

XXII

Chy, the Kootona (Day 154 on Tashoo)

Sleep, the great rejuvenator. Sleep punctuated by dreams, wonderful dreams, pleasant dreams. Dreams involving a beautiful female with blue-blond hair, yellow-in-blue eyes and lion yellow skin, Tyarza, the woman of my dreams, literally. She is wearing the leather poncho like dress that is form fitted by a leather string on each side and leather Roman type of sandals.

Once again we are in a meadow. We are sitting on a red and white checkered cloth with a picnic basket on it. There is also a bottle of wine on the cloth. She's smiling at me and talking to me in a soft, almost breathless voice.

Now, she is laughing and playfully running away from me, her long hair flying behind her. I chase her, catch her arm and pull her to me. As I pull her to me, she turns and kisses me. I can't help myself; I kiss her back. She is saying how she wishes she had met me sooner, before she was promised to another chohachy but, she doesn't care; she loves me and me alone and, not only is this other not good enough for her, he never was.

Suddenly, a large animal appears over a small rise. It's running toward us. It's a fearful looking feline; it looks like it's about three meters long and has a one hundred fifty-centimeter-long tail. Its pelt is coal black in color with reddish-purple stripes. The tail has a small tuft of reddish-purple fur on the end. The ears are more rounded than a Mory's, but still vaguely triangular in shape. The muzzle is about twice as long as a Mory's, and has more whiskers. The eyes are golden-yellow in color; the pupils are oval, like a Mory's eyes only more rounded. It isn't a Mory because it's running on all fours. The feet are digitigrade rather than a Mory's semi-plantigrade. The upper canines, while not extremely long, are longer than a Mory's and extend to the bottom of the lower jaw but not beyond it. These obvious similarities to the Mory, along with the differences, make this creature a strangely exciting animal to look at.

For some reason, despite its fearful looks, I'm not afraid. As a matter of fact, I'm soon kneeling and calling to it. It bounds toward me and, at the last thata, jumps completely over me and stops at the feet of Tyarza. After stopping at Tyarza's feet, he rubs against her legs. Then, he turns back toward me and drops to its elbows and bounds back to me and jumps up and places its front paws on my shoulders and licks my neck. I start scratching his head between his ears causing him to half close his eyes and eliciting loud purr.

I stand up and take Tyarza in my arms as the animal rubs against us. All of a sudden as I hold Tyarza, she and the creature start slowly fading away, fading until they are replaced by blackness. Go away! Why must you interfere with my happiness? I want Tyarza back. I am happier with her near me than I am with anyone else. Go away! Take this damnable nightmare with you. Please go away!

Now the blackness of a coal mine surrounds me. Suddenly the blackness is broken by pinpoints of blindingly white light. I start to look around and I find myself in space. I am about 1,200 km above a planet. I look around and I see over one hundred ITN capital ships orbiting the planet. It is Zokoka. I don't know why, but the name Zokoka has importance to me. I don't know what these dreams mean. All I know is that when I dream about being in deep space, I also dream about flying a star fighter and a space battle.

Once again I am flying fighter cover for my battle carrier, the TSS Okpo. I had been transferred to the Okpo several months earlier. It is a temporary assignment while the TSS Tonojen receives its finishing touches. The Okpo's battle group, which includes three battle carriers, is in orbit around Zokoka, a relatively minor star system 5.277 light years inside the border of the Khorchan Interstellar Empire. There are three other battle carrier groups in synchronous orbit around Zokoka. Each battle group is 120 degrees around the planet from each other.

Zokoka is a minor system only in the fact that the star is a red dwarf star. It is an important system in that, even though none of the planets can support carbon-based life, all of the planets are rich in important materials that the Terran Interstellar Federation needs. That is the reason the ITF has such a strong naval presence here.

Suddenly, a forty ship Khorchan armada appears out of hyperspace. Almost immediately upon their appearance, the Khorchan carriers start launching their attack ships. At the time of the Khorchan arrival, there are only about fifty fighters per battle carrier on patrol. As soon as I see the Khorchan ships materialize, I contact the Okpo without the normal protocols. I inform them of the Khorchan ships and they start launching their fighters. In a matter of minutes, over forty-five thousand fighters are swarming to meet the Khorchans. Unfortunately, because of the unexpectedness of the attack, three of the Terran ships were destroyed before the fighter protection could complete their launch.

