

Forward

Five thousand years ago, a small band of nomadic hunters reached the broad vista of an endless sea. The deep cold waters were full of fish for them to catch and there, they discovered the taste of delicious oysters. The thick wide forest leading down to the sandy beach offered plentiful game that would provide meat for food and skins for clothing. The trees and bushes were weighed down with fruits and berries. They were protected from enemies by a high mountain range to the west. They decided to stay and called themselves Abenaki, People of the Dawn, or Folk of the Eastern Sea.

If, like their contemporaries the spreading Egyptian and Sumerian empires, they had developed the magic of writing, would their history have been different, less contained, less unchanging? We will never know.

Centuries passed. Millennia flowed by. Their religion and legends lived for eons, passed on by storytellers. As the group became larger, it split into tribes that settled what was to become the New England coast from Canada, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, Massachusetts to Connecticut. They lived peaceably. When a tribe became weak or too small, it would join with a neighbor in what would become the Wabenaki Confederation.

They learned to raise crops in what they called 'three-sister' small farms. Close to their homes, small hills of earth each held corn, beans and squash together.

This hunter-gatherer culture lasted successfully for thousands of years. Then, the Europeans arrived.

They brought woven cloth, shiny baubles to use in weaving baskets, new foods, and more effective hunting weapons. Even more important, they brought writing and the French Jesuits were eager to teach the savages how to write as they attempted to convert them to Catholicism.

They brought childhood diseases that killed over half of the Native Indians and they brought something even worse. They brought politics.

The Abenakis joined with their French patrons in fighting the English and they were massacred. Fifty years later, it was natural for them to assist the Colonial Patriots in fighting the same British enemy. Despite that, the American government refused to recognize the Abenakis or to give them reservation lands and most moved to Canada.

Here, our story begins.

Prologue

“What are you doing here? Get out.”

The tall, thin, sharp-featured man turned away from the papers strewn on the desktop to face the intruder who stood, arms akimbo with anger displayed in his hard eyes.

“You’re in my way and you don’t belong here either.”

“You had ideals and you sold them for cash. You believed in something and you became a traitor to it.

The intruder came closer.

“A dirty half-breed’s going to tell me what to do?”

A sharp hunting knife slipped from a sheath under the bleached linen jacket.

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A Haunted Room

“There’s only one tiny problem.”

When Winnie worked for me as a receptionist at the hotel I manage, that could mean a major catastrophe or a minor glitch. I braced myself.

“The room is haunted.”

“Huh?”

“There’s a ghost.”

She looked honestly worried and I bit back my refrain.

“No. Really. Look.”

She pointed behind me at the wall facing the reception desk in the small lobby of the inn. I whirled around, not daring to guess what I would see. There was a large dark painting in an ornate gold frame. It was done in the style of a colonial American Gothic with a man and his wife standing stiffly in a field. Behind them was the Greenwood Inn, as it must have been then. Crouched behind them, partially hidden by the woman’s wide skirt, was a thin, ruddy-skinned man with sharp cheekbones and a smooth forehead. His black hair was in a long braid that fell over one shoulder and in it was stuck a bright blue feather.

“Him. The half-breed Indian. He was murdered in your room. If you don’t believe me, ask Ron.”

“Winnie, I’m not afraid of ghosts. Let’s look at the room. I’m happy for you. It’s a good thing that you’re fully occupied with only one room left. I could have come a different weekend and it was very sweet of you both to invite me.”

She smiled. Winnie was being gracious. I knew her ‘gracious’ to be insincere and I was suspicious. I gave her a good look. The new lady of the Greenwood Inn looked nothing like her husband’s ancestor. Dressed and coifed perfectly. No bad hair days for Winnie. Cream colored pants, a dark blue blazer, a lapel pin that looked like planet earth with a tiny dull green stone set in the middle. She saw me looking.

“Oh, that’s just a gift I got. It’s an uncut emerald.”

She tossed off the expensive stone as if it were a mere bauble.

Something warm and wet was shoved into my hand. I cried out involuntarily and looked down at a spaniel splotched with white and brown.

“You’re not afraid of dogs, are you?”

In answer, I reached down and patted his silky fur. He wiggled his entire body in ecstasy.

“This is Skedaddle. He’s such a snoop that we found ourselves saying ‘skedaddle’ all the time. He began to believe it was his name and now that’s what we call him. He’s a full-bred Cavalier King Charles and he has a fancy name to go with it, but we ignore that.”

He followed us down the short corridor to the last room. Winnie used a key card to open the door and she flung it open.

The narrow, almost opaque, old bottleglass window had been set, gemlike, between two modern windows. They admitted a subdued early evening light that illuminated the room in pearl gray. The small dark blue armchair was set next to a coffee table that had been made from a small barrel. The walls were painted a light green. She pressed a switch on the wall and inconspicuous lights, built into a cornice that circled the room, filled the room with a warm golden glow. The white curtains were open to a view of the dark green dusky wall of the forest behind the inn. The high king-sized bed was covered with a white candlewick spread that reminded me of my childhood bedroom. Next to it were a large cherry-wood armoire and a broad desk topped by a set of drawers. On both sides of the desk were clusters of cubbyholes. The wall behind it was paneled with grooved oak wood from ceiling to floor and the mix of colonial and modern blended smoothly. The wood gleamed and the air was redolent with lemon oil. While the door was still open, I heard soft music. When she closed the door, with a squeak, the sound was abruptly cut. Thick colonial walls created a peaceful silence.

“It’s beautiful.”

She preened.

“You both have done a beautiful job.”

“I admit that I was a bit concerned that you wouldn’t want to stay in a haunted room. If you’re worried, I can leave the dog with you.”

I could detect no sign of her concern. There was no indication that she expected the accommodation to be empty after she scared me away from sleeping with a ghost. The room wasn’t just ready for guests, it was ready for me. There was a bowl of fruit on the little table and a small vase of flowers on the desk. Gifts for a visiting hotel general manager.

“Why should I worry?”

“You shouldn’t. The ghost is just looking for peace since nobody solved the crime and he’s never done anyone any harm.”

“Don’t be insulted but I don’t believe in ghosts.”

With some sarcasm, I added, “Ghosts can’t bother people who don’t believe in them.”

“There’s a book that says that there are real ghosts if they’re Indian and this one is.”

I knew the book and was pretty sure that she hadn’t read it. I strangled the chortle.

The thought was cut short by the screech of a fingernail scraped across a blackboard.