

Father of the Whirlwind

Anoshi watched in silent anger the whirlwind blustering down from the mountain like each of its brothers before it.

Warning cries carried through the village on the first of the winds. All around him, children screamed, women called for help, and men barked instructions. It was the same chaos, always, no matter how often it happened. Some men released the horses to run for their lives, while others ushered the rest of the villagers into the dugouts—their only safe place when the unstoppable force of the whirlwinds came.

As the last of the men disappeared beneath ground, Anoshi's brother called his name, and he turned and followed Nameet inside. Together, they pulled the heavy door shut.

Though he could not see, Anoshi knew each family huddled, praying that their house would stand. Nothing else could be done.

In minutes silence had engulfed the outside. The whirlwind was gone.

Anoshi counted the people as they left the dugout while his brother and other men ran into the village to see the damage. There was always damage, but some days it was minimal.

The reports came back before the dugout was empty.

"Three houses today."

"The western cornfield is destroyed."

"I am gathering men to track the horses."

"Brother..."

As the endless voices beckoned for attention, Anoshi turned and saw Nameet walking towards him. Behind him, a stretch of cloth was born by two men. Anoshi's father lay upon it. They set it on the ground.

"He did not come into the shelter," Nameet murmured.

"Where was someone to help him?" Anoshi accused. His father was old and did not always understand the world anymore.

"We have our families," one of the men said. "Where were you to help?"

Anoshi approached and knelt. There was no life in his father's broken body. He closed his eyes to the sight, and the anger he always held at the whirlwinds pulsed. "This is enough. This has to end!"

“You can yell at the whirlwind, but it will not listen,” his brother mocked.

“The whirlwind yells at us, and for years we have cowered before it. I shall no longer.”

“You can stand before the whirlwind, yet it will throw you from its path,” Nameet said.

Anoshi rose and did not look at his brother. For years, their father had said the same things. He had said the only way to survive was to hide from the whirlwinds. They could not fight them. They could not tame them. They could only run and be safe. But the trees where they hunted food could not run. Their farms could not run. Their houses could not run.

“There is one the whirlwinds listen to,” Anoshi said.

“The father of the whirlwind? There is none of greater power.”

“Now that I am village leader, it is my right to speak with him if I wish.”

Nameet scoffed. “You would do better to wrestle the whirlwind than approach him.”

Anoshi sighed. “But it is impossible to wrestle the whirlwind.”

“You will surely die if you enter his presence.”

He met his brother’s eyes. “But it is possible to die.”

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Anoshi was titled village leader that evening as they burned his father’s body. Not much was changed. For three years, he had acted as village leader while his father often wandered aimlessly and without warning. They knew his mind was not completely retained. Now, Anoshi requested his brother act as leader in case he did not return.

Nameet advised him not to go and not only him, every man in the village told him he had a foolish determination, and the women whispered the same thing. Anoshi was alone in his conviction that this was right, but he would not care. If he died, it would be in trying to prevent other deaths. To him, that was worth it.

He began his trip when the moon was at its highest. It was told that at the peak of the mountain, the father of the whirlwind sat, breathing in clouds through his pipe and blowing them out to rage over plains below. The risen moon illuminated this peak.

Anoshi walked through the night, wondering the while if it would be better to meet the father in the night or under the sun. In the night, he decided, as he

reached the base of the father's mountain at dawn and felt his lack of sleep tugging him downwards, begging him to not yet climb.

Looking up, he could see no one at the top of the mountain. Legends might have invented the father. Legends might have invented the father's dwelling. No one had ever seen the father of the whirlwind. He was only spoken of. Since the ancient generations, people had claimed to know where he sat. Anoshi did not know of anyone venturing into the father's presence. None had been brave enough before. One who could make the whirlwind was one who should be feared.

Anoshi lay on the ground beside the mountain and tried to sleep, but the sun was too bright and too hot, and when he closed his eyes, he heard only screams from his people at the devastation of a whirlwind.

He roused himself and would have continued, but his feet begged not to be used. A nearby tree called a greeting with its shade, and Anoshi approached to sit beneath the branches. He leaned his back on the trunk and closed his eyes. They opened a moment later when he heard a noise, and looking, he saw a cave in the side of the mountain, staring down at him with its single black eye. In this eye, sat his own father, cross-legged, smoking a pipe.

Anoshi stood, and would have approached, but his father spoke.

"The cave opens its mouth to all, but only whispers secrets to those who listen."

Anoshi would have asked his father what was meant, but his father spoke again.

"The whirlwinds do no wrong. They sing and dance, and you are merely caught under their feet like the ants that crawl through the dirt as we walk."

"We are not ants," Anoshi called, angry that his father cared so little.

"You are not," his father responded, "and the whirlwinds look at you and say to each other 'we are not people.'"

"They do not speak to each other," Anoshi said. "They are alone. Each one lives and dies before his brother is born from their father's breath."

"They are as close to each other as you and I," his father sucked in deeply the smoke from his pipe.

