

chapter two

chethra kaeranya

It was the sensation of warmth that brought Mike back to consciousness. Warm sunlight on his face. Warm, dry ground beneath his head and back. The sweet scent of honeysuckle filled his nostrils, and his eyes were filled with the color red by sunlight filtering through his eyelids. A cool, pleasant breeze caressed his face.

He really didn't want to get up; didn't want to move, even. This was so much more pleasant than what he had been doing. Where he had been. What had he been doing? Where had he been? Something and somewhere very unpleasant, he knew, but what and where exactly, were just beyond his reach at the moment.

He could hear leaves rustling in the pleasant breeze. Oak leaves. An oak tree. He recalled there was something about an oak tree. The image of two men, crouched behind an oak tree came to him. They had silly little bits of leaves and twigs stuffed into their helmets. Their faces were dirty; smeared with black grease. Their clothes were damp and muddy.

It wasn't muddy here. No, it was quite nice, and dry here. Mike inhaled deeply, enjoying the warm sun and crisp, clean air.

The image of the two men by the tree tugged annoyingly at the back of his mind. They had looked scared; like they were waiting for him to help them. Muted by his memory, he could still hear a loud, roaring, rip-like noise, as if the whole sky had been rent apart.

The kraut machine-gun! Mike finally remembered. His eyes snapped open, and he sat bolt-upright.

But he did not find himself lying by that stone wall and farm house in Normandy. He was in a meadow. A gorgeous, lush, green meadow, peppered with flowers, and ringed by a mixture of deciduous and pine trees. Above him, the sky was a pale, clear blue. Small, puff-like, white clouds drifted lazily overhead. They were nothing like the wispy, stormy-gray clouds that had filled the indigo skies over France.

He clutched at his head instinctively. There had been something about his head. He felt his helmet, and pulled it off. There was a large dent on the front-right section, but no signs that the bullet that had struck it had penetrated. He ran his hands over his forehead and scalp, but felt nothing. No lump, no signs of injury. Mike put his helmet back on, and got to his feet.

His uniform was caked with dried mud and cow's blood. At least he hoped it was cow's blood. He still had his Thompson, the spare rifle, and his pistol. What he didn't have was any idea where he was. Standing, he could now see a dirt road some fifty yards from where he had been laying. Had Caprinelli and the others dragged him here to keep him safe while they completed the objective? It was well past dawn now. At least ten o'clock in the morning by his rough guess, looking at the brilliant yellow sun overhead. He checked his watch, and found that it had stopped. He shook it next to his ear, but didn't hear any loose parts, so it must only need winding. Of course, he would have to find the correct time to reset it, otherwise winding it would be useless.

I need to find the men. Make sure they're OK, he thought. He began walking towards the road. After he had moved a few paces, some mountains came into view on his right, having been obscured at just the right angle by some of the taller trees. *That's not right,* Mike thought. *There's no mountains in Normandy. Where could we have advanced to in one night, that we'd be in view of mountains like that?*

BLOOD of atlantis
www.furaffinity.net/user/Lycanthris/
<https://Lycanthris.sofurry.com>
<https://www.weasyl.com/~Lycanthris>

Mike was sure that he had only been out for the night. If it had been any longer, he either would have been picked up by the Germans, and woken-up in a POW camp, or he would have been picked-up by Allied forces, and taken to an aid station or infirmary. Waking-up as he had, with his weapons, his mud and blood-stained clothes, and in the middle of the field, the only logical possibility was that it was the morning after the paratroopers had jumped into Normandy.

He paused, looking at the mountains. They were great, looming bergs that were covered in snow at their stony peaks. They reminded him a bit of the Rocky Mountains; rising seemingly out of nowhere, visible from such a great distance, that one might think they were closer than they actually were. The Pyrenees, in the southwest of France, along the Spanish border weren't like these, he knew. *These can't be the Alps! No way we would have made it all the way across France in one night. Not unless the Nazis completely surrendered.*

Captain Kewish was confident in the abilities of the Screaming Eagles, and their comrades in the 82nd, to put the hurt on the Nazis, but not *that* confident. Some of the men had talked about being in Berlin by Christmas. He was under no such delusions. There was still a long bloody struggle to come in this war, baring some sort of miracle, and Mike wasn't a religious man.

Suddenly, the sound of a scream broke his train of thought. He twisted around, looking for where it came from. He heard the shriek again, and this time noticed it was slightly odd; like a woman's cry of terror and an animal's roar somehow mixed. He was able to discern the direction with the second cry; it was coming from the opposite direction down the road from the mountains.

Mike took off at a sprint towards the sound of the screaming woman. He let his Thompson fall back to his side on it's arm-strap, and he un-shouldered his rifle. If there was a civilian, or civilians, then he didn't want to risk hitting her with a burst from his sub-machine-gun. he would be better able to control his fire with the Garand rifle. His feet beat heavily on the dry dirt of the road, and he rounded a wide-bend that had been obscured by more of the trees surrounding the meadow. He skidded to a halt, hardly able to comprehend what he was seeing.

