



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—his hands were meant for gestures that shaped legends in the air, not for shaping earth. But this year was a Gogi Asherah, a "Summer of Asherah," which meant a longer and hotter growing season than most. The rains had come early and stayed late, and the soil was rich and dark and hungry for seeds.

So here he was, shaping earth for corn in a shallow river valley alongside other Ta'al.

Some built mounds like him, their hands dark with soil up to the wrists. Others carried water from the river in clay vessels balanced on their heads, moving in a steady rhythm that had been perfected over generations. A few planted seeds, pressing each one into the earth with quiet reverence, whispering the old words that asked Asherah to bless the growing.

This was the ancient way of sowing the Three Sisters—corn, beans, and squash.



First, you mounded the soil, building small hills that would hold water and warmth. Then you watered them, coaxing the earth to softness. Then you sowed corn, pressing the seeds into the heart of each mound. When the stalks grew two hands high, you added beans, which would climb the corn like children climbing their mothers. And when the beans started showing their first leaves, you planted squash, whose broad leaves would shade the soil and keep it moist.

Like Asherah's daughters for whom they were named, the Three Sisters nurtured one another, each giving what the others needed, following Innatraea's rhythm. And then they sustained the whole tribe through the long winters when snow covered Ayuwasi and the wind howled like hungry wolves.

Sequoyah knew how important the planting was. These crops would feed their tribe through winter, and give them enough for the upcoming festivals—the harvest celebration, the first frost gathering, the midwinter stories told around great fires. Because of that, every Ta'al eventually ended up helping plant or harvest, no matter what their usual work might be.

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 searching for her. He had checked the cooking fires, the weaving circles, the children's learning grounds—everywhere a young girl might wander. His heart had been in his throat by the time he found her.

She had been happily watching their tribe's Soqu.



The word translated as "horse," but it held a deeper meaning. A Ta'al Soqu wasn't actually a horse—they were someone whose spirit embodied horses. It was an honored position amongst the Ta'al, perhaps the most honored of all. They trained the wild horses captured from the great herds for the tribe's use, gentling them with patience and whispered words. But more than that, they acted as guardians to the wild herds that roamed Ayuwasi—the "Sea of Grass"—their homeland.

The Soqu understood things that other Ta'al did not. They could read the weather in the way a herd moved, could find water by watching where the lead mare walked, could sense danger before it arrived by the twitch of a stallion's ear. They were bridges between the Ta'al and the wild things, and they were treated with deep respect.

Dyani had been sitting at the edge of the training grounds, utterly still, her eyes following every movement of the horses with an intensity that Sequoyah had never seen in her before. She hadn't even noticed him approach.

The second time she disappeared, she 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 in the distance—dark shapes moving across the golden grass like shadows cast by clouds.

That moment had made it clear that their Dyani's heart belonged to the horses.

Asherah, mother goddess of Innatraea, had chosen.

Sequoyah smiled, shaking his head at the memory. How could he be mad at his daughter for that?



She was living her spirit's purpose. Not everyone found that purpose so young—some searched their whole lives without finding it. Dyani had known hers before she could properly braid her own hair.

His mind drifted to Inola, Dyani's mother, the woman he loved.

She was Shal'ifar, a Ta'al Whip Master. The tribe's defenders, fierce warriors, women and men who trained for years to wield the long leather whips that could disarm an enemy at twenty paces or snap a charging wolf's neck before it reached the herd. They were respected and feared in equal measure, and Inola was among the best of them.

That duty kept her away from them often, while she was protecting their borders or fighting the threats that sometimes came from beyond Ayuwasi—Aedonian military incursions, desperate raiders from elsewhere, occasionally something worse. When Sequoyah had first become Inola's ahavah—her "beloved one"—it had been his duty to go with her and attend to her needs. He had traveled at her side for three summers, learning the rhythms of a warrior's life, sleeping under stars and waking to the sound of her sharpening her weapons.

After Dyani had been born, that changed. Someone needed to stay home, to raise their daughter, to give her roots while Inola gave her wings. It was not a hard choice—Sequoyah loved their home, loved the daily rhythms of tribal life, loved watching Dyani grow. But he missed Inola when she was gone, missed her with an ache that never quite faded.

He loved both of them. It was a small pain inside, one he'd gotten used to, that the two most important women of his life were often separated by such vast distances.

