

Warrior

I let my body lean against the tree. I looked down. Crimson flowed onto the ground and mingled with the dirt. My grip around the spear was so tight, the handle was giving me splinters. The pain shot up and down my body from the wound in my torso. In front of me was a dead man. I knew he was as he no longer twitched like he did a few minutes ago. I looked to the sky. Small orange flowers began to blossom in the sky as the sun's rays crept over the horizon. I held my hand up on the wound. My vision grew blurry. My consciousness swayed back and forth. I smiled. I was lying on the floor, bleeding out enough blood to fill a river, and yet I sat there smiling.

I really have lost it.

Long ago, there came a day when I heard about Moja Kucha, the Legendary One-Clawed Jaguar that roamed the jungle just outside the village. I wandered around the village often. And when I did, I always ended up in Shaha's home. Shaha was an elderly man, his age as ripe as a million yucca harvests. He told me stories of the Gods and about the white man across the sea. But most of all, he told me stories of the jungle. This is how I came to know of Moja Kucha.

"Can such a beast exist in the world?" I asked Shaha.

"There can and I swear on my son's soul, there does."

Shaha explained how Moja Kucha had been a jaguar who had been a trouble for the village over many years. How it attacked unwary travelers and hunters, leaving only their bones and their cries for help as evidence of his supremacy over the land. I remember being astonished that this animal, no this demon, had not only survived, but defeated Marjani's best warriors. Then, the name of my father left Shaha's lips.

"Even Tau had many a trouble with Moja Kucha"

How could this be? My father was undefeatable in combat. His pride fell in its entirety upon it. I got up after that and left. Home as my destination, I let my legs take 1

control and stride their usual path. However, my mind walked a different road completely. My shock had not subdued and it definitely showed no sign of evicting out of my thoughts. The same message ran through my skull. It isn't possible. No, it is definitely a mistake. Maybe someone who looked like my father was the one that got attacked. Any excuse would work, as long as I didn't have to admit my own father's weakness.

Distracted by my own thoughts, I hadn't noticed that I had already arrived home. The sun tainted the formerly blue sky with its orange flowers. I saw the hunters and their sons returning from the dark jungle. Just as any other day, my father was carrying large game on his burly shoulders. Seeing this reassured me of his strength.

“Of course it wasn't true. My father is all too powerful for any cat to defeat him, legendary or not.”

I walked into the small hut and sat at the corner. I allowed myself to slip into slumber, a warm confidence filling my body.

I awoke and saw my mother preparing dinner for our family. I hadn't been able to tell what animal it was, since my father had been so far away, but now I could clearly see that the animal that was hung over the fire was a boar, stripped of its fur and tusks.

“Ah, Sefu, you are awake. Go help your father. He is outside.” My mother said.

“Yes, ma'am.”

I walked out into the warm air and saw my father collecting pieces of wood for the fire on the outskirts of the jungle. I ran towards his figure, but by the time I reached him, he had finished his chore.

“Yes, Sefu?” he asked in his brute voice.

“Mother asked me to help you.”

He walked past me as if my comment had been nothing but the winds brushing upon his face. I turned to follow him back and saw a peculiar scar on the back of his right leg. My father had never had a scar. The scar was a pale white and looked as if it could reopen at even the slightest of disturbances.

“Father”

His large stature turned to meet my gaze.

“How did you get that scar on your leg?” I was expecting an answer like “I fell down” or “A tree branch got lodged in it”. Instead, he looked down at the earth. I felt a sickness creep into my body. It seemed to overtake my very soul. After a menacing pause that was enough to make me lose all sanity within me, he looked up and spoke.

“When I was still an immature man, I was known as the Prodigal Warrior. My pride was so large; I felt that I could take on anything or anyone. My pride got to the point where it became dangerous. I began hunting bigger and legendary animals. Then I came across Moja Kucha. I tried to take him down, but he easily overpowered me. That scar is a constant reminder to never again lose my head in my pride.”

My mind raced. The words that had left my father’s mouth were like spears piercing my sides. I looked back at the boar my mother was cooking at the house. I felt that I was no different than it. Tied up above the flames of truth, ready to be consumed and devoured by reality. I hadn’t realized how much pride I held towards my father. His invincible, impenetrable armor had shattered right in front of my eyes. I ran off back to my mother, hiding my tears from the man I once admired.

Dinner was a silent agony. My sisters noticed my distress and decided to be silent. The meal had no flavor. The water gave no satisfaction to my arid mouth.

Nothing could please me. I was a pit that never stopped and no one had a rope long enough to help me out.

