

Vidaga's Horn

Introduction

Vidaga's Horn is a modern-day folktale written as a metaphor for the time in which we now live – the time of Covid-19. Through story, both fictional and non-fiction, Story Preservation Initiative is working to help young people better understand Covid-19, to be aware of the significance of the time that they are now living through, and how the actions of all – particularly those actions that manifest caring and respect - can help to “part the dark clouds” that now surround us.

Through this recording and related materials, Story Preservation hopes to spark meaningful conversation between teachers and students – and parents and their children.

A better understanding of the world takes away fear and offers young people hope.

Vidaga's Horn

The Darkness had come quietly at first, like a panther on soft padded feet, casting a long dark shadow over the homes of those who lived at the edges of Great Land. The Darkness, they called it in whispers. These were not the clouds that told of coming rain. These were from an old time, a long-ago time when sorrow and sickness came and lingered for many seasons.

“Is this The Darkness from the old time you told of in your story?” the children asked Sekou The Elder. “I’m afraid it is,” he answered.

“But in your story, The Darkness brought sickness and sadness and stayed for a long time in the Old Land.” Sekou could hear the worry in their voices.

“That is true.”

The children stood with Sekou and watched as The Darkness grew closer.

“We must do something now or, just like your story, we will soon become like the Old Land.” It was Omari who spoke. Sekou looked into the eyes of the child.

“The Wise Ones knew the ways to chase away The Darkness,” Sekou answered, “but their wisdom fell on the people’s closed hearts and deaf ears. The people chose their own ways, and wisdom was lost. Where wisdom is absent, The Darkness comes and fills the void.

“And so the Wise Ones left the Old Land and never returned,” he continued. “Now, I am told, only Vidaga, the wisest of them, remains, but she has moved high up in the Great Mountain, far away from the people. No one has been able to find her, and I fear no one ever will.

You see, the paths to the top of Great Mountain are narrow and steep, and the cold wind blows bitter and hard. It is said that only those who can hear Vidaga’s horn can find the way of wisdom.”

Sekou’s story told of Vidaga’s magical horn that only a few hearts can hear. Omari listened to The Elder’s words and that night, could not sleep. Omari knew that he and his sister Kuno and brother Olaji would have to make the climb up Great Mountain and find Vidaga, the Wise One. If they did not, The Darkness would overcome Great Land.

“We will find her,” Omari told Sekou that morning. “We will bring her knowledge and wisdom back to the people.”

“Yes, my son,” Sekou replied.

Sekou bowed his head in reverence to the young boy, and then with the lightest touch, he placed his hand on Omari’s head. “Listen for the horn,” Sekou reminded him. “It will guide you.”

With that, Omari, his brother Olaji and his little sister Kuno quietly left the village and made their way toward the Great Mountain. They carried with them three items: a blanket made from the fleece of a long-horned ram, the shoulder blade of an ox, and, around Kuno’s neck, a necklace made from the teeth of the wild boar.

And so together, they began their journey.

Sekou’s words rang in Omari’s ears. “Only those who can hear Vidaga’s horn will find the way of wisdom,” The Elder had said.

Omari wondered what lay ahead, and, with mounting concern, he shuddered, thinking of his decision to bring Kuno and Olaji along.

And not long after starting out, Kuno - who was so small and still so young - began to cry. Her brothers, saddened by this, knelt by her side and wiped her tears. They tried to smooth the worry lines from her brow - but they too were worried and scared, and soon Omari and Olaji could not help but join her in a mournful wail. It made a haunting sound that gathered force as it moved throughout the woodland and filled the deep cavernous stone valley of Great Mountain.

But then ...

Omari put out his hand to quiet the others. “Shhh, shhh, shhh. Listen.”

From far off in the distance came a sound. (Horn– very softly) The children stopped crying and listened. (Horn – a bit louder) “It’s Vidaga’s horn,” Omari whispered.

The sound of Vidaga’s horn grew louder and clearer still. (Horn) From on top of Great Mountain, Vidaga had heard the children’s cry.

And again, she blew the horn, and again, the children heard.

She was calling to them. They gathered their belongings, and now, with strength and renewed hope, they continued to walk the steep path upward to the one who they now knew awaited them.

It was then that Olaji saw a young boy. He was in the deep shadow of the wood, alone and shivering. Olaji took the blanket that he carried over his shoulder and wrapped it around the boy, and warmed him. Soon after, a woman appeared from the Darkness of the wood. She cried out. “My son, where have you been? I feared I would never see you again.” She knelt at her son’s side and bent her head low and cried and cried.

“You have saved my child,” she said to Olaji. Tears of love and gratitude streamed down her cheek. With the tip of a finger, she wiped away one of her tears and with it lightly touched Olaji’s forehead.

“You have shown love and caring for a poor and lost child,” she said. “It is that kind of love that I bestow upon you in return. It will safeguard you on your journey.

Omari, Olaji, and Kuno once again began to climb.

A short time later, they came upon an old man. His eyes were sunken into his head, and his cheeks were hollow.

“Do you need help, Old Man?” Omari asked. The old man turned his gaze on the child. “I no longer have the strength to gather food,” the old man replied. He pointed to a clearing where plants grew in abundance.

