Springtime Shaman

By: A.X. Bueno

Ah springtime in Alaska. A young sea otter starts to soak it in through his window having only woken up a few minutes ago. Since it's May that means the temperature just hit the 50's and the days of below freezing temps are over meaning the plants are alive again, the snow has all melted and the beauty of nature like the mountains and rivers can be appreciated without worrying as much about the cold especially when you have a sea otters' coat. The sea otter is named Lezlo and after having spent several minutes admiring nature as he is prone to do with the extra free time he has he realizes he needs to get ready for the day and thus leaves the old bedroom he is currently reoccupying. For even while he has returned home to relax after finishing his second semester of college there are duties still for the otter to take care of.

For he is the shaman of his tribe, the Aleut tribe and he takes pride in upholding the sacred ancient position even with all that these modern times have brought. He heads down the stairs to the bathroom where he brushes his teeth, showers and then proceeds to take his time brushing his coat, the black fur of his arms and the white of the rest of it. He stares at the mirror for a minute just thinking of what to do next as his bright blue eyes, naturally slender frame and black nose at the tip of his muzzle all stare back at him while he thinks. The indigenous otter then needs to decide between his two outfits both of which are sitting on his bed back upstairs which he proceeds to climb up. The choices he gave himself today are the tunic of his people(the Aleutian name for it escapes him at the moment) or a dark blue short sleeve shirt and some matching shorts along with some sneakers (he was tempted to take his favorite traditional fur boots instead but winter was over and they would have clashed with his casual wear.)

He's thankful he can wear such a simple outfit now with winter gone and the job of a Shaman being pretty lax. The role of a Shaman has always been a part-time specialty called for in times of need since the beginning and this allowed Lezlo to go to university out of state without worry and be able to have plenty of free time since a Shaman despite their importance is rarely needed. Today he had three different visits as Shaman to make: two of these visits were in town and one was to one of the lands owned by his tribe. Before he can travel to any of those three different places he grabs all the stuff he needs and shoves it all in a bookbag before heading to the fridge and opening it. There he sees the lunch prepared for him sitting on the middle fridge shelf and a note.

Lezlo casually picks up the note and reads it. It says "made some salmon and rice for you handsome sorry I can't stay for a hello or something but I only had enough time to drop this lunch off. Have a good time shamanning today love S.F." The otter sighs in contentment, his

boyfriend is so thoughtful he thinks as he packs the lunch in the bag as well before walking out the door smiling. He then proceeds to walk to one of the MACs Transit bus stops so he can get to the part of Fairbank he needs to reach the first person in need of his shaman skills. The wait at the bus stop is about fifteen minutes and when it comes it's about a thirty five minute ride through the city seeing budding greenery, shops, and the ever present Mount Denali before the scenery shifted slightly to the neighborhood he needed to be at.

The otter hopped off the bus with his big bag of necessities and using the gps on his phone walked an additional five minutes till he reached the address of the house he was called to. He then rubs his black paws together nervously before separating them and ringing the old grey buzzer style doorbell. Taking a step back he examines the house from the steps leading into it: it looks a little worn down but doesn't look that old, it'a a mahogany brown with a red shingled roof, a good sized porch with a rocking chair, two evergreen trees out front, the grey doorbell, it looked to be a two story house seemingly without an attic judging by the looks of it and had a dark blue door that had paint peeling off in a spot or two. Two minutes after ringing the doorbell a middle aged bearded seal walks out the kind of small blue door and looks to Lezlo who is still on the steps, the bearded seal squints in confusion at the sea otter before his eyes widen with realization and he asks "are you the shaman that I called for yesterday? Are you here to help me with what I asked for?" "I'm the Shaman you called for" responded Lezlo with a casual tone .

"Then please come in so we can talk more about it, no reason to just stand out here like trees heh heh" the bearded seal says gesturing towards the door as he chuckled warmly. The door was actually kind of small Lezlo noticed as he watched the seal crouch slightly to get the door while walking on his hybrid paw flippers. The bearded seal looked to be about 6 foot 7 and if he had to crouch then the door is a few inches shorter than him. Luckily Lezlo is also shorter at 5'7" and makes it through with the door only a few inches above him as he walks in with hesitation since this is still a strangers house despite this seal knowing his Aleutian role as Shaman. There's a small room after the door that serves as an entrance with a small shoe rack and some coat hangers and this entrance naturally leads into the house. Inside the house seems pretty clean and organized, it's nice and spacious too for what looked like a shack as much as a home. There was the living room with a tv and a bookshelf chocked full of books on things like the tribe's basket weaving methods, diy stuff and hiking, the stairs leading up to the bed and bathroom and the room the old seal was leading Lezlo to; the kitchen.

