

Mirah Alix

Canterbury Tale—"All Good Things Come to Those Who Wait"

A blanket of darkness swam across the sky, enveloping the forest for the night and bringing along the burden of yet another April tempest. An eagle glided through the air, eyeing four two-legged figures amongst the trees as they scurried into a cave. The largest of these figures escorted the smaller three, rushing their heads under the rock and into safety from the lightning. At that moment, a blinding flash electrocuted the muddled sky, and the youngest of the boys let out a sound of fright. Their guide, Agatana, was tranquil and told the boy, "Uneyhi, you scream at nothing. The sky is kind, and its strong light is a reminder of its powerful gift to our harvest." Uneyhi understood, and sat near the edge of the cave to observe the miraculous rain, but still jumped at each flash of white and hammer of thunder. Lasdi, content to startle his peer, extended muscular arms and hit his hands together behind Uneyhi's head, creating a clamorous and echoing sound within the cave. The already frightened boy bound to his feet, and realizing what had occurred, turned to slap Lasdi. Like wolf pups, they began a struggle of hateful friendship and continued the brawl until Agatana called them over to a fire he'd ignited.

Confetti-like sparks in colors of the sun danced about the cave, and their third tribal brother, Nelvodo, was already sitting peacefully by the heat source. Lasdi tossed his thick black braid behind his back and while enjoying the rays of heat circulating in his fingertips, found a need to complain, "Agatana, I hate the rain. It's keeping us from our task, and I'm anxious to hunt down a buck!" He jumped from his seat and began to act out the scene, "I'll crouch behind a tree, gazing upon the oblivious deer, and when the time is right, release my arrow into his flesh!" As he 'released' the arrow, he began dancing as if the prey was truly caught, and the other boys laughed at his immaturity. Agatana hoarsely chuckled, and with his sandpapered vocal chords asked the boys to come once again to the fire, and to listen to his words. They immediately obeyed this respected elder, and were once again in awe of his ability to

silence a room. Crackles from the wood in the flames and pattering raindrops were the only audible sounds, and Agatana sat patiently with his deep olive hands resting on leather-covered brittle-jointed knees, his wrinkled eyelids concealing the river-colored irises beneath, and long dead hair billowing from the fire's soft wind.

No one dared to interrupt his peaceful breathing, until Agatana himself opened his eyes and broke the silence, "Lasdi hates the rain. Uneyhi is frightened of its power. But I see that Nelvodo, sitting with patience, has understood the cycle of nature, and that all good things come with time. You will all catch a buck. Not tonight, no. But you will, and because you will have waited through the storms, both wet and dry, the catch will be even sweeter."

"How can something that takes away our time make anything better?" Uneyhi was dubious, even after noting Agantana's credible values.

"To understand this, young one, is to understand many lessons of life. As you know, not everything is easy, good, or peaceful, but if you look ahead, you can see the amazing effects that patience, pain, and struggle create." He gazed outside the cave at the speckled air and bending trees, and after what seemed an awkward eternity for the boys, heavily sighed and turned his crinkled face to their awaiting eyes, "I will tell you the story of Ganohali Adanvido, the Hunter Spirit, and perhaps this will make you comprehend..."

It was my great-grandfather Ayoli's fifteenth winter, and he, like you, was embarking on his quest to kill a buck. In his time, guides weren't provided for the trip to become a man, and he was sent away during the midst of January. In thin moccasins, he left a soft trail of footsteps away from the village, and for the following three months, was not heard or seen. Alone in nature, Ayoli trekked into the forest, searching for his buck. The winter was especially harsh, the white sky never ceased to litter, leaving the ground a constant change of geography, and was incredibly blinding as it reflected the sun

rays and sparkled in my grandfather's eyes. He had only brought two weeks worth of food in his pack, and cleverly devoured it over the course of three weeks. However, after those twenty-one frost-bitten days, he had still not spotted a single buck or deer. In fear of starvation, Ayoli began the long walk back to our village. However, when he saw from a distance the face of his father, he knew he could not return unless he held a buck in his arms. Empty-handed, he would have returned a boy, a shame, and as a disappointment to his father. What he gazed upon now: a smiling man, proud, and strong, would morph into someone much smaller in stature, a father with a failed son, a father with no further purpose. This was a future he could not bear. Weak, starving, and quivering from the icy air, Ayoli slowly climbed back into the woods, knowing he would leave with a buck, or never leave at all.

