

Humanity

by Marilyn Reeves

Mrs. VanderHoof stepped inside the gypsy's tent and was greeted by the croaking voice of an ancient woman bent low over a crooked cane. Her white hair and black dress were nearly hidden beneath an old woven shawl of indeterminate color.

The wooden shelves to the left and right of the entrance held large, folded quilts, each of a different solid color. Close examination showed them to be well made – and each a good buy for the price. Mrs. VanderHoof didn't care to haggle. She had decided upon the pink one and the beige one, which she thought would be suitable additions to both of her grandchildren's bedrooms, and opened her purse to make her purchase when she saw something out of the corner of her eye.

There, hidden in the shadows on the back wall of the tent, was a very large quilt of many colors, not rectangular but round in shape. It was quite frayed in places and appeared to be quite old, yet of a most exquisite design.

"Tell me about this quilt," she said to the old woman.

"The quilt tells a story as old as time," said the old hag. "Study it for awhile, then tell me what you see."

Intrigued, Mrs. VanderHoof gazed at the old quilt and tried to decipher its mystery. The overall background color was blood red. A four-pointed star in black velvet projected long rays from its center to the outer rim of the circle. "I suppose that could represent the four points on the compass," she mused. The old woman said nothing. Then she noticed four smaller rays in various shades of brown, from dark to light, in between the black ones. Each point was tipped with a tear-drop of silver. And in the very center of the star was a large, translucent pearl.

The remainder of the quilt was covered with pieces of material in many shapes and colors, each segment forming a unique picture.

Some of them were actually quite hideous – reminiscent of Picasso's 'Guernica'. Other sections were a harmony of pastels, as if rendered by the tender eye of Monet. Still others were plain, dusky beige – quite worn and frayed around the edges.

Mrs. VanderHoof was stumped. "Does this quilt have a name?" The old crone whispered something in her ear.

"Oh, I think I see it now," said Mrs. VanderHoof. "The red background is the blood of our ancestors. The big black star represents the mother race, reaching out to all points of the compass. And the brown rays are the other races which stem from that. The silver drops are tears of sorrow. And the various scenes represent periods of war and peace. I suppose the plain beige pieces represent drought and deprivation. And the pearl in the middle? Perhaps it is wisdom."

"Perhaps," said the old woman. "But I like to think of it as hope."

"And all the shapes and colors sewn together over time have created a masterpiece!" said Mrs. VanderHoof.

"That's why it's called 'Humanity'," the old woman smiled. "And it's not for sale at any price."