“There is plenty of food here for you. It is growing beneath the soil,” Omari said.

“But the earth is cold and hard. I cannot penetrate its surface,” the old man replied.

Omari took the ox bone from his pack. Its thin edge, as sharp as a dagger, cut through the hard earth. Omari dug down to the food that grew beneath the soil.

One by one, he pulled potatoes and yams, carrots, and kumara from the soil and handed the food to the old man.

The old man’s hands trembled as he reached out to take the food, but before he did, with one finger, he touched Omari on the forehead. “You have shown respect and compassion to an old man,” he said. “It is that kind of deep respect I bestow upon you in return. It will safeguard you on your journey.”

Omari, Olaji, and Kuno continued their climb. A short time later, they came upon another clearing, and in the center there stood a tiny hut, barely large enough to shelter even one person. The children could hear the wind whistle through the cracks of the tiny walls.

An old woman appeared at the door. "You have come at last," she said.

"Your home is falling down, Old Woman," Kuno said.

"It is the strong mountain wind, my child. My home can no longer withstand its terrible force."

Kuno knew what to do.

She removed the necklace from around her neck. "We shall use these teeth as a saw, Old Woman. We will cut wood and fill the cracks and make your house strong again."

Kuno nodded to Omari.

Together they walked back into the woodland. Each holding opposite ends of the necklace, they sawed down a small tree and used the wood to fill the cracks in the old woman's house.

The old woman closed her eyes, bowed her head, and then, after several moments, she placed one finger on Kuno's forehead. "You have provided protection for an old woman who was in need," she said. "It is that same protection that I bestow upon you in return. It will safeguard you on your journey, little one."

Omari, Olaji, and Kuno walked on, strengthened by the love and respect, and protection that those in need had recognized and, in turn, bestowed upon them.

And then again, they heard Vidaga's horn. (Horn) They were getting close.

When they finally reached the top of Great Mountain, Vidaga was waiting.

"Wise One," said Omari, "we come here seeking your help. Tell us what is the secret, what is it that must we do, to dispel The Darkness?
Sekou says that you are the only one left from the Old Land who knows this."

"Well, well, well, well, my child," she replied. "I have nothing to give you."

Omari felt the strength drain from his body, and he dropped his chin to his chest. They had come so far, and Vidaga was their only hope. He could not speak.

Vidaga lifted Omari's chin.

"Not even the wisest of the wise can give you what you already possess. You are brave to have made this journey that no one else has dared to try. I have watched you.

“You, Olaji, are pure of heart and soul. You gave your blanket to a young boy who was lost and shivering in the wood. You possess the gift of love and caring.

And you, Omari, you listened to the plea of an old man when many others would have walked on. You fashioned a shovel from an ox bone and helped him find food. You are pure of heart and mind. You possess the gift of respect and compassion.

And dear Kuno, your necklace made of boar’s teeth was your amulet – your good luck charm - and you used it to saw wood to protect an old woman from the strong mountain wind.

You are pure of heart and spirit.

And you will, in years to come, be known as The Great Protector.’

“Each of you,” Vidaga continued, “possesses the heart of One Who Gives. It is this that will dispel The Darkness from Great Land.”

Vidaga reached out to each of the children and, with her hand extended, touched them lightly on the forehead, and they felt her energy run through them. She was solemn, but kindness radiated from her face.

“This is for you,” she said to Omari, handing him her horn. “I no longer need it.” Omari held the horn in trembling hands. “My time has passed,” she said. “I have waited for you all these many years. You now,” she said, nodding at the children, “you are the Wise Ones of Great Land.”

“Now, come inside. “Sit by the fire, eat and sleep. Tomorrow you will return to Great Land. Your journey back home will be swift and with ease.

The children were sad to leave Vidaga, but they did as she said, “Share with the people of Great Land all that you have learned, and soon, you will see, The Darkness will depart, and the winds will blow warm and gentle through Great Land once again.”

As they descended from the Great Mountain and arrived once again back in Great Land, there was a cry of joy from the people who had seen them. They all gathered in the village square.

“Tell us,” they said, “what is the wisdom that Vidaga shared? What medicine has she given you to dispel The Darkness?”

Omari was the first to speak. “It is love,” he said, “and respect for all people that will chase The Darkness away.” The people of Great Land listened as the children shared the story of their journey.

“It is giving hearts that care for and protect others that will cause light and warmth to return to Great Land. This is the medicine we bring to you. But it can only heal - if it is applied.”

There was a great murmuring among the people as they walked away. “If it is applied,” they whispered, “If it is applied.”

Hearing that, Omari lifted Vidaga’s horn to his lips. He took one long, deep breath and blew into the magical horn. (Horn)

The people stopped and turned. For the very first time, everyone heard the sound. The call of the Wise Ones -Vidaga, Omari, Olaji, and Kuno - opened their hearts.

And soon – very soon – The Darkness began to lift and drift higher and farther until nothing was left except tiny dancing fragments of clouds.

On that day, the sun shone brightly over the Great Land.

Vidaga saw it all from Great Mountain.

She smiled, then turned and walked back into her mountain home.

(Horn)