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A Great Massacre

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A Great Massacre

"They called for their utter destruction if possible and that their women and children and their goods...shall be taken to be disposed of. A 1669 census recorded no Patowomeck warriors, and the tribe disappeared from all colonial records." – Encyclopedia Virginia

It was a lonely parlor and I sat at a solemn table in a dusty corner, awaiting the company of the man with a crunchy white beard. An anxious female professor sat beside me reassuring *he was the best*.

I tend to over-eagerly open up about my Native heritage, waiting for the chance to no longer look like the proverbial white girl. Instead I tend to chase an elusive identity by leading class discussion into a long tangent, "As a Patowomeck Native I think..."

The woman professor allowed me to believe I had a gift. She told me she could see it in my language as I spoke of my faded culture. She was the one who led me there, to the Shaman, "a man who can see into your spirit, while reading the curves of your palm."

Here I sat the quaint hole in the wall, quiet like cigarette smoke lingering. This claustrophobic room of clingy heat led me to tug at my clothing. With an ominous creak, the door let in a frigid gust of Kentucky winter. A gentleman with his parka nestled tightly around his face, glared around the room and it highlighted his antiqued crow's feet. Mr. Scott Parsons was approaching my table, a calloused hand out in front of him. Small exchanges between me and the woman professor sitting to my right and then quickly he made himself comfortable. Elegantly he stripped away his jacket and ordered a black earl, "Tea leaves still intact."

My clammy hands were stuck in my lap, waiting for him to ask. But I flashed back to the woman professor telling me, "He won't ask for your hand, he will wait until YOU feel ready." So when the

waitress in her black attire and pencil bun brought the man his dark, steaming tea, I stretched my hand towards him. Across the barn wood table, without an exchange of words he began to read. He could have noticed my cheekbones, yes, but he claims to have noticed the distinct lines, winding and turning like the Potomac River. "You are native, and you have suffered many deaths." A shutter of doubt shimmied through my body. "You are an old fragile woman, living in the new age." I gently pulled at my hand, timid of his comments. "Young woman," he said politely, "You have an old soul. From another time."

Nanny told me stories of her people, my people, the savages of the New World. Today, my Nan tells me that she wants to be cremated.

"Our people were run off that mountain. I dream about it every night. That's where I want my ashes."

I cringe at the thought of her body being burned. I imagine the large ceramic oven and her body becoming one, scattering her ashes over a cold mountain top. For now, my grandmother repeats the haunted memory of her people. Her past has become a nightmare, and she drowns in the icy Potomac River... every night.

"Dreaming is integral to the calling, selection, and empowerment of shamans."

– Charles D. Laughlin Carleton University

Something is of value in the act of dreaming. The abstract ideas of dreams are unique and considerably hard to explain. Every human has their own explanations and interpretations as their "altered state of consciousness" controls their sleep.

Shamanism: an act of “using dreams to travel spiritual dimensions to access information and to acquire power; they also apply dreaming to the solution of problems.”—Charles D. Laughlin Carleton University

The ideas of what dreams consist of and for what reasons, lead our peculiar minds to wander into unknown directions.

“Our people were run off that mountain.”

A great massacre occurred in 1666. And without a doubt Nan is convinced it happened to her, vividly detailing her predictable death. She is visionary for her people; she gives the present a view from the past.

“In July, the General Council of Virginia declared war on the Patawomecks. Most of the men were killed. Most of the women and children, who were not already living in English families, were captured as slaves. Indian descendants of the survivors of the 1666 massacre make up the current Patawomeck tribe.”—Patawomeck tribe of

Virginia

She sat on the opposite side of the table, rubbing her tired hands in a repeated manner.

“This old house, nothing breaks the chill in the winter,” she remarked.

My coffee was letting off a steam of cinnamon scent and my eyes blinked in a sleepy repetitive motion.

“The forest was wired with dark trees. And there we were, running.”

“We?”

“I was there. And they were chasing us, in and out, in and out. I felt like I was getting nowhere with this running. Like a dog chasin’ its own tail. And there we were.”

“Dreams are always like that, they are never getting anywhere.”

I stared at my coffee, its heat capturing my face. For some awful reason I was less interested in the depths of my grandmother’s dream and more interested in the swirls of coffee creamer making shapes in my mug.

“Nanny, do you think this dream was real or something?”

“Shiney said she has been having the same dream. But I don’t think she ever feels the cold water like I do. She just gets to the point where she is falling. I wake up and I can feel the cold sweat on my neck.”

My eyes widen like the mouth of the river.

“Shiney dreams it too? Do you think it could be a sister thing, like yall are synced or something.”

“Well that’s what she says when I called her not too long ago. Says she’s been sleeping on a lumpy mattress, been makin’ her have nightmares. My mattress is old too.”

2013, Warren County Kentucky, a quiet, solemn tea parlor. A clingy heat hung around like the stains of cigarette smoke. My hand was sprawled across a barn wood table. I dream of the man with the crunchy white beard reading the lines in my hand. They are swirling like a current in the water.

Present day, Stafford County Virginia, a quiet place of lingering presence. Swift river water spirals, as it bends and curves the land. My Nanny wants her ashes to be spread over the mountain where she experienced her first death.

It is because of "the orphan children of 1666, who also married English colonists that the Patawomeck Indians and their culture survived."—Bill Deyo, Patawomeck Tribal Historian