Anoshi's teeth ground together. "You do not belong here, Father."

His father simply chuckled, teeth clicking against the pipe. "*You* do not belong

here, Anoshi.”

And suddenly Anoshi woke. He knew he had been dreaming as he spoke to his father, and yet he stood where he had stood in the dream, and in front of him was the cave his father had been sitting in. He walked forward, each step as slow and uncertain as the last, until he reached the cave. In the opening he stood for seven minutes, staring at what he could not see in the darkness.

Finally, he whispered. “I am listening.” Then he laid down to sleep.

It was hours later—seven hours and sixteen minutes later. This he knew as he sat up, and yet he did not know if he was waking, sleeping, or in a trance.

Regardless, he could see in front of him, so he walked deeper into the cave. A very short blue man emerged from around the corner and stood in Anoshi’s way.

“What are you called?” Anoshi asked.

“Sonsta,” the little man said. “What are you looking for?”

“The father,” Anoshi said.

“Which one?” Sonsta asked.

“Which one?” Anoshi repeated. “Only one blows from this peak.”

“Idiot humans,” Sonsta grumbled. “Marching our way, assuming they know all things.” He took a step closer and repeated. “Which father do you seek?”

“The father of the whirlwind,” Anoshi said, unsure now that he even called him by the right name. How could there be more than one father? The father of the whirlwind was too great to have others that lived near him.

“He is not here,” Sonsta said and turned away.

Anoshi did not respond, but he followed Sonsta around the corner. The little man had gone only a few paces when he turned abruptly.

“He isn’t here!” he shouted.

“I heard,” said Anoshi. Sonsta’s shout was small compared to the screaming he so often endured from the whirlwinds. “I will wait in here until he returns.”

“You can’t come in here.”

“I will,” Anoshi said stubbornly.

Sonsta decided then to ignore him, turned his back, and continued walking. Anoshi followed, ignoring each hate-filled glare thrown his way. The little man could not beat him if it came to a fight.

Sonsta led on and on. There were no turnoffs in the cave, but Anoshi had the sense they bore continuously to the right. He looked from walls to floor, and

began to notice swirls of dust from the cave floor following each of Sonsta's steps. He opened his mouth to inquire after them, but decided he would not, and his mouth shut. However, Sonsta turned.

"What?" he snapped.

Anoshi stared at him, unblinking. "Where are you going?"

Sonsta walked on without a response.

"The father of the whirlwind has allowed countless of his children to tear through my village," Anoshi said. "I must speak with him. He must know of this. Bring me to him."

"He will not see you," Sonsta muttered.

"He will," Anoshi responded. "I am the leader of my village. I have a right to speak to the father if I wish it."

"I know you are a leader," Sonsta muttered.

"I assumed you did," Anoshi said, "and that is why you came to meet me."

Sonsta stopped. For a moment, several currents of air whipped up around his legs and arms, then they settled and disappeared, leaving a circle of dirt-free rock around Sonsta's feet. His skin now faded from blue, to dark gray, to near white—the colors the whirlwinds sported as they raced towards the village.

Anoshi refused to feel fear. The father of the whirlwind could destroy him in a moment, but he had a right and a need to stand here now and speak. "Your sons have wreaked havoc on my people!" he exclaimed.

"I do not control them," Sonsta said disdainfully.

"That is what must change," Anoshi said. "If you will not begin to control, you must end their lives all together. For they have ended lives that belong to me and mine."

"If you speak of your father, he asked. He climbed this mountain the same as you and requested he be ended. He was tired of his village, tired of rebuilding after the whirlwinds, and tired of your anger."

"Send your sons elsewhere," Anoshi demanded. "There are uninhabited plains to the north and south."

"I will not negotiate now," Sonsta said sourly. "Things other than speaking with mortals beg my attention, and I gladly comply."

"I will keep you always in my sight until I have received cooperation," Anoshi muttered. His village could not see him fail. If he died here, it would be

well. He would die anyway if the whirlwinds did not stop.

Choosing not to argue, Sonsta turned and continued marching. The eddies from his feet rose harsher now. Anoshi was vaguely aware that a whirlwind could be whipped up to wipe him away if Sonsta wished.

Another part of his mind wondered at what Sonsta had meant when he asked which father he was seeking. Where there more than one? Surely there were more in other parts of the land—if other parts of land existed—but what other could Anoshi have been seeking by climbing this mountain?

Likely, Sonsta had been intentionally misleading. He knew who Anoshi was seeking, else he would not have met him at the door.

Some time later, Anoshi was aware that the eddies were weak, near nonexistent. He raised his eyes to Sonsta's hands and saw them clenched. His skin had returned to a constant blue, but it was pale.

Mere steps after that, Anoshi knew why. Something lay a short distance ahead. There was a breathing coming from around the bend. Or perhaps it was not breathing, but he sensed a tangible Living force, something more alive than either of them. He stopped, sharing the apprehension of Sonsta.

