

Way of Life

The hunters have returned to the village. It takes six men to carry the beast that was slaughtered by my father's spear. This creature is his best kill yet. But as I run towards the animal, another group of men lift something else. A figure. I squint through the rising sun and my gut clenches, beads of sweat forming on my forehead. The men are moving my father, and I know that this was his last hunt. My father is lying dead in front of me.

That evening I watch as the thick, dark smoke wafts through the purple sky on the sunset, large bonfires burn below. A smile creeps across my face as the women set up their instruments. The celebrations are beginning.

Beautiful, delicate notes of music ring through the warm, quiet air. The women play their most elegant music for this essential moment, for the tribe, and my father. My father's spirit has a long way to go until it reaches the afterlife. The musicians are guiding the spirit through the Earth to reach its destination, as this is the custom in our tribe. They are led gracefully by their shaman, a woman of deep musical holiness and knowledge. The men dance and sing, laughing about the great times they shared with my father, and they convey their joyful vibes to my father's departing spirit. We roast and feed on my father's last kill, to honour his many successful hunts throughout his life.

The men finish dancing and begin acting out the great and meaningful moments in my father's life. Watching them perform causes a memory to flash through my head. My father is teaching me to hunt, and just after that, I earned my tribe a kill. My first kill. There was a marvellous celebration, but not nearly as grand as this one.

I look back over to the musicians, where my eyes meet my mother's. She is playing her soul-instrument, the instrument she and my father made together after love bound their spirits. She grins at me and turns back to her instrument, where she laughs and plays along with the other women.

Although dying is a vital ritual of the spirit, there is still a hole in my heart that my father would fill, and I feel myself desiring his presence immensely. He made our tribe proud in life, and in turn he was judged worthy to pass the trials of the Earth, and move on, where he will meet the spirits of our ancestors and fellow tribespeople. And while I will miss him, I will see him again when it is my time. And I will have a funeral as glorious as this. It is the way of my people. It is the way of our life.