“I’m not hungry.” I stood and trudged away from my family. My mindset had long left disbelief and had entered depression. I felt so worthless. My father was the only form of accomplishment I had in my life. And now it was gone, forcibly ripped from my weak hands. I looked at my arms and saw what my father saw. A weak child who was incapable of doing anything to help anyone. All of this was because of a stupid cat. Moja Kucha. If only it had never existed. My depression slowly boiled away and rage took its place. I started becoming furious with Moja Kucha. I blamed incidents on it that it wasn’t even concerned. But worst of all, I made a promise. I promised to kill Moja Kucha.

I stood panting. Blood covered the spear that I held in my hand. Before me, I saw a broken legend. I saw Moja Kucha, dead by my hand. A sinister smile crossed my face and I felt just as I saw my father. Invincible.

I awoke from my dream with a satisfaction unlike any other. I got up just in time to see my father running into the jungle with the other men of the village, just like any other day. I decided that in order to beat Moja Kucha, I would need to be strong. I sneaked into my father’s room and saw his spare spear lying on the ground next to his bed. I reached over and picked it up, trying not to leave any evidence of my theft. I went to the back of the village. There was a small watering hole there. I dove in with the spear in hand. A small hole, barely large enough for my slender body, was hidden amongst a bundle of leaves. Pushing the leaves aside, I slipped through like a fish fresh out of water. I swam up to see the protruding stalactites reaching out from the cave’s ceiling.

My new home.

I had found the cave long ago. Many a days were spent within its confiding walls. It was my only comfort as a child and now it came through for me again. It was rather spacious. An enormous plot of rock floated in the middle of even larger ring of water. A small hole in the ceiling provided a small bit of light that shined upon the marble that lined the walls. A soothing sensation moved across the water, like the wind flowed through the grass. I climbed out of the water and sat on the solid ground.

From that day on, I trained all day. I sprinted around on the little island to build up my legs. I lifted heavy boulders to bulk up. Anything inside the confines of the cave, I used. By nightfall, I would pick up the spear and sneak out of the cave and into the jungle. At first, I could barely catch rabbits. But over time, I began to see patterns in the animals and I slowly moved up to bigger game. I was slowly becoming stronger and I could see it.

One night, there was a piercing noise that flowed through the small opening in the ceiling. I opened my heavy eyes. The smell of smoke and cooked pork still lingered from that night's meal. I stood up and the piercing noise returned. I decided to investigate as I knew of nothing that could make such a noise. I jumped into the water and a few seconds later, I popped my head out and looked into the jungle. I jumped out of the pool and dashed through the trees like a scurrying rat. I passed everything in a blur. Finally, I arrived at a clearing. I peeked through the thick vines and caught a glimpse of 3 men. They wore funny clothing coated in gold and silver. Each carried a long metal pipe in their hands.

“Au nom du roi Louis XIV, vous païens doivent être mis à mort” (In the name of King Louis XIV, you heathens are condemned to death)

They all lifted their pipes and pointed them towards a hidden figure. Then, smoke leaked out of their pipes and the noise pounded on my ears. I finally realized that these were the dangers across the sea that Shaha had told me about. The ones with the fire sticks that brought death.

The white man.

I waited for the men to walk in another direction and I took the opportunity to crawl out of the bush. I looked at the victims. They were hunters from Marjani and their bodies were bloody. I closed their eyelids and softly spoke an old Marjani prayer for the dead. Then, I picked up my spear and followed the men. I tracked them as if they were animals on the run. Eventually, I came across them again. An enormous black ship floated in the bay. I turned my head trying to find some way to kill them and avenge my brethren. I realized that they were pointing their fire sticks at something.

I adjusted my head so I could see the target better. My father stood there struggling to strike down one of the 3 men. Then, I heard the crack and smelled the smoke.

Tears swelled within my eyes as I watched him fall to the ground. The sound of his lifeless body hitting the ground filled my very being with despair. I wanted to run out and hold onto him, but the shock of the moment kept from moving. All the while, they laughed. They were mocking my father in their own demon tongue. My grip around the spear grew tighter and tighter. I stood up and prepared to dash forward. I planned how I would kill them. I saw every opportunity there was. I was ready to strike. Then, a roar came from the trees behind me. I turned in time to see a black figure pounce out of the jungle and attack the men. The first one didn't stand a chance. The animal landed on his chest before he knew what was happening. The other two were startled by the sudden attack and didn't have time to recover from their initial shock in order to fend off the second strike. The last man stood alone, watching the beast inch closer. In a single swipe, he fell.

All through this time, I stood watching in amazement of the creature. Before me, stood a being of no fear and much strength. It was the definition of what a true man should be. It's head turned towards me and my eyes locked onto its.