

Ashley Brown
St. George's Indian Band (Miqmaq)
Age 17

The Capture of Demasduit

Come gather around me, my children. It is cold tonight, and the wind blows strongly from the land by the Great Ocean. I will tell you a horrible tale of something that will scar our hearts forever. It happened some time ago, when our numbers were greater and we lived together in larger families still. This was when the dreaded white men, the bukashaman, and their Shanung traitors came hunting for us, before we had to escape to this strange land on the far side of our island.

The day dawned late, as was the custom during the deep winter, and we were enjoying the last few moments of sleep before it became light enough to do anything. Though we had much to do, and very little time to do it with only twelve of us to share the load, and though we were hungry, we still enjoyed the time spent doing absolutely nothing.

I awoke to the sound of my mother calling out my name, and my brother's name. I sighed, and opened my eyes, welcoming the world of deep ochre that flared before my eyes. Though the sight was always the same when I awoke, I always welcomed it, for the deep red color reminded us of our strength as a People.

I left the mamateek, and was greeted by my cousin Shanawdithit. She was much older than I was, having seen twice as many winters as I had. But this did not trouble me, because she always told me that some day we would escape the bukashaman, though to do so may mean that we would be much hungrier, and have to live somewhere else besides our traditional wintering lands. If she was right, I would live to be older than she was, hopefully, unless the osweet also found a different place to live.

The People were busy today, stoking fires, making jewelry and pottery, and ochreing the boat and fishing equipment that we had taken from the bukashaman the



A PROJECT OF THE DOMINION INSTITUTE

previous fall. These things never seemed to dye well, the red color sliding off of them the moment they touched water or snow. But still we tried, for in order for these things to be pure and blessed by the Great Spirit, they had to bear the colors of strength and honour.

I noticed that even though we were short on food, my mother still left small scraps of osweet and bidesook at the edges of our camp. When I was younger, I had asked her why she was putting out these scraps when our family was hungry and needed every small piece of food that we could get. Her reply had been that our brother Moisamadrook, and his wolf pack, were very hungry too. She had told me that the animals were part of our family too, and they would help us in our time of need if we helped them in theirs. I never realized how right she was until that fateful day.

We went about our day as usual, but we did not know that only a few short runs away, there was a band of bukashaman with their traps and guns, ready to capture us for their sport, to fuel their hatred.

Halfway between our family and the bukashaman, brother Moisamadrook and his pack of wolves were busy chasing brother Dogajavick. Though they normally ate osweet, as we did, Moisamadrook was as hungry as we were, and he was willing to choke through the bushy red tail of Dogajavick in order to feed his cubs. But on that day, Dogajavick was to be lucky. The one thing that the bukashaman seemed to hate more than us is Moisamadrook and his kind. The largest and most foolish of the bukashaman heard the excited barking of the wolves, and fired off his gun at them.

The sound echoed through the trees, and our entire family looked up. We had heard this before, and we knew this meant danger. We stood still, like frightened osweet, waiting. All of a sudden, the wood exploded. Moisamadrook and his pack came tearing through our camp as if the Black Monster himself was on their tails. My mother cried out, and started to run. She gathered up my baby brother and shouted for me to follow. I was frightened, but I managed to follow my mother, stumbling through the deep snows into

the forests nearby, where the bukashaman would have problems shooting their guns and following us.

But not all of the people made it to the safety of the trees. As we melded with the branches, Shanawdithit cried out and pointed back to our camp. I looked around, and saw my aunt Demasduwit stumble and fall in the snow. The bukashaman and their Shanung companions had caught up to her, and many guns were leveled at her. Demasduwit cried out, attempting to shield my baby cousin, and told the bukashaman that she was a nursing mother, pleading with them to spare her life. Though the Shanung with them understood her cries, they did not translate. Instead, they hung their heads in shame and disappeared back the way they had appeared.

Terrified, and fearing for her life, my aunt flung up her shirt, showing the bukashaman that she was female, that she was with milk, that she should be spared. This tactic had worked before, and the entire family, who was now watching, was sure that these savages would let her go. But instead, one of the bukashaman knelt and grabbed hold of my aunt's arm, hauling her roughly to her feet. As she tilted in the balance, she nearly lost hold of her baby, and she yelped in pain.

My uncle, Nonosbawsut, was known to these men. He knew this, so he decided to try and make peace, to try and secure my aunt's safe return. He slowly approached the bukashaman, holding the tip of a pine branch. This was a strong symbol of peace among our people, and since he knew these people did not understand him, he attempted, through gestures, to make it clear that Demasduwit was his wife, and that he wanted her released. The bukashaman who seemed to be in charge of the pack refused clearly, and Nonosbawsut flew on them faster than brother Gobidin. He did not even make it to the edge of the pack of men. One of the bukashaman leveled his great gun at my uncle's chest. We cried out, but our cries were drowned by the report, and my uncle fell in the snow, his blood staining it the colour of our sacred ochre.

We could do little but watch as Demasduwit and her tiny baby were carried away, back through the rough snows toward the camps of the bukashaman. Nonosbawsut's body was loaded in a sledge, and he was taken away as well, leaving only the bright red drops of his blood and the depression in the snow for our family to mourn over.

We never forgot that horrible day, and without Demasduwit, our families slowly fell apart. We left each other, and later we learned that Shanawdithit's father had died and left his wife and children alone. They felt they had no choice but to seek help from the bukashaman. One kindly bukashaman took them in, but they soon were taken to the great camp of the bukashaman, where my aunt's mother and sister died of the strange breath disease that was slowly taking our people, one by one. The remaining Behathook scattered, marrying into the hated Shanung, or even to the bukashaman, so that our families would never die out. And now we are but a remnant. The bukashaman tell each other that we are extinct, gone forever. I feel that perhaps they are right, but they do not know the truth of their words fully. They also say that brother Moisamadrook no longer runs over the snows, but the bukashaman do not inhabit the entire land, and we know of the secret hiding and hunting places where we hope the wolves still roam. And we, the extinct peoples, still live on through our children, and our children's children. We may not ochre ourselves anymore, and our blood may be watered down by that of our enemies, but we survive, and shall do so until the end of time.