Without waiting for authorization, I attack. I pick out one of the attackers, peel away from my flight and, ten seconds later put him out of his misery. A quick glance tells me that I'm too far away to consider attacking one of the Khorchan capital ships, so I look for another target. I didn't inform my wingman of my plans, but a quick glance to my right and I see him in perfect formation and protecting my rear. Ensign Arthur Yamashita has been my wingman for only three weeks, but he seemed to anticipate my every move when we were on patrol and today is no different. Until today, he had never seen any action, but, we had spent many hours training so he would know my every move almost as fast as I performed them.

I manage to get in the blind spot of three more Khorchan war craft and send them to meet their ancestors. Ensign Yamashita got his first kill immediately after I got my fourth of the day. As I was searching for another possible kill, I saw a fluorescent orange Khorchan fighter racing up from behind me. Ensign Yamashita starts screaming in my ear just as I notice the Khorchan.

I watch the Khorchan approach but something about the approach made me decide against evasive maneuvers. As I watch, the Khorchan pulls along side of me. I look over at him and, as I watch him, the pilot salutes me and flies back toward the Khorchan fleet. He is accompanied by all of the remaining Khorchan craft. Despite the size of the fleet, it would seem that this attack was little more than a show of force with no plans to hold Zokoka.

I am moaning in fear and anger. I can hear myself over the sounds of the dream. I am thrashing about in my bedding. I can feel it. I feel like I am being tied down, but there are no fetters on me. I can hardly breathe, yet I am not suffocating. These dreams are too real to be a dream, but I cannot remember when, or even if, I ever experienced them.

Now I hear scratching. It is the sound of claws on wood, but it is not a dangerous sound. It sounds more like the sounds of concern. I hear metal on metal creaking. It isn't the sound of a door opening in a twentieth century horror movie; it's more like the sound of a mildly rusty hinge that's in need of oiling.

I hear a voice. A vaguely feminine voice, but not the voice of Tyarza. It is a deeper, yet feline sounding feminine voice. ARA! It must be Ara, the mother of my master. Now I understand what she is saying.

"Mvilu, wake up. You are having another of your nightmares." In her voice is concern mingled with exasperation.

I know she's getting tired of my nightmares; but, so am I. Slowly, I stir, moving my head back and forth until I can open my eyes. I hear Ara enter my room and, once again, I hear her voice.

"Mvilu, please wake up."

I look at her and smile weakly. "I am sorry, Ara. Did I wake you up with my nightmare?"

"No. It is time for me to get up anyway. The sun will be up within a hi'nu and I want to have the nakvyv ready for you and Rora."

"Do you want me to help?"

She just smiled and said, "You have never been required to do slavery work since you arrived in my home and yet you still insist on acting like I expect you to. You may accompany me, but you do not have to help." I put on a pouty face which elicited a laugh from Ara. "That look never worked for Rora; do not expect it to work for you. Now if you want to accompany me, hurry and get dressed. I am going to the kitchen as soon as I leave your room."

She left; I got dressed and headed to the kitchen. Ara was already starting nakvyv and, after several athaloo of pestering, she relented and let me help her. She couldn't get used to the fact that a male was so willing to help her in the kitchen. Even though she had never demanded that Rora not assist her, he had never shown an inkling to do so. I guess the male-female relationship in this species is ingrained, maybe down to the genetic level; I don't know for certain, nor do I even have a guess. It could also be based on the fact that the males of the species protect the village and the females bear, train and protect the cubs. I know the females protect the cubs because I've seen more than one female attack a male that threatened her cubs.

After Ara finished preparing the nakvyv, I went to verify that Rora was up and ready to eat. I knocked on his door and, for the first time since I had known him, he tried his hand at a little humor. "Who is it?" He asked.

I laughed when he said this and, in a high-pitched voice, replied, "It is Kyta." Then, laughing said, "Who do you think would knock on your door?"

He was laughing when he said, "Come in, Mvilu." I opened his door and stuck my head in. He asked, "Is the nakvyv ready?"

"Yes, it is and your norotha said something about having your ears if you do not get your tail into the chair within ten athata. You sure sound in a jovial mood this morning. Usually you are pretty taciturn. What happened to you last night? Good dreams? Dreams about a certain nohachy perhaps? Hmmm?"

That startled him. "That is none of your business, Mvilu." He said as he turned his head in embarrassment. An "I'm guilty" statement, if I ever heard one. "You sure are smart mouthed this morning."

I smiled and said, "No more so than normal and you know it." I laughed.

He just looked at me before replying. "That is true but, we need to get to the table. I would hate for Norotha to throw our nakvyv out the door for the wild animals to eat."

