

The Basket's Story

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For Andrea Laforet

I was born in nineteen hundred three
When a Gitksan woman in B.C.
Pulled bark strips off a cedar tree
With hatchet, hands, and knife
After soaking and splitting and drying them, she
Cut thin strands so carefully
And with her skill in basketry
She wove me into life.

The woman sang her grandmother's song
As she plaited me so light and strong
To last a gatherer's work life-long
In the fields of hops and berries
I served her well, I served her long
The years I did to her belong
And then she sold me for a song
To a man from off the ferries.

CHORUS

Spruce root, cedar bark, plaited, coiled, twined
Sewn and folded birch bark rind
Lore, art, nature all entwined
And held within a basket.

The man he kept a general store
With souvenirs of "Indian" lore
Baskets stacked up by the door
A magnet for the tourist
A wealthy woman came in who
Sometimes bought a piece or two
With a certain silhouette or hue
That pleased her inner purist.

"Now here's a basket that will shine
"Patina, shape, and weave so fine
"Traditional but unique design
"With lots of use—I'll buy it."
She treasured me for many years
Displayed with several of my peers
Saying, "Here's a sight that always cheers
"My heart—I can't deny it."

My owner died after many's a year
And left me to her best friend dear
As a keepsake and a souvenir
Of love and admiration
And as her own old age drew near
This keen museum volunteer

Brought me in and told them, "Here
"I'm making a donation."

The curator took one look at me
And said, "How marvelous! Can it be?
"We've a photograph where you can see
"This basket with its weaver!"
So here I am for all to see
I'm Tool, I'm Art, I'm Memory
The work of a woman's hands to be
Remembered now forever.