But the cord held. It always held.



Then his reverie was interrupted by Adohi's sharp voice. She was one of the older Ta'al women farmers, her face weathered by decades of sun and wind, her hands as tough as leather.

"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 from her own mound. "Tell us about Red Cedar Woman again!"

Adohi looked in the woman's direction, her expression souring. "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!"

Several of the other farmers laughed, and even Sequoyah couldn't help but smile. Adohi's "nonsense" was well known—she liked the bawdy tales, the ones about lovers meeting in secret and warriors being brought low by pretty faces. Not inappropriate, exactly, but not the sort of thing you told to children.

Sequoyah smiled and knelt back down. He could tell them stories just as easily planting as standing—his voice carried well, and the rhythm of the work made a good backdrop for the rhythm of words. 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. They were always watching, always measuring, always deciding if you were worthy of their respect.



He was about to begin telling Red Cedar Woman—he liked the story too, liked the way it built from sorrow to triumph, liked the ending where the cedar grove grew from her sacrifice—when he was interrupted again.

Zehava's voice cut through their chatter, making them all go silent.

Their tribe's matriarch had a way of doing that. She didn't raise her voice, didn't demand attention. She simply spoke, and somehow the world listened. She was not tall, not physically imposing, but there was something in her bearing that commanded absolute respect. She had led the tribe for nearly thirty summers, had seen them through drought and plenty, war and peace.

When Zehava spoke, you listened.

"Sequoyah, come with me, please. I have already sent several Shali'far 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. No one questioned, no one demanded. You waited for the matriarch to tell you what she chose to tell you.

But Zehava did not correct him.

True worry settled deeply within him when, instead of the sharp rebuke he expected, their matriarch knelt down and put a gentle hand on his shoulder, meeting his eyes. Her face was lined with age, but her eyes were clear and full of something he did not want to name.

Compassion. Sorrow. The look you gave someone before you broke their heart.



"It is Inola," she said quietly. "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, stronger than anyone he knew. She had survived a hundred battles, had scars that told stories he could never match. She would survive this too. She had to.

The other Ta'al began humming softly as he walked away, a low, deep sound that rose from their chests and filled the air like the vibration of Innatraea herself. They called it Walela—"Hummingbird"—and it was a way to show comfort and hope in moments of sorrow. The sound followed him as he walked, wrapping around him like invisible arms.

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. Not a physical thing, but something real nonetheless—a thread of spirit that stretched between them no matter how far apart they were. When she was fighting on the borders, he could feel her. When she was safe, the cord hummed with warmth. When she was in danger, it pulled tight with worry.

Now all he could imagine was that cord swaying in the wind.
Stretching. Fraying.

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 more often since her mother's death, and she understood why. Her father was a storyteller, and so he needed people and belonged to them in a way that was utterly different from herself. When he was sad, he sought out the tribe. He told stories to fill the silence. He surrounded himself with voices and laughter and the small daily rituals of communal life.

Dyani was not like that.

To Dyani, Ayuwasi and the wild horse herds were home. She didn't need people—not the way her father did. She needed the wind in her hair and the thunder of hooves and the vast open sky that stretched forever in every direction.

She needed Adsila.

His name meant "Fire," and he was her best friend. He was always with her—had been always with her since shortly after her mother's death, when grief had hollowed her out and left her feeling like a shell of herself.

Training the wild beast of a horse had helped them both.

Adsila had been untameable when the Soqu first caught him. He had thrown every rider who tried to mount him, had bitten and kicked and fought with a fury that made the trainers shake their heads and talk about releasing him back to the wild. Some horses simply couldn't be gentled, they said. Some spirits were too fierce.



But Dyani had seen something in him. Something that reminded her of herself—wild and hurting and refusing to surrender. She had spent weeks just sitting near his enclosure, not trying to touch him, not trying to train him. Just being there. Letting him get used to her presence. Letting him decide, in his own time, whether she was worthy of his trust.

One morning, he had walked up to the fence and pressed his nose against her hand.

After that, 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. The Soqu had laughed and shaken their heads and told Dyani that she had been chosen.

Just as her mother had once told her she would be.

Dyani patted his forehead and stroked the side of his face gently, feeling the warmth of him, the solid reality of his presence. Adsila snorted, restless. He wanted to run. He always wanted to run—standing still was not in his nature.