Finally, after three more days of exhausted waiting, he spotted a hoofmark in the flaky snow. After five paces, he spotted another and another and another. Because of the freshness of the marks, he thought the beast would be within his sight extremely soon, but suddenly the prints ceased. Ayoli was bemused, but after coming this close, would not give up easily. He scavenged the surrounding area for hours, deteriorating the snow in a stressed circle of footprints until finally he cited a miniscule mark. This mark, a hoof print, would be the only piece of hope Ayoli needed to continue. Despite his troubles, he knew from this one mark, that there was still a chance. Using the hunting skills his accomplished father had so faithfully spent hours teaching him, Ayoli followed the direction of the mark. While he spotted few additional footprints of the prize, he continued treading through the forest, determined.

Determination is powerful trait, and Ayoli knew that he was far behind the buck, he knew he had to walk fast, long, and straight in order to ever catch up. Doing so, it still took him days to find the freshest signs of the stag. Finally, after all his suffering through piercing snow, a clenching stomach, and dizzying weaknesses, he spotted the majestic creature. It stood alone, a thick coat, developed antlers, muscular neck, and (in Ayoli's mind, overcome by hunger) stocky saliva-inducing venison. The

time had come, and Ayoli pulled his bow and arrow from behind his pack. It would take at least three arrows to take down the beast, and luckily, the first was aimed perfectly to pierce the jugular artery. The young hunter, weak from exhaustion, fumbled on the second arrow, and thus stalled its' departure from his bow; however, the efforts were not in vain as the head shot straight into the buck's hip. Admitting defeat, the legs of the creature fell beneath him, and blood stained the white snow around his powerful antlers. Ayoli carefully approached him from behind, and delivered a merciful slice that ended his prey's life. Letting out a sigh of relief, and shrugging pounds of stress off his shoulders, Ayoli sat down for the first time in two days, recuperating from the excitement of capturing the buck and completing his task.

However, he still had to make it back to the village to see his father's proud face and to impress the elders of the tribe, to become a man. Resisting the urge to eat his prize, he followed the tradition of bringing it to the tribe as a gift, and tied the legs of the beast to a bearskin cloth. He then wrapped this around his waist and began the agonizing journey through the forest. Pulling the extra weight, Ayoli's thighs screamed at his every move, meanwhile his feet were too frostbitten to care. They were silent, numb, but after two more days of surviving on the few plants still alive, his feet had carried him home. Once he'd entered the edge of the village, every muscle in his body collapsed, and he lay face down in the snow, the buck slid to his feet. A woman nearby ran to his lifeless body and called for others to come help. Ayoli was carried by his father into their tent, laid by the fire, and examined for injuries. A few children had gathered around the buck outside, hoping to soon be the devourers of its cooked meat. They danced around it, rejoicing in the fact that their hunger pangs would be put to sleep. Meanwhile, Ayoli awakened to sound of his father's voice, but his words were faded by haziness...a shield that lay between him and the world. The weeks of starvation and cold had greatly affected the boy, and it wasn't until the fire had returned his toes to health (about three moons) that the sights and sounds of his village emerged from behind the blurry shield. He called out for his father and mother,

and he was happy to see the strong cheekbones on his father's smiling face. He wanted to ask how long he'd been gone, how many people the buck fed, and what life had been like with him away, but his father was first to speak,

"Ayoli, we thought you were dead, and then like a spirit you came back to our lives, bringing the feast! No one has dared to eat the buck, son...it is all yours."

"But, father," Ayoli stammered in confusion, "the buck is for the people."

"That is tradition, Ayoli, but you survived longer alone in the wild than anyone...we thought you were dead, we thought you were dead..." His father and mother swarmed Ayoli with hugs and praise, thankful for his breathing soul. They propped him on his feet, and limping due to leftover pain, Ayoli exited the tent, finding himself in the middle of a great celebration. His people were chanting "Ganohali Adanvido! Ganohali Adanvido!" and handing him many gifts. His prolonged absence made the people feel as if he would never return, and the miracle that he did convinced them he was blessed by the spirits, and named him Hunter Spirit. Not only had he braved the terrible winter, but he'd brought back the largest buck they'd ever seen. His name would be legend and his tale of patience, strength, and perseverance would be a lesson for all young boys to come.

Agatana sighed with the end of his story, leaving the boys to silently contemplate how Ayoli's journey could inspire theirs. Once again, the only sounds were of the fire's random snaps and pops and precipitation from the sky. The silence actually allowed the boys to realize that the raindrops were only trickling from the tree leaves, not pouring from the clouds.

"It stopped raining." Nelvodo finally articulated, and Agatana chuckled at the timing of this realization.

“Yes, all things, good and bad will come to an end sometime. Just like Ayoli’s suffering, if you wait long enough, and persevere through the obstacles of life, you will be rewarded.” Agatana was proud he’d found a way to influence the young boys, and each of them sat as still as he’d ever seen. They understood his lesson, and were not only ready for the hunt ahead, but prepared for many quandaries in life, knowing that all good things come to those who wait.