

The Owl of Death

Author's Note: This fictional story was written to give you a better understanding of the fear and bondage that many Native Americans are still in today. The concepts in this story are true today, in one form or another, to the way of life among many of the Native Americans on the reservations. Many Native American groups are very unreached as far as The Gospel of JESUS is concerned. Remember that each tribe is really its own distinct people group within the grouping of "Native American". Native Americans live all across this continent and we encourage you to reach out to the First Americans to be here in this country who have yet to understand the Gospel.

“Who—ooo, hoooo, hooooo. Whoooo-ooo-ooo, hooooo, hooooo, hoooo.” Ten-year-old Laughing Brook woke, her heart beating fast. The sound came from right outside her open window. She looked at her older sister Shantelle, still sleeping soundly. Carefully, gently, Laughing Brook slipped out of bed, trying not to wake her sister. She went over to the window, the cool night breeze feeling fresh on her face. Would she see the owl?

“Who—ooo, hoooo, hooooo. Whoooo-ooo-ooo, hooooo, hooooo.” The sound came again. Then suddenly she heard the slightest rustle of wings, and a huge bird swooped toward the ground, rising again with a small rodent in its talons. Laughing Brook watched as it glided away, landing in a tree next to the

cornfield. She trembled with fear as she turned back to the bed. She had seen the owl. Should she tell her mom? Her sister? Then they would be scared, too. As she lay there in the dark, trying to fall asleep again, Laughing Brook heard it a third time, “Who—ooo, hoooo, hooooo. Whoooo-ooo-ooo, hooooo, hooooo.”

By the time Laughing Brook opened her eyes again, the sun’s rays had heated up the trailer bedroom. “Shut the blinds, it’s hot,” Shantelle mumbled, rolling over as Laughing Brook got out of bed. She quickly slipped on her clothes and left the room. She glanced into her mother’s room – the bed was empty. In the living room, her seventeen-year-old cousin Jaylen was still sleeping on the couch. Leftover pizza from last night’s supper was sitting out on the

table, but Laughing Brook wasn’t hungry. It was too hot to eat. She grabbed a Coke from the refrigerator and went out the back door. Trying not to think about the owl from the night before, Laughing Brook quickly headed down the path to the spring. It would be cooler there, moist and shady under the rocky



overhang. It was her favorite place to go in the summer time.

As Laughing Brook wound her way through the field, around the mounds of corn, she noticed her mother hoeing weeds at the other end of the field. Planting and caring for the fields was supposed to be the men's job, but Laughing Brook had no father and no brothers. Sometimes Jaylen helped, but mostly he lived with his dad in another village. It was just when he got in trouble and got kicked out that he stayed with them.

"Mom!" Laughing Brook called, and her mother looked up. "Mom, did you hear anything last night?" Just then, her mom's cell phone rang.

"Hello? Yes. Lone Wolf?" Laughing Brook caught her breath as her mother started crying. "This morning? Just now? Okay. You should come, I can't tell him. Okay. Okay, I will." Laughing Brook looked at her weeping mother as she put the phone back in her pocket.



"Who is it, Mom?"

"Jaylen's dad. They found him this morning. He's dead."

"Mom, I heard the owl last night. I was so scared."

Laughing Brook's mother wrapped her arms around her shoulders. "I heard it, too, Honey. I put out a prayer offering this morning, hoping that our family would be protected. But you know the owl means death. That's why it came to us last night – telling us that Uncle Lone Wolf was gone. Come on, we need to go tell Jaylen."

Laughing Brook hated funerals. The burial had to be before sunrise the following day, so everyone was busy getting ready. Jaylen, his older brother,

and their uncles and cousins were out at the cemetery digging the grave. Laughing Brook's mom and grandma went to dress the body and wash his hair. Shantelle, the older girl-cousins, and all the aunts were running around, baking and cooking lots and lots of food. There was nothing for Laughing Brook to do but try to stay out of the way. She wandered down to her grandma's house.

"Look out, Laughing Brook, stay out of the kitchen," scolded one aunt.

"Go watch T.V. or something," suggested her cousin.

