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## **Little White Butterfly**

**by Amelia Lee**

This time of year is the cold season. To me, winter is the most destructive season of all. Everything is swallowed in white, and our crops are dead. My home keeps the warmth trapped inside like a warm hug, so we don't freeze to death. Me and mama are preparing lunch for our family, deer stew and berries. My older sister, Citali, is out gathering cama root to prepare for the big feast taking place tomorrow. Papa has been out hunting for more than 3 hours, which is very unusual because he said he would return hours ago, but something must have come up. A horrible feeling erupts from my stomach. What if something happened to Aponee? *No, stop thinking that*, I shout in my mind.

"Koko," my mom says, waking me from my daze. "I'll be right back, I need to cut herbs from the garden for the stew." She speaks gently, trotting out of the pithouse. Just as she steps outside, something catches her eye, making her face go pale and lifeless.

"Koko!" My mother crows. "Koko!"

"What is it?" I say, her desperate tone triggering my nerves. I join her outside.

My heart stops, and I cannot breathe. There lies my father, the head of our tribe, with an arrow plunged into his stomach.

"Aponee! What happened to you?" I wail, holding back tears.

"Me and our best men went out hunting a few hours ago...and one of them shot me."

My mind swirls, and the bones in my body turn into mush. His words replay in my mind, like an endless loop. One of the men shot me. One of them shot me. One of our best men shot me.

"Koko," he says softly, interrupting the screaming noise in my head. "We have been sabotaged."

My dad coughs out red liquid, the color of hatred. His face becomes sallow.

"I'll go get Citali right now," My mom says, trying not to cry. I could do nothing but stand there and watch him die on the cold winter ground. After what seemed like an eternity, Mama returns with Citali. Her eyes are a violent red; she must have been crying. We embrace Papa in our arms like a fragile newborn. Finally, he finds the strength to speak.

"Listen, if I don't make it, you must find this traitor, and you will become Head of our tribe. You are old enough," my father says, gasping for breath. "Find him Koko. I couldn't get a good look

at him, but I know he had long hair, and an expression on his face that I cannot describe with words. Koko, you have t-."

My father trails off with a withering expression plastered on his face. That was all I had left of him. An image forever burned into my memory. The world stopped. "No Aponee!" I shout, my mind on a path of destruction. "No please, wake up!"

My words turn into quiet gasps. "Wake up," I say repeatedly. My sister Citali sits in the corner of the pithouse crying and throws her digging stick across the room.

"If I wasn't gathering cama roots, I could've been there to help him," She says, crying in between words.

"It wasn't your fault, Citali," my mom says supportively. "He's in a better place now."

Our shocked expressions are frozen on our faces for a long time. My mother, me, and my sister say nothing. The only sound is the winter wind howling against the pithouse. Eventually, I break the silence, "I will find him," I say quietly. "I will find the traitor and kill him."

Citali whispers, "Father will guide you in spirit."

Three days after my father's death, we held the funeral at the town center. All the families were there to honor him. We wore ceremonial garments. Someone sang a special song to honor my father.

My father's name Aponee means butterfly in my tribe. To me, he had always seemed like one. In the way he walked gently as he shot a deer. And as he lay over the deer, praying softly. When he smiled at me and Citali, it was just like a butterfly landing on your shoulder. It pained me that one of these people honoring my father never had an ounce of respect towards him. When the song stopped, two men carried his corpse off into the dead plain north of our village.

"Goodbye father," I said softly.

Afterward, we had a huge feast of all father's favorite foods: cama root, jackrabbit, deer, and different types of berries. Cold wind blew against my face as I ate. THWACK! A green arrow zipped in front of my face. ZIP! ZIP! THWACK! A flurry of arrows invaded our gathering.

"Everyone -- run back to the village! We are being attacked!" my mom screams. People flew down the hills, running towards giant gorges with tiny pithouses on the top. As I ran down the hill and approached a river, I could see the reflection of a young man with long hair and a devilish expression.

"Your father mistreated my family for generations," he said. "My people served as his slaves. It was my duty to kill your father and next I'll kill you. Have no doubt, your bloodline will be erased."

Another arrow whizzed past me.

*I need my bow and arrow!* I think.

I had left it on the hill. I run, dodging arrows from every direction. Gorges, flatlands, and rolling hills blur my vision. Ice patches from the edges of the Fraser and Columbia rivers are slick under my mukluks. Finally, I spot the bow and arrow that once belonged to my father.

"Only one arrow left!" I scream.

And then I remember my father's words. *When you have only one chance, you give everything you have.*

*I'll have to make it in one shot,* I say to myself.

The blue arrow barely grazes my face as I pull my elbow straight back and launch. Something in that moment evokes a memory from nearly 20 seasons ago. I remember a young child with long black hair, gathering cama roots. My father hit the child with lasso pits, and nearly stabbed him with an arrowhead. His mother got down on her knees and begged my father for mercy. He took her by the hand and led her up a hill, returning with red hatred on his hands. The mom was never seen again. Why was he so cruel to this family? Was he trying to make the boy a stronger man, or was he just heartless? A dry wail awoke me from my daze. The mysterious man lay there with my arrow plunged in his thigh.

"EYAHHHH!" He wails over and over again.

"No!" I scream out loud. "I will be back." My legs sped through the dry terrain until I got to the village. "I have shot the intruder!" I scream so loudly the pithouses rumble. "We must heal him please!" I scream even louder this time.

Heads poke through pithouses, people emerge clutching deer hides, cama roots, and rock. The old medicine man comes out with healing tools I hadn't seen before. "Take me to him," he says in a rickety low voice.

The whole tribe goes silent. Salmon stop flapping, deer don't gallop, the wind goes still. Me and the man trot through the terrain passing the rivers, and neighboring villages. The man with the long hair lays on the ground with blood on his leg.

"Ahh let's get you fixed up eh?" The medicine man says gently. Out of a bear hide basket, he pulls a thick mixture and a deer hide. Carefully, he pulls out the arrow.

"AHHH!" he screams.

"I know it hurts, but you will feel much better soon." He lays the creamy ointment on the wound, and ties a strip of deer hide around it. "There, better?" The old man asks.

"Yes."

We both walk back to the village helping the long-haired man stabilize his wounded leg. And then I see it. A little white butterfly floating with the wind.

"Good job Koko," it seems to say. "You made me proud." The butterfly lands on my shoulder then floats off into the wind. "I love you father!" I whisper, holding back tears. "I love you."

The butterfly swooped down in circles, drifting off into the sunset. Once we got to the village, I lay my weary head down on the floor of our pithouse. Sunsets after, winter drifts away, leaving warm floors, and new harvest. I am now the head of the tribe, feeling more wise than ever.

Whenever I feel nervous, I know in those moments my Aponee is with me. Facing challenges and feeling pride with me. We are one. Together. With each other forever.