There was indeed a woman in trouble. He could see the top of her blonde head; her hair whipping about, flecked with dirt, as she thrashed at being held down on the road. What had caught Mike off guard were the men who were holding her down. They could really only be called men in the loosest sense of the word. There were five of them; each around three-and-a-half feet tall, with greenish-gray skin on their ugly faces.

There was no other way to describe them than ugly. They had long, beak-like noses, overbites, with crooked, pointy, yellow teeth, and big, pointed, bat-like ears. They were filthy. They had sparse strands of lank, black hair caked with dirt, mud, and grime. Their clothing, also layered in filth, was extremely odd. It seemed to be made up of poorly stitched-together bits of cloth and leather, with plates of metal strapped irregularly down over their bodies, like some sort of crude attempt at armor.

Mike took all of this in, in only a fraction of a second. As four of the ugly little men were holding down the thrashing, screaming woman; one holding each of her limbs; the fifth was standing over her, unfastening his belt with a ravenous look upon his cruel, hideous face. Mike knew what was about to happen, and he wasn't going to let it. He brought up his rifle, and fired two shots directly into the chest of the one that had been about to rape the woman. The force of the shots from the powerful M-1 rifle lifted the little man off his feet and sent him flying a few feet backwards. Before he hit the ground, Mike had already fired another two shots at the one who was holding the woman's right arm.

As the first fell to the dirt road, the two holding the woman's legs leapt up and charged at him, brandishing crude-looking, rusty, machete-like blades. Mike fired two more shots at each of the charging men, and they fell face-first into the dirt some twenty yards before him. There was a loud 'ping' that accompanied the last shot, as the spent ammo-clip ejected from the magazine of the M-1. Mike quickly reached into an ammo-pouch, pulled out another clip, and shoved it into the rifle.

As he brought it up to finish off the last of the rapists, he saw that the woman had thrown off the last of her attackers. She was standing now; almost twice the height of her foe; brandishing a two-handed sword. It looked to be a much more finely-crafted weapon than those of the little, green men. It had a long, straight, silvery-steel blade with an ornate cross-guard. It broke the crude, rusty blade of her assailant as they clashed. She whirled around, and used the momentum to drive her blade all the way through the chest of her enemy, up to her sword's hilt. Inky-black blood smeared the silvery blade as it protruded from his back. She put a foot on his chest, and kicked him off her blade.

She gave the strange sounding half-scream, half-roar again. This time, however, her voice was filled with anger, as she brought her blade down again, and again on the corpses of the three attackers lying in the dirt around her. It was only now that Mike was able to get a proper look at her, and noticed that she was equally as odd as her attackers.

She wasn't ugly, not by far. But, she wasn't human. She looked, for all the world, like one of the characters Mike would draw in his comics; and anthropomorphic cheetah. She was covered in short, sand-yellow fur that was flecked with black spots. Nor, Mike realized, had it been dirt in her curly locks of long, blonde hair, but black spotting like on her fur. She had a long tail, likewise covered in yellow, black-spotted fur that ended in a black tip, and whipped about her as she cleaved into the bodies of her abusers. She was tall; taller even than Mike; perhaps six feet or so. She was slender, and athletic, with the long, well-toned runner's legs that one might expect in the humanized-form of an animal known for its running abilities, such as the cheetah. She was wearing a cloth tunic underneath a leather jerkin that covered her torso. A short, cloth skirt, that came to an end a good six-inches above her knees covered her lower body. Mike waited as she worked her anger, and frustration out on the corpses of the little, green men.

He walked a little closer, up to the two that had charged him. He prodded them with his rifle to make sure they were dead. Their oily, black blood was seeping into the dirt, making a disgusting mud. He rolled one over onto its back with the toe of his boot. He was even uglier up close. Beady black eyes stared lifelessly from underneath a heavy brow. Mike wondered what sort of creatures these; and the woman, for that matter; could be. He had thought that the stories of the Nazis experimenting on human-beings, trying to create super-soldiers had been just that; stories in his *Colonel Constitution* comic books. Even though these monstrosities had fallen as easily as any Wehrmacht soldier, this did not bode well. He would have to notify his superiors, assuming he could find any.

The cheetah-woman's scream-roars had ceased, and Mike looked up. She had worn herself out, and fallen to her knees, driving the point of her blood-stained sword into the dirt. Her long mane of curly hair had whipped around so that Mike could now get a clear look at her face. Her face also bore the patterns of a cheetah; with black stripes running tear-like from her eyes down her muzzle; for indeed, she did have a muzzle. It was not exactly like that of a normal, *animal* cheetah. It was much the way Mike might have drawn the muzzle on one of his comic women; shorter, in a transitional phase between a human face and an animal one, with full, soft, human-like lips. Triangular, but rounded, cat-like black ears poked up through the strands of her curly blonde locks on the top of her head. Setting aside that she wasn't human, she was quite beautiful.

Mike slowly walked toward her. He lowered his rifle, but didn't shoulder it. In her state, she might lash out at him as well, not to mention the fact that he didn't know if she would be friendly to begin with.

{“Are you alright, ma'am?”} he asked in French. French was one of the languages Mike knew fluently, and he had chosen to speak to her in it based on the assumptions that he was still in France; that the green-skinned things were some science-experiment of the Germans; and that if they had been attacking the cheetah-woman, then she must not be German.