Laughing Brook went into the living room and noticed her aunt in the bedroom, sorting through clothes and filling a laundry basket. "What are you doing, Auntie?" she asked.

"Getting his clothes ready to send with him," she explained. "Uncle Lone Wolf is going on a journey. We will send clothes and food with him. We will shoot his horse and bury it and his saddle with him also. Then he will have everything he needs for his journey."

Laughing Brook nodded. She knew that many of the pies and cakes that were being made were not for them to eat. They would be buried with Uncle Lone Wolf too. Just then she heard a truck pull up. It was her mother. Laughing Brook ran to the door.

"Mom!" she was going to give her a hug, but quickly Laughing Brook's mother stopped her.

"No, Honey, remember? I was in the room with the body. You can't touch me now." Laughing Brook watched as her mother and grandmother went over to the low fire



burning at the side of the house. A kettle of boiling cedar twigs stood on the fire. They stooped over the kettle, waving the steam over their bodies to cleanse themselves. Even with this cleansing, Laughing Brook knew it would be several days before she was allowed to hug her mother or hold her hand.

A little while later, another vehicle pulled up. One of Laughing Brook's girl-cousins jumped out. She was very angry. "What's wrong?" Laughing Brook asked, but her cousin just stomped into the house.

"I just went out to the cemetery to tell Jaylen he needed to go back to the house. Guess what I found? The men are all drunk out there, every one of them. There are bottles everywhere, and Mike is so bad he's passed out. Uncle Lone Wolf died from alcohol, and what do they do? Does more drinking make it better?" Quietly, Laughing Brook started cry-

ing. She was scared of her uncles and cousins when they were drinking. They yelled a lot, and sometimes they hit her. She hoped they wouldn't come back to the house until they were sober again.

It was a long day. That night, Laughing Brook fell asleep on the couch at her grandma's house. It was still dark when she awoke to the noise of people bustling around again. She went into the kitchen. A pick-up truck was pulled up outside the house, and the women were loading pies, cakes, cookies, and other food into the bed of the truck. Laughing Brook saw other things in the truck already – some

of Uncle Lone Wolf's things that he would want to take with him. As the last of the things were loaded and the truck drove away, Laughing Brook's grandma started wailing. The women and children were not allowed to be at the cemetery during the burial. Quietly Laughing Brook crept back into the living room, listening to the wailing of her mother, grandmother, aunts and cousins. She wanted to cry too. The loud, hopeless sounds scared her. Why did Uncle Lone Wolf have to die? Where was he really going on his journey? Would they ever see him again?

A few minutes later, Laughing Brook's mother sat down next to her. Laughing Brook wanted to lay her head in her mother's lap, but she couldn't. "Mama, how do they bury somebody? I mean, what are they really doing?"

"Uncle Randall took the body in his pick-up truck. They dig a deep

hole, and then they put Uncle Lone Wolf into a sitting position with his knees tucked up to his chest. They wrap him tightly in blankets. They lower his body into the hole, facing east so he can see the rising sun. Then they put his horse, his clothes, his saddle, and his other things in the hole next to him. Uncle Randall will sprinkle holy cornmeal over everything and pray for the spirit. Then they fill the hole in and cover it with stones. That is all."

"Where does Uncle Lone Wolf really go?" Laughing Brook asked.

"We will see, Laughing Brook." Her mother answered. "Sometime in the next three days, his spirit will leave the grave. Watch the sky. If there are clouds, and it rains, we know that he was a good man and his spirit was accepted to a good place. If you do not see clouds and rain in the next three days, we will know that he went to a bad place. Use your feathers and pray for him, and don't forget to feed the spirits. Then maybe they will accept him into the good place."

The sky was getting light now, and the sun would be rising soon. The women wiped their tears and started setting food out on the table – stew, yeast bread, macaroni and cheese, fruit salad. Slowly the men began returning. Laughing Brook watched their faces as they stooped over the cedar water to cleanse themselves. They were not crying, but their faces were taut, tired, sad, without comfort and without hope. A deep feeling of hopelessness settled over her heart.