

THE GREAT FESTIVAL OF LIGHT

The huge valleys in the land stretched as far as the eye could see. This day was a very special day. The creatures of the land, as well as the people, were getting ready to celebrate the **Great Festival of Light**.

Walking along the winding road that led to the great gathering, three animals were talking about the performances they were going to put on.

Gawe, an **old black bear** with a crusty personality, was making extravagant boasts about his immense strength. He had promised his two friends a spectacular act that would make the most of his strength and imposing bulk. As for **Satiwa**, the **chatty fisher**, he had prepared some acrobatic turns that nobody had ever seen before. In fact, he was determined to show the other animals that he was the fastest, most clever and most skillful animal in the valley. For his part, **Tiyo**, the **silver hawk**, had prepared an incredible aerial routine. With his prowess at high-level aerobatics and breathtaking spiral dives, he planned to show his friends that he was the best hunter in the land.

Our friends had prepared their performances to mark the arrival of the **summer solstice** on that lovely **June 21**. For all the forest dwellers, that day was the most important one of the year. It was the beginning of summer and the reawakening of everything that was beautiful in nature. The snow had vanished; some of the flowers were already exquisitely scented; the sun had cast its soft rays on the hills and made the enchanted rivers sparkle. All the animals were hurrying to celebrate the longest day of the year. Our friend Gawe, the bear, had been celebrating the end of his period of hibernation. After sleeping all winter, he could now finally feast on the fresh, juicy fruits of the field. For Satiwa, the fisher, it meant recovering his brown summer coat and being able to play again in the green meadows as he searched for new prey. Tiyo, the hawk, would be especially cheerful as he strutted in front of the local females in search of a partner.





Suddenly, while the friends were talking, they saw in the distance **Anouk**, a strongminded dog who had been living in the village with the humans. Anouk was descended from a long, proud line of **sled dogs**.

Anouk was also going to the celebration of the summer solstice. This year, he had the privilege of attending the event in the company of his trainer, **Elisapie**. After the usual greetings, Gawe asked him why people were accompanying him to their celebration. The humans, after all, had nothing to celebrate! They didn't hibernate all winter, and they certainly didn't change their fur with the arrival of summer! The three friends just couldn't understand it. They thought the human race had nothing to rejoice in. For the animals, June 21 was an opportunity to celebrate their differences as well as their special characteristics, but humans were all alike! What could those **beings who walked on two legs** have to celebrate?

Anouk was surprised. He told his three friends: "Humans are not all alike. There are major differences between them."

"No," answered Tiyo, "I know them well and they all seem the same to me. Humans

have neither feathers, nor scales, nor antlers. They're all the same size. They cannot fly like the eagle or the swallow. They all just walk. I tell you, they're all alike."

"You're right, Tiyo," added Gawe. "I've seen quite a few in my day and they're all alike. What do they have to celebrate on this day of the summer solstice? They're not like us animals. Take, **Ahona, the goose**, for instance — she's just returned from a long trip to the south where she spent the winter."

"And **Nultam, the fox** — he's coming to show his new summer pelt."

"And **Kasahu, the stag** — he'll surely want to display his new antlers."

"What could **humans** possibly have of interest to show each other and to talk about?"

"But look here, friends!" Anouk said. "People really are very different, just as we are! Even if their bodies are quite similar, it is what they have **inside** that makes each one of them **unique**."

Satiwa, who, for once, hadn't played the chatterbox, now took the opportunity to contradict Anouk. "We animals are really all alike on the inside. For us the most important thing is to survive. Aren't people just like us?" he declared.

"No," Anouk was quick to answer. "They may share some of our priorities, but they experience and learn things very differently."

"Take my trainer **Elisapie**, for example. She's Inuit from the Great North. She has always lived in the Arctic and she knows better than anyone how to adapt to the cold and hardships of winter."

"One day, she came across two friends — **Benjamin**, a young Haida boy, and **Pauline**, a young Métis girl. Benjamin came from the West. He knew very little of winter and snow. He lived right by the sea. The sea had brought him a different kind of knowledge from that of Elisapie. Unlike her, he had never done any ice fishing! He had never traveled by sled."

"Also, their beliefs were different, as were their customs, their traditions and their languages. As for Pauline, a Métis from the Plains, she was a young girl who was very proud of the heritage that came from her Indigenous and European ancestors. Among them were **coureurs de bois, guides, interpreters, fishermen and explorers.**"

"The humans will also be celebrating their differences while thanking Mother Earth for bringing forth living creatures in such variety."

The friends stood there open-mouthed for a few long minutes. Then they thanked Anouk for telling them about human beings, and wished him a pleasant journey. They could never have guessed that human beings were, like themselves, **alike and different at the same time.**

From that day on, all the animals would know that human beings also need to come together to celebrate. And the animals felt all the joy that humans would experience in celebrating the summer solstice, also known as **National Indigenous Peoples Day.**