The kitchen had your typical stove, big cabinets, a big grey and black two sided fridge, a sink full of dishes which was surprising given how clean the rest of the house seemed to be kept, and a round table with five chairs one of which the bearded seal gestured the young sea otter to take a seat in which he did. They both take a moment to just settle into their seats, the sea otter taking a few moments to adjust his large fuzzy otter tail around the seat before then after a few

more moment of silence Lezlo says “so I got your call yesterday and you said you needed spiritual protection on your hikes, what exactly do you need protection from?” “There are some short shadowy figures that look almost like children I’ve seen lately near the pond in the park that’s a couple of blocks from here, you’re familiar with this type of spirit right?” Lezlo gulps and remembers these spirits, his uncle used to tell him stories about them when he was still teaching him all that he would need to be a Shaman. These shadowy spirits that looked like small children and if you saw one and followed it you were gone forever thanks to whatever horrible thing these spirits did. Even the Russians back when they were colonizing Alaska saw and feared these creepy, enigmatic spirits.

With that knowledge Lezlo takes the necklace he already got the spirits to enchant through communing with them like his uncle taught him and chants something more in Aliguutax or the Western Aleut dialect and language and the necklace moves slightly but is otherwise normal. He hands the charm to the older bearded seal doing his best to control the slight shaking of his hand which thankfully he doesn’t notice. “T-there you go sir, that should give you the protection of ahem...gentler spirits, I should get going now” the comparatively younger otter says while closing his bag where he kept the necklace and starting to place it on his back. Before he could leave the clean, lovely home the seal stops him by putting one of his square hand flippers on Lezlo’s shirt, it’s cold and damp. Lezlo turns around clenching a fist on instinct since he’s not one to be caught off guard given his experiences with past agitators but the seal only says “I have something for you before you leave. A thank you for taking the time to help this old square flippered sea critter.”

What he hands Lezlo is a hand woven basket done in the recognizable style of his tribe. It has plastic sticking out slightly from the lid of it and smells of the sea and a smell the otter struggles to identify. Sensing the confusion the seal says “they’re clams and a few halibut that I caught yesterday, fresh from the ocean. I am a fisherman after all, the basket was also made by me by the way. I hope it’s a good reward.” Lezlo responds “it’s a fine reward, thank you Mr. … uhm I’m sorry what’s your name, I don’t think you gave it to me.”

“Don’t worry about it, you can just call me Mr.Parker hehe” the seal says with another jovial chuckle. Lezlo chuckles with him if only because that laugh is infectious and says while rubbing a fuzzy paw behind his head “well thank you Mr. Parker I appreciate the gift. I can’t wait to try these all cooked up.” Lezlo says that but he hasn’t really made clams before and while he can cook for sure the otter is not exactly the best at it. He thinks of what he’s going to do with all these clams that are kind of heavy in this big basket while he walks to the house of the next person who needs his help. Luckily this next person is only a few blocks away from the house of Mr. Parker and he makes it there pretty fast after finding a route that goes around that pond and park that looked just as creepy as he thought they would from a distance.

Lezlo arrives at the second house 18 minutes later and this time since there is no doorbell so he knocks very gently and then again slightly harder after waiting a minute. Then out of the rustic, red shack-like house walks a female black footed albatross slowly spreading her enormous ebony wings as she stretches while opening the door and says with a smile in her voice “hello, you must be Lezlo. Please come in and have a cup of lemonade while we discuss the reason you’re here.” The albatross ushers him surprisingly quickly inside while she finishes her sentence and then gives her name while they walk through a small hallway leading into the rest of the house; Alayna. She seems to be only a few years older than the sea otter and she tells him to follow her to the dining room and then to take a seat at the table while she grabs the lemonade.

She asks Lezlo if he wants ice or not while he sits on a chair at the table adjusting his body and tail so he feels comfortable “Yeah I’ll take it with ice, thank you” Lezlo responded sincerely. Then Alayna with a wing plops a glass filled with ice-cold regular lemonade on the table and says with an expression that is now somber “*sigh* so I know I was kind of vague in my message to you simply saying that I may need you to talk to the spirit of someone potentially dying without much detail but there’s a reason for that. You see my mother is… dying and we’re really not sure from what. No doctor has been able to give her a proper diagnosis despite her clear deterioration from…whatever is wrong with her and I just can’t keep playing this waiting game of hoping the next doctor will have the answer and then bam, disappointment! I need an answer and modern medicine has failed me so far, she’s getting worse by the day and I’m not sure how much time she actually has left so I figured a more spiritual source might give an answer and at this point there’s not much to lose.”

