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Urban Myths – in the year 2122

by Rosalyn Hurst

The groups gathered by the lakeside to celebrate the autumn equinox of 2122, raising their hands to the sky, a gesture of farewell to that cruel sun who would, over the coming months, depart for so many hours. The summer months had been torrid, the heat. The sudden storms that threatened crops and livestock had sapped the energy of so many.

Families had travelled far to celebrate this day, trade what little they could, to meet friends, or to seek a partner, sometimes the first and often a replacement for those who had died.

The elders gathered in the grove overlooking the lake. Their numbers grew each year as another centenarian joined the group, and yet very few had died in the last year. There were stories and myths about this unusual, disturbing longevity which had not been passed to younger generations.

The elders were offered gifts, their wisdom sought, their guidance respected by many. They could offer stories of a time before climate change or the Covid pandemic. They recalled the Garden of Eden, some accused a wrathful god, others a failing science, for the current devastation, who could tell fact from fiction in these hard days?

During the day deals were done, valuable children were offered as apprentices in return for a guarantee of food in the coming winter. Gossip exchanged. When the essential trading was completed, the drink and food that had been hoarded away for days, emerged and was shared, drinking dancing, laughter and fights filled the hours, till dawn and the return of everyone to work and to the fight for survival.

Theo led his family group back through the seventeen miles of forest track, his wife, Sarah, sobbing quietly as she had to leave her son to go with Joe and his group who lived in the far

south. They dragged the cart in which sat Granny Chloe, Granny Emma Great Aunt Jackie, cousin Helen and Grandad Gary, their combined ages reaching 550. Granny Chloe's complaints seemed unending, the uncomfortable cart, the chill breeze, the lack of a warm drink, on and on and on. Grandad Joe, kept asking where they were, could he get down, and looking at the children whom he did not recognise shouted, 'Get away you hooligans, I'll call the police.'

By sunset they had got back to the settlement. Paula and Jim had remained to guard against wolves and brigands. The fire had lit and the broth was cooking over it. The elders were settled in their huts immediately sleeping. Theo, exhausted, looked around at his little group and voiced what they all had been thinking.

'We cannot survive the winter like this. The number of elders is growing - they are outliving their children,'

'And grandchildren,' declared Sarah, 'Had to leave Nat to off god knows where, just because we won't have enough food.'

'We can hunt, the bears will be travelling down to Sussex soon when the Artic winters set in, deer too, and the ice will set in at Dover and maybe we can get seals there.' but that was said more in hope than in reality.

'Its all the fault of that Covid, god only knows how many years ago,' muttered Jim, 'They didn't know what would happen when they vaccinated the very young, did something to their genes it is said, and now they live for ever.'

'Those elders' spat Sarah, 'They're wily and crafty. They frighten the kids to give them food, they terrify them with stories of radio active bears coming over from Dungeness, they scream at them that the milk is contaminated and then grab it for themselves.'

A month later, as the chill of the October days shortened, Sarah returned slowly from the store. There, buried in a hole in the ruins of Lewes Castle she often found books and today a treasure. '*Survival in the Artic 1900, stories and myths of the Inuit*'. In the evening she and Paula struggled to read, trying to recall that lost skill,, looking at the pictures of such a familiar landscape, although the people had Asian features, and were young, healthy and carefree.

With trembling fingers they traced and understood, they re-read, they had an answer. They whispered for the men folk to sit around them, sending the children to watch the elderly and keep them distracted. Sarah read with deliberate precision:

'The winters of the Artic are severe and food is scarce. Old people are revered and their wisdom is much respected. In late October or when the freeze commences each community holds a special event of celebration and the elders are given the strongest and best of spirits, a type of vodka, until they pass out. Unconscious they are taken from the huts and with great ceremony buried, not underground but in a shallow grave that is then filled with snow. When spring arrives and the snows begin their melt, the elderly are lifted gently and many return to full life for another summer. For those who do not mourning ceremonies are conducted.'

'Is it true? Can it be done,' her eyes wander to the hut where snores and grunts of the elders can be heard.

'Does it matter? It's not murder, after all we do expect them to survive don't we?' And with little hesitation the group agree.

Sarah muttered in some despair, 'Why didn't we think of this before, before we squandered last year's rations on them?'

Jim patiently replied, 'Well we loved them once, and then we would be punished if it was thought we had deliberately killed them,' and after a minute or two said, 'Who has got the stash of vodka?'