As we ate the nakvyv, Rora and I were joking around with each other. I would occasionally glance at Ara and see her rolling her eyes every now and then. She, and I, had never seen Rora in such a good mood. I was enjoying it and I am sure Ara was enjoying it more than she let on. After the nakvyv, Ara and I cleaned up leaving Rora to continue sitting at the table. After we finished in the kitchen, Ara and I joined him.

He leaned forward a bit and said, "Norotha, do you need Mvilu and me for anything today? Since the number of guards at the garden have become lower, I do not have to be on guard duty there as often."

"No, I cannot think of anything. Why do you ask?"

“I thought that Mvilu and I would go hunting today. I know we have plenty of meat for us, but we do have neighbors, especially elderly and new anorotha, that are not so fortunate. Perhaps we could provide them with some meat.”

Ara looked at Rora with the motherly love that all males hope to receive. She said, “Rora, I think that is a wonderful idea. It shows that you have not forgotten what it is like to do without and you are willing to pass on your good fortune. I would be proud of you if you did just that.”

I looked at Rora with a bit of pride in my attitude as well. When their fortunes turn around, most Terrans forget any assistance they receive during their hard times. Without a word, I went to my room, retrieved my bow, arrows, quiver, spear, and atlatl. By the time Rora was ready to leave, I was waiting on him.

As we were walking out the door, Rora and I were discussing the best place to go hunting today. It had not taken him long to realize that hunting the same area all the time leads to over hunting and a decrease of the game herds. This particular day we headed south of the village for about a hi’nu and a half. As we walked we were within a kilometer of the river, which was so wide it looked more like a large lake than a river, and we could see it occasionally through the trees.

I decided to try to find a game trail that headed to the river and try to ambush some game on the way to, or from, the river. After searching for about 15 athaloo, we found the trail I was looking for. Rora had learned a lot about proper hunting techniques, such as not touching the trail with bare fingers. During our sword training, I had found out he was always a quick study and I rarely had to tell him more than once about doing, or not doing, things.

This particular time, I had him climb a tree after receiving assurances from him that it wouldn't bother him to jump on an animal's back. I studied the tracks in the trail and found that it was a trail used to both go to and away from the river. I figured that animals here, like on Terra, probably went for water first thing in the morning, about midday and the last thing in the afternoon. The freshest tracks I could find were heading away from the river, so, since it was about midday, I thought that the animals would be heading back to the river to drink soon.

I whispered, “Rora, face the river while in the tree and wait for a herd of animals to head your way. When a herd of animals comes by, make sure you jump on the last animal in the herd. That way, the rest of the animals will have to run toward the river and not be so quick to attack you in defense of their herd member. I am going to go about two kilometers up that trail,” I pointed to a trail that ran almost perpendicular to the trail we were on. “And see if I can find anything. With luck, we should both be able to make a kill today. If we get lucky, we will meet about a kilometer up this trail at the little clearing we found the last time we went hunting.”

“That is a good idea, Mvilu. Let us do what you suggested.” He hadn’t forgotten how what he said to me had saved my life the first time we went hunting.

I went up the trail and found a tree that was both close to the trail I was watching and was one I could easily climb. I climbed to about six meters off the ground and leaned with my back to the bole of the tree. I had a feeling that about the time that Rora saw something, I would, too. It was a bit of a wait, but about half a hi’nu later, I saw a small herd of Azooshaka walking down the trail heading for the river. (1)

I waited until they were almost below me before I drew back my bow. Just as I got the bow drawn, I heard a frightening roar behind me. The Azooshaka froze in their tracks. I saw my chance and took it. I released the string and the arrow drove deep into the upper shoulder just behind the neck of a bull. I must have gotten lucky because I saw the arrow head protruding from the chest area. The arrow must have missed every bone. I had to have pierced his heart as well because the bull fell where he stood.

When the arrow struck the bull, he bellowed and the rest of the herd scattered. I stayed in the tree for a while and kept a wary eye out for the herd. I wanted to be sure that they had left the area. Azooshaka have been known to attack a predator after it had taken down a member of the herd and I had no desire to deal with those horns, especially the single horn in the middle of the forehead.

I knew that the roar I had heard was Rora jumping onto the back of an animal. We sure did seem to have a lot of luck when we went hunting. It was as if the Great Being himself was following us since I arrived. Whatever the reason, I was not complaining. I knew that we would have good luck as long as it continued, and then it would end. (It still amazes me how much my attitude in life is so similar to the Mory attitude.)

