



Progress?

By
A. J. Fotheringham



Overture

Before Man's footprints marked the soil
The wind moved silently across the grass,
followed the beds of pristine rivers
and caressed the earth.
Only the call of birds
echoed in the hills
to break the silence.

Then came the people.
Heeding the wind's song,
they melded their lifestyle
into the rhythm of the land
and its seasons.

Visitors from across the sea
changed it all.
They called it progress.



Act One

Lights dancing on water,
or so they appeared to us,
largest fireflies we had ever seen.
Hiding in the forest by the beach
we watched, fascinated,
as the wooden craft,
many times bigger than our
canoes,
drifted on the tide.
Its white wings were folded for
the night,
but its eyes were bright with
unknown light.
When daylight came,
they left their craft
and came to our shore –
strange pale men
wearing too many clothes.
We thought they were chiefs
come to impress us
with their many garments.

We soon saw they hungered,
thirsted, like us,
that they were men possessed of
little
but a magic they called Faith,
a magic they used
to turn our kind welcome
into a cruel fate.
I saw my brothers die,
my sisters cry
as their children sickened in their
arms
I walk the woods alone
far from my home
I carry the message to the other
people of this land:
Beware the lights dancing on
water.



Act Two

When winter came to Huronia
and snow
filtered through the trees,
I, alone,
could hear the birds of hate
screaming
in the hearts of the men around
me.

And, as the winds grew stronger,
and the cold deeper,
their hate
buried us
like long-lost logs
in the snowbanks of our land.

When summer came,
we were gone.
A new victor
claimed these woods
and trod upon our graves.

When winter came again,
there was no Huronia,
nothing
but the silence of the snow
that buries the past.



Act Three

Starving,
withered babies
clutched to dried-out breasts,
the women wait for food
that does not come.
Their men,
weakened by hunger,
stand with their hands out
as the white men pass.
Insults and rocks
will not fill empty bellies.
Our people
once rode this Prairie,
chased buffalo
and laughed
to see our children
playing in the wind.
The red-coated men
came bearing the Promise
of the white leader in the east,
a Promise that broke
like spring ice on the ponds
and then drowned our nation.

We showed them the buffalo
and they took it away.
We showed them our land
and they took that, too.
Now we show them
starving children,
but they turn away
with hearts of stone.
They do not even hear the wind
as it carries away the dust
of our bodies,
leaving nothing
but the low murmur of our song
to haunt the Prairie grass.



Act Four

They call me One Who Talks
and say the Spirit speaks
through my dance,
the well-metered movements
invoking its presence.
I am silent,
my whole being focused
on each careful, measured step.
As the drum beats,
so do my feet, hands,
arms, legs move,
my head held high,
my eyes see only the Spirit God.
I am the dance;
its purity of cadence
caught in my soul.
Softly at first, then louder,
I sing the words
I learned as a child
before the tourists came.
They pay good dollars
to watch an old man,
wearing feathers,
dance in the ancient way.

Their chatter breaks my
concentration.
Their cameras click
and chase away the god.
I complete the show,
knowing I am
but an empty vessel,
no conduit
for the cloud world now.
As the drums die away,
I stand quietly
and have my picture taken
while my grandsons
trade my dignity
in exchange for coins.
Only I know what word
the Spirit spoke today.
It said "goodbye" and left,
taking the light.
In the dying sun,
I stand waiting.
When all are gone,
I will dance again;
this time without drums
or watchers,
trying to call the Spirit home,
trying to recover my soul.



Act Five

As I walk this beach,
remnants of
my grandfather's people
are dragged out into the ocean
and washed from this land.
Raven must be laughing
to see the mighty warriors
are long gone;
our houses now showpieces
for the gawking tourists;
our totems nothing
but picture postcards,
oddities from another time.
The deep coastal forest
where once my ancestors
trod the path and hunted game
have been replaced
by cement and power poles,
lines of cars and buildings
and strangers
who turn away from the past.
I walk this beach,
but not alone.

My grandfather's words
spoken long ago
travel with me
and I feel shame
weighing down my heart.
When he spoke,
I could see
the canoes of my people
their bright masks,
hear drumming
and see their dance.
Now my grandfather
lives a dream
in the nursing home.
I do my best
to keep his words alive,
to pass them to my sons,
but they hear
only the music
blasting in their ears.
Their eyes
are glued to the future
they walk away
from their heritage.
I scream with the ocean birds,
asking, "Why?"
The only answer
is wind song and wave call.
Even my footsteps
Are gone from the sand.
Yes, Raven must be laughing now.



Finale

The land becomes empty.
Even the beasts and birds
flee the winds of change.

Dying rivers
circle diseased cities
where the cadence of life
pulses day and night.

Some that still care about the land
walk the fading trails,
but too many souls are lost
and cannot find the path to the
old ways.

The wind sighs
and slips away
leaving progress to its own fate.

Meet the Author



Anne J. (A. J.) Fotheringham

A Montreal-based writer and editor, she has published children's, fiction, short stories, poetry and non-fiction.

She is the author of
The Lamb's Bay Mysteries
available on Amazon.

A career communications professional, she is a graduate of McGill University and Seton Hill University, in Pittsburgh.

Check out her website and blog at:

www.ajfotheringham.com

You can find her books here

amazon.com/author/ajfotheringham