"There is a greater One than you," he murmured, receiving, in return, a glare.

Then the Living seemed to smile, and Anoshi's heart raced. It was a gentle smile that welcomed them both to enter its presence, but Anoshi felt that there was no predicting or controlling this Living. It only was and would do as it would.

"You have followed me stubbornly this far. You must follow me further," Sonsta declared.

Anoshi's instincts told him to leave. He sensed a power in the Living that he could not face. His instincts also told him to approach, for every part of him longed to be nearer to this Living and to behold it.

There was a doorway to the left, and Sonsta disappeared through it. Anoshi followed.

As soon as he entered the room, he averted his eyes from what ever sat there. He took barely a step forward, head bowed, eyes squeezed shut.

"You called me, Sire," Sonsta's voice came from a few feet ahead.

Anoshi lifted his eyes enough that he could see Sonsta kneeling face down. If he had doubted, he now knew the power of Sonsta could not be compared to this

Living. Sonsta, the father and birther of unstoppable whirlwinds, was powerless in this presence. Anoshi felt fear like he had never felt. There was no reckoning the magnificence of this Living. He knew he was breathing now only because the Living deemed it acceptable.

He dropped to his knees, throwing his face to the ground in a fashion like Sonsta's.

"Thank you for coming to me," the Living said. The voice was gentle and welcoming, but so much power was held, even in that sentence, that Anoshi could feel tears in his eyes, from the beauty of it and the fear it gave him.

"You have brought someone," the Living observed.

"I did not, Sire. He followed me," Sonsta murmured.

"I know," the Living said. "That is why I asked you to come."

There were no words from Sonsta, but his breathing became heavier.

"What is your qualm with Sonsta?" the Living asked the question directly to Anoshi, and Anoshi understood why Sonsta's breathing had quickened. He did not have the will to speak. The Living was too great for a simple village leader to approach, but as soon as this thought passed through his mind, he felt the strength to speak anyway. "Sonsta is father of the whirlwind," he said. "His sons run wild, claim lives, destroy structures. I have come to ask him to control them."

"Truly, it is well within his abilities to birth, to control, and to stop them," the Living said. "But he has sent them continually under my orders."

As much as Anoshi desired to be angry at the Living for allowing this, he could not. His only thought was that the Living had a reason, and that reason should not be questioned.

Then he remembered his brother approaching with their father's body. He remembered debris from houses strewn across the village. He remembered tears from a child when her brother could not be found. Maybe this Living shouldn't be questioned, but that didn't mean he couldn't be.

"Why?" he asked. He wanted to ask more, but that one word was the only word he could muster, and as soon as he spoke it, he trembled, fearing the Living would strike him down for his impudence.

He was not struck. Nothing happened. The Living did not even speak. In the silence, Anoshi's heart pounded. Then there was something. It wasn't a word that was spoken in a voice, but it was an urging to speak all he had meant to say.

“So much destruction and pain!” Anoshi’s voice came harsh. “For so many years. You know what has happened. The tears of children without homes, the emptiness of our stomachs when our farms are destroyed, the aching of our arms and souls as we rebuild homes again and again. Why have you allowed this? How dare you allow this?”

Immediately, Anoshi regretted his words. The urging to speak left him, and he was once again faced and overwhelmed by the power surging from the Living. Whatever his reason for ordering this, it was not Anoshi’s right to know. But he felt no reprimand. There was no anger, no retaliation. If anything, he felt that the Living had expected every word he spoke.

Something in the room changed, and he knew that the Living was rising and walking towards him.

He swallowed, shaking, squeezing his hands against the floor until they clenched into fists. He tried to open his mouth to defend himself, but his teeth chattered, and he clamped his jaw shut. As tears streamed down his cheeks, even his mind could only form two words: *Forgive me...*

The Living came to a stop a few feet shy of Anoshi, and Anoshi could sense all the power contained within, that of a thousand raging wildfires, ten thousand surging thunderstorms, and a hundred thousand untamed whirlwinds. This was all held in the Living and more—far too much for Anoshi to comprehend, but none of this was released when the Living reached down and touched him.

The touch was like a hand, but it was peace, spreading through him, comforting, calming him. And Anoshi knew he was safe. He knew the Living knew him. He knew the Living would not harm him. And—strangest of all—he knew that the Living loved him.

He was pulled to his feet, and the other hand was placed on his chin to lift his head. Anoshi was suddenly staring into the eyes of the Living. These eyes had no color. They had no shape or form. They were simply eyes in the purest sense, and they looked at Anoshi with a tenderness he had never known.

Anoshi’s tears were still falling, but now they fell from gratitude. He wanted nothing more than to fall forward and be enveloped by the life the Living had to offer. He could not yet. He would have to leave, and return to his village, and tell them what he had seen, but for now he basked in the gaze of the Living, letting it hold him.

“I used the whirlwinds to call you,” the Living murmured. “And I rejoice that you have chosen to seek my presence.”

End