After I gave the Zooshaka bull plenty of time to die, I climbed down out of the tree and verified that it was safe. The Zooshaka being as large as it was, I knew I would have a difficult time getting it back to the rendezvous point where I knew Rora would be after he got his animal. Using my dagger, I opened the Zooshaka and removed the organs that we would not be able to eat. I walked about 5 meters off the trail and, using a small shovel that is a part of every Mory chohachy’s Etyma Jivekoo, I dug a hole about ½ a meter deep and buried those organs. Then, I returned to the Zooshaka, retrieved two pieces of a thin strong rope from the Etyma Jivekoo, one about one meter in length and the other about ten meters in length. I tied the front legs behind the neck using the short piece. Then, I took the longer piece and tied it around the horns creating a harness that I could put around my shoulders and, after considerable effort, started dragging the Zooshaka.

As I was dragging the Zooshaka toward the rendezvous spot, I heard a strange mewling sound coming from some bushes to one side of the pathway that I was taking. At first, I ignored the sound but, it sounded like a pathetic little kitten crying because it had lost its mother. I knew that the Mory and, as far as I knew, the Uany had no idea concerning domesticating wild

animals, so I was just before walking away and leaving the poor pitiful creature to the “tender mercies of Mother Nature”. Believe it or not, however, I have a soft heart, and, to hear some say, a head to go along with it, and I just couldn’t walk away without at least investigating the sound.

I left the Zooshaka and slowly crept along the pathway back the way I came until I could hear the sound most loudly. I then got on my hands and knees and slowly eased my way toward the bushes closest to the sound. I had my dagger and bow at the ready, just in case I had discovered another of the strangely violent animal life of Tashoo. When I found the area that the sound was the loudest, I quietly eased the limbs of the bushes apart. There on the other side of the bushes was a small clearing that covered approximately 1/10 hectare. Lying at the far side of the clearing was a Kootona. I froze. I had been told that the Kootona, while one of the most vicious animals on Tashoo, could not see things from a distance of more than ten meters very well if they didn’t make sudden moves. I studied the creature. It was a female. I could tell because I couldn’t see a mane and I also saw that she had teats that had been swollen with milk, although now they were shriveled. Initially, I thought that this was due to weaning; but, she was lying very still, too still, in fact, to even remotely be alive. I could see that rigor mortis had already set in. The eye that I could see from my vantage point was glazed over and her tongue was lying on the ground and dry.

Beside her were several small cubs, I say small, for an animal the size of the Kootona, a small cub would weigh in between five to ten kilograms. I saw that they, too, were not moving. I started to leave, when I remembered hearing the mewling sound. One of these cubs had to be alive. I crouched there for a few athata watching the cubs. Finally, I was rewarded by seeing one of them move. It started crying pitifully again for the mother that it would never nurse from again. It was, however, trying its best to nurse, though. I could tell that the mother had been mortally wounded, though I didn’t know how. She must have been trying to make it back to nurse the cubs one more time before dying. As I said earlier, I have a very tender heart and it was with great difficulty that I kept the burning tears at bay. I knew I had to do something for this pitiful little creature that would starve to death, if it weren’t attacked and eaten by a full-grown male Kootona.

Slowly I crept across the little clearing in the hopes of sneaking up on the cub and trying to catch it, although I didn’t know what I would do with it once I did catch it. I knew that to bring this animal into the village would incite panic among the Mory because there is a great animosity between the Akootona and Mory. This animosity is stronger than the enmity between the Mory and the Uany. The Mory kill each and every Kootona they can and, I am told, the Akootona repay in kind. In fact, I had been told that if a Kootona had either a Mory or a Uany to kill, it would go for the Mory first. When I asked why, no one could answer. I had been warned about the danger that a full-grown Kootona poses to the Mory. So, I could imagine what would happen to an unwary Uany that met with a Kootona unexpectedly, or expectedly for that matter.

I looked at the Kootona cub and was shocked speechless. It was a miniature version of the animal I had seen in my dream earlier that morning. The claws on the front feet, I found out later, were sickle shaped and designed for holding prey more than the Mory front claws. As I neared the cub, I noticed that it was a male. I could see the evidence, one obvious difference from Terran kittens. (2)

Because of his obvious concern with the fact that his mother wasn't feeding him anymore, the little Kootona cub didn't notice my approach until it was too late. With a quick move, I managed to pin the cub to the ground while I quickly thought of what to do with him. This was as difficult as you could imagine pinning a ten-kilogram cat would be. I had heard that even a twenty-day old Kootona could do serious damage to a full-grown Mory before the Mory had time to think, let alone react but, for some reason, this cub just lay there while I held it down. I couldn't understand until I noticed the smell. Mother had obviously been dead for longer than I had imagined because the stench of death was strong this close to her. What was beyond my ability to understand was why no other animal had come by to consume her carcass and the carcasses of her cubs and kill this one? I guess that fate, or God, may have interfered with this natural action and, therefore, prevented it from happening. Perhaps He had bigger plans for this cub, and me, and protected the cub until I arrived. Whatever the reason, I now had a Kootona cub pinned to the ground and a tiny fear was growing as to what would happen if I released even a minuscule amount of pressure against the neck.

