

## A-lon - A True Story (well, mostly true...)

A-lon, the beautiful brown buck, had just about survived another deer-hunting season - making himself invisible most of the time, except when he was showing off his handsome self to the red-brown beauties of the herd - just about... because... Jack, who did not see him in time, smashed his truck against A-lon with such brute force that his right hind leg broke on impact and, inside him, his spleen ruptured -exploded really - from the force. Even so, he stumbled off the road, collapsing into the roadside ditch.

Like A-lon, Jack was certainly in shock but otherwise he was unhurt. That's partly because he was hurt so deep in other ways he no longer broke easily. After shaking the stars from his eyes he leapt out to assess the damage. Very little to his truck: one headlight and the grill, now concave. And, although he was a little drunk, Jack could quickly see how beautiful A-lon was, even half-dead. Jack counted A-lon's points. Funny how sometimes you can't get your deer all season and then he jumps right into your lap.

A-lon was still alive but that mattered less to Jack: he'd soon be dead and right now what mattered more was getting home. That rack was going to be his. What a way to get his trophy, he mused, returning with his chainsaw half an hour later.

A-lon was not quite gone when Jack drove the chain across his strong and beautiful brown neck but he was too far through the door to feel the pain. He did, however, feel the absence of his head, of his proud and splendid antlers.

Jack wasn't so interested in A-lon's meat. He drove home with his bloody chunk of pride and glory packed into the back of his truck, flanked by two six-packs. There are many kinds of sustenance. This was Jack's kind.

Out for a walk, Brigit discovered A-lon's body in the ditch along her road. She was a hunter, too - with her eyes. She loved trophies, too - a hawk feather left in her path, a heart-shaped stone. She gasped when she saw his corpse but her fire rose when she saw he was without his head. Brigit guessed what had happened. She knew this kind of loss might have left the buck's spirit confused, unable to find its way home. Promising to help him she asked his name. She saw it clearly and quickly. A-lon.

Brigit always had a little dried sage in her pocket, mostly for companionship, and a little molted snake skin as offerings for dead animals she would find along the road. "I'll be back when it's dark," she promised as she crushed the papery skin and leaves, sprinkling them along his body.

Brigit returned, as promised. Sensing urgency she quickly asked Alon's permission and raised him from the dry grass and litter - his balance off until he rose from the Earth and was airborne with Brigit close beside him on their way... in search of his head.

With ease, A-lon followed the only possibility and found his once-stately head lying on Jack's cluttered workbench, propped up by the glorious roll of his left antler.

Brigit returned to Brigit's house and found the head of A-lon on Jack's workbench.

Brigit stood aside, waiting. Jack was in his ramshackle house. She intuited the situation. Taxidermy is expensive. What had he been thinking; he hardly had enough money for beer. He'd just let it sit there for a while, 'til the cold passed, the ground thawed, and he could bury it for a while... until the skull was flayed and scoured by hungry worms. It was the best he'd be able to do.

Brigit wondered what Jack would think when he finally looked again. There would be no evidence of any disturbance. He'd have a mystery where A-lon's head had been and since Jack didn't much like mysteries he'd crack open another six-pack.

With A-lon's head returned to his body there was no reason to stay any longer in Jack's dreary shed. A-lon and Brigit traveled away into the woods where she knew A-lon - or at least some large buck - liked to spend deep autumn. He thanked her for helping him and as his spirit left his battered, mangled body Brigit nodded a sweet goodbye, watching as his antlers grew and grew and grew - looking more like branches with each succeeding moment. And his brawn shifted into the gnarly deep-furrowed bark of a Grandfather Oak. Brigit's smile broadened. Her eyes widened with joy. She loved mysteries. And if they revealed themselves she loved that, too.

Here, she thought, A-lon will prosper perhaps for hundreds of years, dropping acorns for winter-hungry deer for many, many generations to come... if Jack, or someone else seeking the sun in those woody bones, didn't take a chainsaw to it. Maybe... in time... but not while Brigit was around. That was for sure.

Just then she heard a little rustling in the saplings on the far side of the Oak. "Hello?" she called. Around the great trunk of A-lon's Oak came a young deer.

"A-lon?" Brigit asked.

"No," replied the doe. "A-lon was my father."

*Bonliz Hoag January 7, 2012*