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Grade 11, Age 16

Remember, My Grandson, Remember Us

Her frail hands worked tirelessly with the utmost care and attention on the beadwork for a pair of moccasins. They were for her grandson. They were a gift, a sort of parting gift. She knew she wasn't going to live much longer. Life was short, too short, and soon she would pass on.

Pausing, she reached for another bead, each one representing the concerns and thoughts that flooded her mind day after day as she watched her home, her world change slowly before her eyes.

She was sitting underneath a small tree, situated in the shade, listening to the words of her native language, and the words of the foreigners. A negotiation was taking place and all was quiet, every single person listening carefully, some leaning forward with anticipation. Chief Crowfoot stood in front, gesturing with his hands, clearly trying to get the foreigners, under a large tent, to comply with his demands. The Blackfoot hadn't been treated all that fairly in the past and Crowfoot was intent on changing that. She had enough faith in her leader, but she strongly believed that this treaty would not change everything for the greater good.

Slipping another bead onto a thread, her mind wandered.

Long ago, her ancestors lived off the land, with no restraints. Buffalo had been plentiful. Life had been long. They had been the only inhabitants of this land, including all other tribes.

Oh yes, they had their fair share of problems, mostly with the Cree, their enemies. But other than that, there had been no worries. Back then life was good. The Blackfoot had been feared, esteemed, and vigorous, a force to be reckoned with.

The world, in which the Blackfoot and all other native tribes had lived in, was changing, little by little, into something they all feared they would regret, something that would bring many calamities. Treaties were being signed. The government was afraid, she knew, of these people, the first residents of Canada. The government had quickly confined those in the east to reserves, limiting their food sources and way of life drastically.

She had heard of many false promises given to the natives in the east. She had heard of injustice, of pain, both physical and emotional. The liquor that the foreigners had brought over was vile, destroying the lives of her people.

And finally, she had heard of the assimilation, the tradition and customs that had survived for countless decades, being stripped away, torn apart, and erased. All that once was, was quickly fading into nothingness, as if the Native Way had never existed...

Bringing her head up, she listened as Crowfoot's voice floated across the grass. She wasn't too far away; she could hear his voice distinctly, the soon to be famous words echoing all around, soaring into every ear of every person present. Some were hopeful, some were unhappy. And some were just anxious to get a treaty going...

"Grandmother." A young voice broke her out of her reverie. She turned her head to see her twelve-year-old grandson approaching, intent on joining her under the tree. He was her only grandchild and he tried to spend time with her as much as possible. She wished she could see him every moment of the day, especially at this time in her life. "What are you doing?" he asked.

She smiled, her deep brown eyes full of love and gratitude towards him for sitting with her. "These," she said, indicating the beadwork with her free hand, "are moccasins, for you."

The boy grinned and reached out with one hand, fingers sliding across the beaded surface. "I do not know what I did to deserve these," he replied, glancing at the crowd, eyes lingering on a few of the older boys who had already done many things, great things in comparison to himself. "I long to go with my older brothers on raids, to be just like them," he added in a soft tone.

"Patience, my grandson," she chided gently, "patience. You will get there soon enough..." Her voice trailed off as the words of the foreigners reached her ears. "...If this treaty doesn't come to pass," she murmured bitterly.

The boy blinked. "What do you mean?"

Unwilling to share her worries, she changed the subject abruptly. "Promise me..." There was a slight pause. "Promise me you will always remember...us, the Blackfoot. Don't forget our way of life," she told him, gazing at him intently. "Remember the stories of your ancestors. Remember how life was good, when the buffalo roamed freely, in great numbers.

Remember when the young men of our tribe earned their glory and prestige through horse raids, when they became warriors through our Sun Dance ceremony. Remember the stories told about acts of bravery.

Remember the families, kept together by love and honor. Everyone respected one another and looked out for one another. Remember when we could do things without being held back by terrible disease.

Remember when we hunted across the prairies to the east, and the foothills when we traveled west to the great rocks. Remember when we traveled north to the forest, and south to where the Long Knives have now taken over.

Remember our Creator. Our people have always believed there was someone above us in the Great Sky, watching over us, now and forever.

My grandson, the white father has told us there will be more of his people." He knew what she referred to. "Remember, my grandson, remember us."

Her grandson nodded, more determined to honor her wishes than ever. "I will not forget," he vowed solemnly.

She smiled and closed her eyes, salvaging that blissful moment in which her grandson promised to always remember. When her time came, she would go peacefully, resting at ease with the last knowledge of her mind being this moment.

The wind carried the last words of Chief Crowfoot. "...As long as the sun shines, the grass grows, and the river flows..." Crowfoot, she knew, was a wise man, and had made a wise maneuver in the signing of the treaty.

She opened her eyes and resumed her work once more. She chose the brightest beads and threaded them skillfully onto the moccasin. No more would each bead remind her of the problems. No, each bead in coming represented the hope she had for her grandson, and future generations of her family. Each bead would hold a little bit of memory and love, each one coming together in a delicate and elaborate design, portraying the work and effort she had put into raising her family.

Each bead would remind her grandson, whenever he wore them, of their conversation and the life that once remained undestroyed.

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