“And that’s why I need you right now, my mother is sleeping right now and I’m hoping that while she is you can reach her spirit as Shamans do and see what’s doing this to her. I didn’t want to give all the details before now because I wanted to say it all in person when i could be sure something would be done and I also wanted to keep this as much of a secret as possible for now given the circumstances. Please tell me you can help my mom, she’s so sick and means so much to me.” The albatross finally finishes speaking with her head in her wings and a few tears rolling down her dark beak as Lezlo sits there head down, face lowered and rubbing the soft fur on his chin, processing all this and slightly troubled by it all.

Lezlo sighs heavily and says “alright, well first off let me say I’m very sorry about your mother’s condition, I would have kept the secret if you told me sooner and will keep it now since I am professional. Secondly I can definitely help you but I’m going to need you to do something to help me help you and your mom.”

“Anything, tell me what it is and I’ll do it!” Alayna says with a slipped note of desperation. “I’m going to need you to play a precise beat on my drum to help me get into the right state to reach the spirits while I prepare myself. I’ll tell you when to start and don’t stop until I’m in the right state of consciousness to be able to tell you stop. Now take me to her please” Lezlo gets up off his chair as he finishes saying that as Alayna simply nods to confirm she’ll take him to her mother. This prompts him to also grab his bag and they proceed to walk out of the dining room and through the living room to a blue door in a hallway visible from though outside said living room.

Alayna opens the door and once she flips a switch to bring light back into this pitch black room Lezlo sees a sight that makes his tail droop and almost slam against the ground before he notices that and stops it before it can. An older black footed albatross that is slightly older than middle aged in her mid 50’s or so but her body tells a different story. The mother albatross looks practically on death's door with a frame almost skeletal with bits of bone visible through her wings, big bags around her eyes, noticeably shallow breaths, and what looks like a bit of bile around her mouth. Alayna, the young daughter albatross says with a quavering voice “she’s been like this since yesterday night. She’s been having almost constant heartburn and has been unable to eat lately, she’s also been complaining of her stool looking really strange like tar and has been so weak lately that I’ve needed to help her just to stand, more than once.”

While she finishes talking Lezlo takes out the drum from his bag along with some kind of herb and a small glass bowl. Then he asks “do you have a gas lighter? Also you don’t mind if I burn this do you?” while holding this herb which was dried and bundled making it hard to tell what it was. “You can if it’ll help. What is it? What’s it used for? Will I need to watch it to make sure it doesn’t pose a fire hazard or something like that?”

“Just between you and me I can’t remember the exact name in English but I do remember it’s name in Aliguutax. As for your questions it’s a local herb that serves a similar function to white sage in that it cleanses the area of malevolent spirits and their energies, it’ll burn itself out so no need to watch it and it will definitely help since it keeping any malevolent spirits/spirits away will allow me to focus easier and protect me allowing me to reach your mom’s spirit much easier when I enter the state of being needed to reach spirits.” Lezlo pauses, takes a few seconds to catch his breath and then says “sorry to have to explain all this so fast and so much, I just need you to understand how this works and also to play that drum. Here let me show you how it should be done, playing the right beat on it that is.”

Lezlo shows the daughter Albatross the beat and with a bit of practice and back and forth exchange she’s able to do it well enough to help him. After that the bundled local herb is lit and the sea otter grabs a chair to take a seat right by the sickly mother bird. He takes a deep breath

and focuses on the sickly body of the older albatross before relaxing his whole body. His pupils then shrink a little before his eyes roll back slightly leaving only part of the blue iris and a tiny bit of pupil visible. For a few minutes past an hour Lezlo just sits there completely still, almost lifeless except for the occasional slow breath while the white sage like herb burns to ashes and the drum is played just right so everything goes well.

Then slowly Lezlo's consciousness returns proper to his body as his eyes roll back into place, his tail and paws twitch to life along with the rest of body and his breathing and heartbeat return to normal speed. He takes a deep inhale then proceeds to twirl a short whisker before saying the results of his spiritual excursion while Alayna finally stops playing the drum and waits for the help and possible diagnosis she's hoping he'll give her. "Well I managed to reach her spirit and keep it tethered to here though she's exhausted from what's been eating away at her so she'll still be asleep for a while. The problem is an ulcer in her intestine, duodenum specifically instead of her stomach which makes it harder to diagnose. It's aggressive and threatens to start bleeding in the next few hours."

