

## **Once Upon a Time...**

*By: Kara Fidelack (2018)*

Once upon a time, there was a group of noble and peaceful people living in a vast and varied land. These people lived alone on their land for thousands of years. They were very attuned to the world around them, and they used this respect for the natural world to harness the properties of the plants and animals that lived in their land. The smallest plant could be used as a magnificent medicine. The animals that roamed the land could be used to provide shelter, clothing, tools, and food. Each time a plant or animal was killed or taken from the earth, the people made sure to say a prayer of gratitude thanking the earth for providing them with sustenance. The people traveled their land, learning to live in harsh climates and conquering the many challenges that faced them. In order to keep their way of life alive, they told intricately-woven stories to their youth, so that they could, one day, be the story keepers that would pass their tales on to those that came after them. The people continued to live on in peace and harmony in their untouched and undiscovered land.

Until, one day, newcomers arrived from across the fathomless seas. The people were surprised to see them; they had become so accustomed to living in their land alone. The newcomers looked, sounded, and acted different. They were fragile and could not withstand the harsh elements that the first peoples had always known. They did not know how to survive in the land that the first peoples called home. So the first peoples reached out to help the newcomers and show them their way of life. They taught the newcomers to create shelters so they would be warm. They showed the newcomers how to hunt and fish so they would be fed. They taught the newcomers what plants were helpful or harmful so they would be safe. Slowly, the newcomers learned to live in this new land.

The newcomers, while strange and other, did have their own special skills to contribute. They had learned to craft materials out of metal and fabric that were beyond what the first peoples could create. The newcomers shared their inventions with the first peoples in return, giving them pots and pans, metal arrowheads, guns, and blankets. Unfortunately, these gifts came at a very high price.

The first peoples were not aware, but the blankets the newcomers had shared, while warm and comforting, shared something else: something sinister and deadly. A sickness, brought over from across the seas by the newcomers, was hiding within the blankets. As the first peoples slept tightly bundled in the blankets, the sickness crept into their flesh and bones and began to work its dark magic. The first peoples, though strong and accustomed to their severe weather, had never experienced this sickness before, and they soon began to fall ill in the thousands. The first peoples, desperate to save their sick family members, tried every herbal remedy they had come to know, but nothing worked. One by one, the first peoples fell, their death toll rising into the thousands. The dark sickness continued to creep across the land, laying its icy hands on children, elders, or the weak and ill.

While the blankets brought the nightmare of disease, the guns, too, spelled disaster for the first peoples. With this advanced technology, animals could be killed with swiftness and ease. Gone were the days of taking only what was necessary to survive; beasts were killed without care, carcasses piling up. As more of the animals in the land were hunted down, the first peoples' main food source depleted, leaving them hungry and dying off from disease. A once mighty and proud people were left weak and frightened in their homeland.

The newcomers, now quite accustomed to living in this new land, were eager to explore and claim the land as their own, building houses and farms wherever they roamed. As the newcomers gained strength and numbers, the first peoples realized they needed to make a deal if they were to survive.

The leaders of the newcomers and the first peoples gathered together in a sacred place to talk. Although some of them had learned the words of the other's language, they still struggled to understand each other as they discussed. The first peoples, strong believers in cooperation and peace, thought that the agreements they reached with the newcomers would be honored and kept as sacred promises. The newcomers, thirsty to own and tame more of the vast land, did not have the same understanding. They did not see the promises as sacred, and had no value in keeping these promises with the first peoples. They were blinded by greed to have more, more, always more.

Years passed, and while the newcomers thrived and continued to claim the new land as their own, the first peoples continued to struggle in the place that had belonged to them for millennia. The newcomers wanted to teach the first peoples their ways of life; they wanted the first peoples to be more like them. To accomplish this goal, they sent the first peoples' children away from their families to go to school. Many of these schools were places of fright and suffering for the first people's children. They were not allowed to speak their own tongues, wear their own clothes, pray to their own gods. Some were beaten or abused if they did not follow the strict rules asked of them.

Little by little, the vibrant culture of the first peoples began to fade. Being apart from their families and their language, the children forgot their way of life. If they returned home, they were strangers to those they had once loved. Many lived inside constant nightmares from the horrors they had faced in the schools. When the children grew up into adults, they were broken and did not know how to lead good lives, having never led good childhoods. When they had children of their own, they did not know how to be parents, and so their children, too, suffered. Some tortured souls turned to drink or drugs, seeking some refuge from the pain and suffering, if only for a moment.

Meanwhile, the newcomers had made themselves quite at home, in a land that was not theirs. They began to take over government and control the land. The

first peoples were too weak and sparse to disagree. The newcomers decided to banish the first peoples to their own isolated pieces of land. Many cruel rules were inflicted upon the first peoples. Practicing their own customs or beliefs would land them in jail. Leaving their isolated pieces of land, even to attend a family member's funeral, was a criminal offense. If first peoples decided to attend a university, they would lose their identity as part of the first peoples. If women of the first peoples married a newcomer, they lost their identity as a first people. The first peoples, full of despair, prayed for a miracle.

After a long period of darkness and depression, a spark of light began to grow within the hearts of the first peoples. Though they had been hurt and oppressed, they longed for justice and a return to the peaceful ways of the ancestors. They began to speak out about the horrors they had faced. The first peoples were taking back the power of the stories they had used long ago to share their lives with one another. More and more first peoples began to share the tales of the injustices they had faced and slowly, the spark grew. It was even capable of jumping into the hearts of caring newcomers who realized the evil of what had been done in the past.

A new age is on the horizon. First peoples and newcomers together, passionate about righting the wrongs of the past, fight to restore the peace and harmony that was once common in this land. They strive to keep the promises that were made by their ancestors many moons ago and find forgiveness for what has been done. This does not mean that all is well; there are still many battles to be fought and many newcomers who do not support the spark. There is a long journey ahead and the ending of the tale is not yet written. What part will you play in writing it?