s Beach. The familiar whoosh of Raven’s wings and a loud *kraw* break the silence.

“There’s that silly Raven!” Johnny exclaims happily, looking up at the big black bird in the sky.

“Seems to follow us around. Probably wants some of our lunch! Not today, Mr. Raven,” Jessie says, smiling. “We didn’t leave a crumb!”

The two friends arrive at Emma’s Beach. The tide is out, and they head across the sand to the rocky part of the beach to begin their search for treasures.