"I know, boy," she murmured. "We won't rest long. I promise."

Adsila tossed his head, impatient, and she couldn't help but smile.

Then the smile faded.

Dyani sighed, her hand falling from Adsila's face, and leaned against the nearby tree. She closed her eyes as the tears started to fall, unbidden and unstoppable.

This had been her mother's tree.



It was an old oak, its trunk thick enough that three people couldn't link hands around it, its branches spreading wide to create a canopy of shade. Her mother had found her here, the second time she had run away from the planting. Had sat down beside her and looked out at Ayuwasi together, watching the wild horse herds move across the golden grass.

Dyani smiled through the tears, remembering.

It was several Gogi Asherah previous—that's how her people kept time, counting the long summers that came when Asherah blessed the land. 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, warm and amused and full of love.

"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, but it was more than that—it was an endearment, a sign of her mother's love and fierce protection. Her mother had called her Yuhni until the day she died.

The smile faded as Dyani squeezed her eyelids tighter, crying harder now, remembering the moments that had come next. The moments 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!" she had said, using their people's word for mother. "They're so beautiful!"



Her mother had laughed—that full, rich laugh that Dyani would never hear again—and pulled her close.

"Then that is what you will be, Yuhni. A Soqu. I can see it in you."

And she had been right. Asherah had chosen, and Dyani had become what her mother had seen in her.

But her mother wasn't here to see it.

Her mother would never see anything again.

Dyani's sad reverie was interrupted as Adsila snorted and butted against her, his nose pressing into her shoulder. She opened her eyes and leaned against him, staring at her hand as she stroked his beautiful mane—red-brown like autumn leaves, like fire, like his name.

He pushed himself against her again, warm and solid and *present*. He understood she was sad. And he knew, as she did, that both of them needed to be in the wind.

Standing still was not in either of their natures.

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, his whole body quivering with barely contained energy.

Dyani laughed—a real laugh, surprising herself—and smiled again. She patted him with her left hand, then used her grip on his mane to throw her leg over him and pull herself onto his back.

No saddle. No bridle. Just her and Adsila and the bond between them.



Dyani used her knees to get him moving, taking a moment to look out across Ayuwasi and breathe. The Sea of Grass stretched to the horizon in every direction, golden and green and endless. The wind moved through it in waves, making the grass ripple like water. In the distance, she could see a herd of wild horses—dark shapes against the gold, moving together in their ancient patterns.

There was something special about riding a horse. It was as if their strength added to yours, their spirit merged with yours. Adsila didn't just carry her—he supported her with everything he was. When she rode him, she was not just Dyani, a grieving girl who had lost her mother. She was something more. Something fiercer. Something that belonged to the wind and the grass and the endless sky.

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. The clouds moved slowly, white against blue, and she could almost see her mother's face in them.

I'm still here, Yuhni. I'm still watching. Be brave.

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 a horse. She had been crying, more from embarrassment than pain, and her mother had knelt down and taken her face in her hands.

"Soqu Unesdi Uwasi Ulitsvyasdi," she had said. *A horse trusts only those with brave hearts.*



"You fell because you were afraid, Yuhni. But you got back up. That is what matters. The horse will learn to trust you—not because you never fall, but because you always rise."

Her mother had believed in her even then. Had known her daughter's spirit before Dyani knew it herself.

Dyani sat up taller on Adsila's back and spread her arms out wide, letting the wind catch her like wings. She could be brave. She could remember who her mother had been, carry her inside her heart like a flame that never went out.

Like Adsila had taught her.

He started to run, his hooves hitting the ground in his own rhythm—a special kind of thunder that Dyani felt in her bones. The wind surrounded her, whipping her hair back, filling her lungs, taking away her sorrow. Not erasing it—nothing could erase it—but carrying it, transforming it, making it something she could bear.

She closed her eyes, feeling the wind and sun, remembering.

Her mother's voice. Her mother's laugh. Her mother's arms around her under this very tree.

Soqu Unesdi Uwasi Ulitsvyasdi.

A horse trusts only those with brave hearts.

And somewhere in the Sea of Grass, a girl with a brave heart rode toward the horizon, carrying her mother's memory like a banner, like a blessing, like a fire that would never go out.

