



Gogi Asherah

Summer of Asherah



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“Soqu Unesdi Uwasi Ulitsvyasdi.

A horse trusts only those with brave hearts.”

-Ta’al Rinowhn Saying

Sequoyah rose from his latest mound of soil, stretching his aching back and savoring the warm sunlight on his face. This wasn’t his usual work, he was a storyteller, not one of the tribe’s farmers. But this year was a Gogi Asherah, or “Summer of Asherah,” which meant a longer and hotter growing season. So here he was, shaping earth for corn in a shallow river valley alongside other Ta’al. Some built mounds like him, others watered them, and a few planted seeds. This was the ancient way of sowing the Three Sisters—corn, beans, and squash. First, you mounded the soil, watered it, and sowed corn. When the stalks grew two hands high, you added beans and when they started showing, squash. Like Asherah’s daughters who they were named after, the Three Sisters nurtured one another, following Innatraea’s rhythm; and then sustained the whole tribe.

Sequoyah knew how important the planting was, these crops would feed their tribe through winter, and give them enough for the upcoming festivals. Because of that every Ta’al eventually ended up helping plant or harvest. He looked at the empty spot next to him, where his daughter Dyani was supposed to be, well most Ta’al.



He smiled remembering the first time she hadn't shown up, making him spend half the morning worriedly looking for her. She had been happily watching their tribe's Soqu, though the word translated as horse, it had a deeper meaning. A Ta'al Soqu wasn't actually a horse, but someone whose spirit embodied horses. An honored position amongst the Ta'al. They both trained captured horses for the tribe and acted as guardians to the wild herds that roamed Ayuwasi, or the "Sea of Grass," their homeland.

The second time Dyani had been found by her mother, Inola, on one of the rare times she was home with the tribe for a while. Dyani had been under a tree at the valley's edge, watching the wild horse herds. That moment had made it clear that their Dyani's heart belonged to the horses. Asherah, mother goddess of Innatraea, had chosen. Sequoyah smiled, how could he be mad at his daughter for that? She was living her spirit's purpose.

His mind drifted to Inola, at the memory of that event. She was one of the tribe's warriors, a Ta'al Whip Master. That duty kept her away from them at times, while she was protecting their borders or fighting. When Sequoyah had first become Inola's ahavah, or "beloved one," it had been his duty to go with her and attend to her needs. After Dyani had been born, that changed to taking care of their daughter at home. He loved both of them, it was a small pain inside, he'd gotten used to, that the two most important women of his life were often separated by such distances.

Then his reverie was interrupted by Adohi's sharp voice, she was one of the older Ta'al women farmers. "If you're going to rest your back like an old woman you may as well tell us a story."

Tayanita, another of the women but similar in age to himself yelled over. "Tell us about Red Cedar Woman again!"

Adohi looked in the woman's direction. "That one again? It's all you ever ask for!"



Tayanita arched her eyebrow in response. “It’s a good story, better than the nonsense you like.”

“When you get to be my age and don’t have a husband anymore you’ll enjoy that same *nonsense!*”

Sequoyah smiled and knelt back down, he could tell them stories just as easily planting as standing. Their jibes meant that they liked him, but also that they were curious what he would do, everything was a test with Ta’al women. He was about to begin telling Red Cedar Woman, he liked the story too. But he was interrupted again as Zehava’s voice cut through their chatter, making them all go silent. Their tribe’s matriarch had a way of doing that.

“Sequoyah come with me, please. I have already sent several of my own *Whip Masters* to retrieve Dyani from the *Soqu*.”

He looked up at her, eyes going wide. “Matriarch what...?”

He heard Adohi hiss behind him, the sound of subtle warning passing her lips as a breath. No one talked to Zehava that way. True worry settled deeply within him when, instead of correcting him, their matriarch knelt down and put a gentle hand on his shoulder, meeting his eyes.