Her head snapped up at the sound of his voice. The blade of her sword sung as she pulled it from the dirt but she neither attacked, nor even rose to her feet. She knelt there, ready to strike if need be, with a fierce, defiant look smoldering in the cat-like, slitted pupils of her icy-blue eyes.

{“Whoa, whoa, whoa,”} Mike cautioned her as he held up his left hand in a placating gesture. {“I’m not going to hurt you. I’m a good-guy; I’m an American,”} he indicated the US flag worn as an arm-band on his upper right arm.

“Atlantian?” she spoke as she cocked her head to the side with a quizzical look.

{“No, American. Do you speak French? Do you understand me?”}

She only continued to look at him with a bewildered expression.

{“What about German? Do you speak German?”} he asked, switching languages, hoping that she didn’t, as that might mean that she was some sort of Nazi-experiment as well.

This only resulted in a further nonplussed expression from her.

{“What about Italian? Are you Italian?”} he tried another of the languages he knew.

“I have no ken of this odd language, in which you speak, human,” she answered in English, with a quasi-British-sounding accent, “but, I am grateful for your rescue.”

Mike was completely taken aback. He would have sooner expected her to speak some sort of mewling, growling, feline language than English. “You... you speak English?” he stammered in disbelief.

“I know not what you mean by ‘English,’” she said, eying him with confusion, “but we are speaking in the Trade Tongue of the Noble races.”

“Um... okay,” baffled by all the strange things of the last fifteen minutes, Mike figured the least of his worries was why she was calling English the ‘Trade Tongue of the Noble races’, or who, or what the ‘Noble races’ were. He chose not to argue the point. “Are you alright?” he asked, remembering what he had been trying to communicate in the first place.

“I am fine,” she said with some forced dignity. She ripped a filthy rag angrily from one of the corpses, then got to her feet, and used it to wipe the blood from her sword. “It was fortuitous; you came to my rescue before this goblin-filth was able to violate me,” she said as she sheathed her sword in a leather scabbard at her waist.

“G...goblins?! That’s what these things are?!” he asked, completely shocked.

“Yes, goblins,” she answered, again with the quizzical response to his own befuddlement. “And you dispatched them quite skillfully with your hand-cannon. I must admit, ‘tis a fine weapon. I have never known even dwarven-wrought arms to dispatch foes with such speed or accuracy as your boom-stick.”

“Dwarves?!” Mike exclaimed, looking skyward, as if to find answers. He didn’t know whether to laugh, or to scream. *What in the name of ever-loving-fuck is going on here?!*

She looked him over, taking in his attire; so very different from what she or the goblins wore; the firearms in his hand, and hung about his body, the grenades clipped onto web-belt full of pouches, and his helmet, covered in netting and foliage. “You are very odd for a human.”

“And you’re very *bipedal* for a cheetah!” Mike half-shouted in frustration.

This was clearly the wrong thing for him to have said, for her expression turned immediately to a scowl, and her hand gripped her sword, ready to draw it once more. “Do I look like a base-animal to you, human?!” she spat, “I am *chethra!*” she said proudly. “Would I call you ape? If I did not owe you the life-debt, I would cut you down for what you hath spake!”

“I...I’m sorry,” Mike said, holding up his hand to placate her, as he backed-away a few feet from her. “I apologize. I didn’t mean to insult you. I... I’m just really, *really* confused, here. I’ve never seen a... *person*... like you before, or goblins, or dwarves, for that matter,” he explained.

Her expression softened at this, and she released her grip on the pommel of her sheathed sword.

“Look, I’m lost. I woke-up in that field, over there,” he pointed with his free hand over the trees, back toward the meadow, “and I need to find my troops. Have you seen any other soldiers like me? Americans?” he again pointed to the US flag worn around his arm.

“Atlantians?” she asked. Her eyes grew wide, as she again misunderstood him.

“No,” he sighed, cupping his face in his palm, and rubbing his eyes. “We parachuted in from the sky, last night...”

“*You came from the sky?*” it was her turn now to be shocked.

“*Yes!* We're here to help liberate France. I need to find the soldiers in my unit, so we can help clear the Nazi defenses for our other soldiers, who are landing on the beaches!”

“Human, I know not of this land you call 'France', or who or what these 'Nazis' be. We are standing in the Queendom of Ascandion. The nearest beaches are many hundreds of leagues away, at the shores of the Sea of Moritheil.”

Mike finally decided on laughing, instead of screaming, and he gave a mad little chuckle, as he again wiped his face with his hand. He turned around on the spot several times, looking around for some shred of sanity, while the cheetah-woman; or rather the *chethra* woman; stood in silent contemplation of his mania.

“By what name are you known, human?” she asked after several minutes while Mike had been muttering under his breath.

“Huh?” he turned back around to face her. “I'm Mike... Captain Mike Kewish, of the 101st Airborne.”

“I am Chethra Kaeranya, my Lord Captain,” she said bowing. “I owe you the life-debt, and I am now in your service for whatever purpose you may require of me.”