"You need to take her to the hospital soon or it will become fatal." Lezlo finishes and takes a breath, body exhausted from the whole ordeal that was visiting the spirits. He did what he had to do though and weakly smiles to Alayna as he stands. He says "I know I just told you worrying news and that you only have hours to get to the hospital before anything concerning happens but do you mind if I sit down to eat before I leave? Helping your mom took a lot out of me and if I don't eat something to regain my energy I think I'm going to faint before I can make it to the door. I promise I'll be done and gone in about twenty minutes and then you can go plus you have several hours and the hospital is not far. Please?!"

Alayna actually surprises Lezlo with a strong hug and an answer of "you've just been an immense help of course you can eat here, after all that shouldn't take too long to have a meal, I can prepare one if you don't have one?"

"No it's fine I actually have a meal prepped already. I'll be out of your feathers soon enough eh heh." Lezlo says this after returning the random, surprise hug the albatross just gave him. He then takes a seat in the kitchen, reaches into his big bag and pulls out the meal his boyfriend prepared. The salmon, rice and vegetables which both smell and look pretty tasty so he's eager to dig into this meal made with love. He asks to and then takes a spoon from a utensils drawer and then slides purple tongue over black lips before digging into the food.

A short time later he finishes and grabs his bag after putting everything back inside it and telling Alayna goodbye and thanks for letting him eat him here. He grabs the basket of clams and halibut Mr.Parker gave him while Alayna thanks him for all his help to which the sea otter says

you're welcome and he exits the house as do Alayna and her mom who he helps her get to the door. Lezlo walks away while both black footed Albatrosses get into a car and head to the hospital.

Now Lezlo walks back to the bus stop so he can head to the Aleut island and more specifically one of this tribes' villages to do the funeral ceremony to fulfill his Shamans' role for this day at least. But on his way to the bus his phone starts to ring and he checks the number before answering, confused by the random call of a tribal council member. He clears his throat and then answers "Henlo Lezlo speaking..oh hello sir. Oh so you were able to find someone else...uh huh, well I appreciate the consideration. Thank you...alright bye."

Lezlo presses the end call button with a webbed digit and mutters a "thank you lord" to the sky with his paws connected. The council member (part of the communal authority of his tribe) just told him how Alayna called them about how tired the sea otter looked and thus they decided to find another Shaman of the Aleut to do the funeral ceremony and save him the trip and effort. Luckily there are other Shamans within his tribe that can be called on though not too many given how some of the old Shamanic knowledge became lost for several different reasons. With that done with Lezlo walks for about 10 minutes more before actually reaching the bus stop. He uses the day pass that he bought at the beginning of this morning anticipating three trips instead of two otherwise he would have just paid the dollar fifty the two times and just boards the bus taking a seat, sitting with all his stuff. In a way it's a good thing he didn't have to do the ceremony anymore, between his exhaustion and lack of traditional attire for that sacred tradition it would have just been awkward for him and everyone else.

As the bus heads back to his house it passes a lake which has bioluminescent plankton that he loves to watch. Lezlo sighs and reminisces about the lake thinking of times he's ridden on and watched it before, it would have been nice to see more of nature's beauty and he could imagine stopping to admire and boat on the lake once more but he's tired and it's already getting kind of late at quarter to 4. The natural landscape rolls by fast on his bus ride but he still soaks it all in with the same love of it that he's had all his life. Soon after the mountains are passed again he steps off the bus and soon enough is back home. He fetches his key from his pocket and enters his house again zipping straight for the kitchen first.

He puts the basket of halibut and clams in his freezer for now and the container that had the meal of salmon, rice and vegetables in the sink. He then leaves the kitchen and goes through the living room to reach his bedroom. Once there Lezlo takes off the bag, empties the contents before then putting them back where they individually belong and then finally changes into sweatpants before just flopping onto his bed. The sea otter has a bit of schoolwork he could be doing but there's still plenty of spring break left before he heads back to college and he's

honestly not in the mood to do more work. He reaches for his phone from his shorts that are now on the floor and he grabs the phone and chucks the shorts into a laundry bin.

He thinks of what to do next while staring at his home screen (a photo of his family which is him, his dad, and his siblings) and then he unlocks his phone with a touch of his webbed paw. He goes into his contacts and scrolls through till he finds the number he wants, it's labeled "Boyfren" then Lezlo uses another digit from that same paw to push the call button and waits for the ringing to start. His boyfriend is actually visiting him and staying in a hotel and while he could go visit instead of call he knows the plans that they made and wants to give the right amount of space. Still a call is always nice he thinks and then Lezlo hears the ringing end and a familiar voice answers the phone with a "hey, what's going on" making Lezlo smile wide. He then says "hey" back and the two exchange stories of how their respective days have been going. Both happy simply to hear each other's voice.