

The Best Village Artist

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She sat among her many coloured cushion covers, boxes of coloured beads, and several pieces of beaded leathers piled in different sections. She was the village seamstress, though she never charged for her work. If she did charge anything, it was to buy extra flour, sugar and pimi to make bread, bannock, biscuits, cakes and pies. She sold those at a small profit. She gave away most of the money to small charities of her choice. In this village she was known for her kind heart and artistic talents.

In the darkness of her work room and in the bedroom, she realized the gnawing sense of her daughter's artistic talent that was so huge that she felt eclipsed by its vitality. You should be happy she told herself as the evening hour drew the long shadows toward the night. She did not welcome this feeling: it was too new, too petty, and it wasted her time, and it kept joy from her mind.

Everyday, this girl child of ten took to the beadwork with the unerring eye of great maturity. Her stitching was exquisite, as she bent her head to complete flower beads of the right colour combinations. From the time she could focus those big brown eyes, she had looked at her mother's work, tracing with her eye and later with her hand, the stitching. She gauged the pull of the thread that secured the beads, thread and needle in exactly the right place. She had been shown how to crochet. She made flower bouquets on thin wire shapes.

By the time she turned fifteen, it was obvious to everyone else that the girl was as talented as her mother. Her mother knew her daughter better, different in artistic expression and there was no stopping her. By now she was a big girl, a foot taller than her mother. Still, her artistry had no bounds as she was always experimenting with caribou, moose and deerhide, moose tufting, and pompoms of many colours. She made

small prints in silk embroidery and made the frames for their display. She sold everything that she was willing to sell.

As she turned sixteen and outgrew the schoolhouse, it occurred to her mother that she could go away to school on her own money. She sent a telegram to her third oldest daughter that she was shipping this daughter to her. Meeting her at the train station, there was no discussion, just the announcement: you are going away to school in your sister's town. The girl was in shock; no one had asked her if she wanted to leave home.

In the darkness of her bedroom, the mother rationalized her decision: she will learn new things, not just beadwork and artistic things. But there was a voice that interjected with an accusation. You are sending her away because she is more talented than you. She ignored the voice. She is very young and attached to her dad, she will suffer from melancholy. No, she is a big girl. She will cope. By noon the next day, she was gone.

As the afternoon lengthened into the evening, she gathered her boxes of fabrics, hides, beads, coloured yarns, different silk embroidery threads, set the different needles, and looked at awls. She sighed in relief: her workroom was hers once more. In the darkness of her bedroom, she allowed the green-eyed monster to speak. Now, no one will surpass your talents in this village. The daughter became world famous. Her mother did not care. She reigned supreme in the village.