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*Age: 25*

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## **First Contact**

As she settled by the fire, the morning wind blew a thousand whistles; one hand on her shoulder, the other was holding a little hand. “Come, my child and listen to the eagles talk. They bring news to our people and one day you will understand and remember how important the chants of this Great Spirit are.” They walked along the river, the air felt cold, so she wrapped the blanket tightly around her and the little one. There was so much to teach and to learn. You could hear the beads jingle from a distance as they neared the mouth of the river, a nesting place for the Great Spirit.

“Oh, Great One,” she cried, “we need your help and guidance. We have encountered many difficulties in the past but we fear that this is too great for our people to overcome. They want it all, they speak of riches and jewels and opportunity but what we have seen in pain and wrongdoings to our people.”

The voice was louder than any words ever spoken but were heard just by here. She felt it, heard it, and saw it. “Don’t be afraid,” the Great Spirit said, “For our people are strong, and in time they will see the strength in us, they will not overpower us, or conquer us. Our spirits cannot be destroyed. Whatever they think they can have will be returned to us, in time, be patient.”

As she thought about the words that had been spoken to her, she looked down at the little one and said, “We will not be forgotten, but recognized, you and young others will live through us, for us, continuing on our tradition and our way.” She then knelt down and silently thanked the Great Spirit for the guidance that she had been searching for. She offered a sprinkle of tobacco to Mother Earth for her journey and headed back to the fire. It was not long after when the others came. They sat around a circle and discussed what the Great Spirit had said. They others could not understand why they were told to wait and to be patient. This was, of course, their land, how could it be that someone, anyone, could just come and take it all away?

They could not rest for the newcomers were close now. The others had to pack their things, again, and move on. It was not safe, not even in the dark where they could not be easily seen. The children did not understand; they continued to play, dance, and sing. The Elders, they were worried, their faces revealed feelings of anxiety and fear. What would happen to their land? What would happen to their people? Their faces now spoke of heartache, they were so tired, tired of running, tired of being afraid. Why were these newcomers so afraid of them? They had done nothing wrong; they had lived off the land, always replacing what was taken. Where, oh where, would they go?

Many of the people had already come to the realization of what was happening. Their people were dying. Their people were starving. But the Great Spirit would save them; he, the Great One, would rescue them. The Great Spirit would become the leader of the people; they would use his Great strength and his Great will to move on and to fight. It was now time to teach and pass on the knowledge that had been passed on to them. It was time that their voices were heard. It was time to let their spirits become great; they had to be certain that their spirits would live on in others. This would not be the end; rather, this was the beginning of a legacy that would live on through many generations of the people.

They took the time to dance, to play the drum, and to perform their tribal songs. It was as if time had stood still on that day, the day of renewal and rebirth. The moment arrived to prepare for the ceremony for they did not know what, or if, another would come. The women dressed in long, beaded skirts and they had used the juices from the ripe berries to paint red symbols on their skin. They formed a circle and they became one. A circle of unity that no newcomer could ever break. A circle representing a powerful force that would be felt for all of eternity.

The men sat around the drum, the circle of life, never ending, always beginning, each strike as powerful as the first. Voices sang out in celebration; the people rejoiced, for this was the place of true peace and serenity. The beat of the drum could be felt in the depths of the soul; down in a place so deep that it brings you back to where you belong. The thump brings you to a land that once was the home of the family, the home of the people.

“Can you hear it?” she asked, “Can you hear the voices that reach you, the songs that touch you, the spirit that has now become you? This spirit will always be a part of you. Let the Great Spirit guide you for he will always bring you home. Close your eyes little one, let the beat of the drum carry you, carry you from the pain, carry you from the anguish. Let the sound bring you to the distant land that you know; the land that you love. Home will always be there for you my child.”

They sang and they danced for hours, feeling contentment that this was their day. Nothing could be destroyed in this moment. Everything was complete; it was as if they had reached a state of nirvana; there was no suffering, no crying, no pain. All that existed was pure joy and happiness.

They smiled together as they celebrated life. They thought of their people, of their children, of their land. For they knew that in time they would return to this place to celebrate again, to celebrate a whole new beginning for their people. Many moons would come and go, but the faith in the Great Spirit would bring them home.

It was time to go now, time to let go, time to release. They knew that someday, however, the Great Spirit would guide them back. He would return them to their roots. He would lead them home.