“It is Inola. Her warband was ambushed, she is home, but it is bad. She’s in Orev’s tent, he is tending her wounds. Come.”

Sequoyah shot to his feet and followed her, Inola would be alright he knew it, she had always been stronger than him. The other Ta’al began humming softly as he walked away, a soft deep comforting sound. They called it Walela, or “Hummingbird,” it was a way to show comfort and hope in moments of sorrow.

A cold breeze off the river blew over Sequoyah, causing him to shudder, and he could feel his thoughts shifting. He’d always imagined a cord connecting him and his Inola. That cord was their bond, even across vast distances. Now all he could imagine was that cord swaying in the wind, stretching, and eventually snapping. He started to run.



A few years later...

Dyani was supposed to be helping her father with the planting, he had been helping with more often since her mother's death, and she understood. Her father was a storyteller, and so he needed people and belonged to them, in a way that was utterly different from herself. To Dyani Ayuwasi and the wild horse herds were home, she didn't need people, just Adsila.

His name meant *Fire* and he was her best friend, he was always with her. They had met shortly after her mother's death, and training the wild beast of a horse had helped them both. Adsila had simply become hers, he just wouldn't let anyone else ride him. Sometimes horses made their own choices, no matter what you tried, and Adsila was as stubborn an animal as you could ever find. Dyani patted his forehead and stroked the side of his face gently. Adsila snorted, restless, he wanted to run. "I know boy, we won't rest long, I promise."

Dyani sighed, her hand falling off Adsila, and leaned against the nearby tree, closing her eyes as the tears started to fall. This had been her mother's tree. Dyani smiled through the tears though, remembering days of gazing out into Ayuwasi together, watching the wild horse herds, and the first time her mother had found her here. It was several Gogi Asherah previous, that's how her people kept time. Dyani was supposed to be helping with the planting then too, but she was here watching the herds. She could still hear her mother's voice. "*Yuhni, you love them don't you? The horses?*"

Dyani's smile grew a little wider remembering what her mother had once called her. *Yuhni* was their people's word for a child, a sign of her mother's love and fierce protection.



Her smile faded though, as Dyani squeezed her eyelids tighter, quietly crying more, remembering the moments that often came next; under her mother's tree. How Dyani wished she could still spin in circles under the sun, feel her hair blowing in the wind, and talk to her mother just once more. “Yes, *I love them, Agitsi! They're so beautiful!*” Agitsi, their people's word for mother.

Then her sad reverie was interrupted as Adsila snorted and butted against her. Dyani opened her eyes and leaned against him, staring at her hand as she stroked his beautiful mane, and feeling his warmth. He pushed himself against her again, he understood she was sad, and that both of them needed to be in the wind.

Dyani patted his shoulder gently, then traced her right hand up towards his mane and grabbed ahold. “You want to run don't you boy?”

Adsila snorted and stamped his feet in response, making Dyani laugh and smile again. She patted him with her left hand, before using her grip on his mane to throw her leg over him and pull herself onto his back.

Dyani used her knees to get Adsila moving, taking a moment to look out across Ayuwasi and breathe. There was something special about riding a horse, as if their strength added to yours. Adsila didn't just carry her, but supported her with everything he was, and she loved him for it. Dyani patted him on the side and looked into the vast sky, imagining that her mother was out there somewhere, watching over her still.

As Adsila started to move faster and the wind picked up, Dyani remembered what her mother had told her once, after the first time she'd fallen off of a horse. “Soqu Unesdi Uwasi Ulitsvyasdi.” *A horse trusts only those with brave hearts.*



Her mother had believed in her even then, and had known her daughter's spirit. Dyani sat up taller and spread her arms out, she could be brave and remember who her mother had been inside of her heart. Like Adsila had taught her. He started to run, his hooves hitting the ground in his own rhythm; a special kind of thunder. The wind surrounded Dyani, whipping her hair back, and taking away her sorrow. She closed her eyes, feeling the wind and sun, remembering.