I thought quickly and decided that I needed to prevent him from being able to scratch me with his fantastically long claws, which were exposed and digging into the ground. I came to the conclusion that the best thing to do would be to, somehow, remove my leather vest and wrap him in it, leaving only the head free so I could feed him. Performing this action almost proved to be my undoing. I knew that I would have to ease the pressure on his neck as I tried to remove the vest. I had been holding him down with a bit of pressure against his trachea so, I was, inadvertently, slowly choking him. His strength was all but gone when I arrived anyway, so the little amount of pressure I was exerting was causing him to slowly choke to death. I realized what was happening just as I got my vest off. I quickly wrapped him up and let go of the pressure on him. I quickly took a rawhide string from the vest and tied him into a small bundle.

I looked him over to see if there was any other damage to him that might have caused him to be as weak as he was. I didn't see any blood on him, dried or otherwise; therefore, I was fairly certain that he was all right, physically. I picked him up and held him up to where I could see his face. As I did so, he moved his head quicker than I thought he could in his weakened state and latched onto my hand. He wasn't strong enough to break the skin, thank God, but, with his milk teeth having erupted, he was putting a severe amount of pain into my hand. I thought quickly and, using my other hand, I slapped him on the end of his nose and said strongly, "KY!" (3) He continued to hold my hand with his mouth, though the pressure was lessened somewhat. Once again, I slapped his nose and said, even louder, "KY!" This time he released my hand and looked at me with fear, and possibly, sadness in his eyes. I could see that he didn't like the pain that was inflicted upon his snout when I slapped it. But, he had to learn, and quickly, to not bite the hand that might be feeding him for a while.

After the cub released my hand, I pulled some more string out of my Etyma Jivekoo and improvised a sling and tied him into it. As I held him, I decided to name the cub Chy. I put him onto my back, put the harness I had put together for the Zooshaka on and drug the Zooshaka and carried Chy to the rendezvous site that Rora and I had agreed upon. I laid the bundle of Kootona cub on the ground and retrieved a piece of dried meat from my Etyma Jivekoo. I reached out my hand with the meat in it to the cub. When he smelled the meat, it got his undivided attention. He

was suspicious of the new smell, after all, I didn't smell anything like his mother, but he was hungry enough to want the meat. I eased the meat close enough for Chy to reach it. He took it and ate it greedily, growling the whole time. He was closer to starvation than I had thought.

I got another piece of meat and handed it to the cub. He ate it just as quickly. I continued to feed him until he refused any more meat from me. He turned his head toward me, sniffed and, through his slightly opened mouth, I could hear a soft purring sound coming from him. It looked to me like he might be thinking of me as his new mother. I found myself becoming somewhat protective and more than a little attached to the little fellow. I guess it must be an instinctive thing among most humans.

Since he was a wild animal, I was a bit leery about becoming too friendly with Chy. I didn't want him to become completely dependent on me for his meals but, at the same time, I was somewhat lonely. Even though I knew that Rora and I would visit Kyta and Tyarza on a regular basis, I still didn't have anyone that I could count on to see every day. I knew that I was longing for a pet of some kind. As I said, at the very beginning of my tale, I had always had an affinity for cats on Terra and here was a "homeless kitten" that needed a home. I was being torn between what I should do and what I wanted to do. Finally, I decided that I would talk it over with Rora and see what he thought.

I had Chy lying on the ground when Rora arrived at the rendezvous point. He had a Taojoo that he had killed when I heard him roar earlier. When I showed him the bundle of Kootona cub, he went ballistic.

"What in the name of the first Ka'yno are you doing with that thing? Do you know what THAT is?" This was the first time since I met Rora that I saw him show any semblance of anger, especially towards me.

I decided that I wasn't going to lose my temper with him since he didn't know the situation concerning the cub. Calmly, I replied, "Yes, Rora, I know what *he* is. I found *him* in the forest. He was about to starve to death when I found him. So, I decided to feed him and try to nurse him back to health."

"Mvilu that is the duty of his norotha." Nervously, he looked about. He continued by saying, "And I have no doubt that she will be looking for him very soon. We should not have him here. It could mean our deaths if she finds us."

"Rora that is the last thing we have to worry about right now. I found him trying, and I stress trying, to nurse from his norotha. She was dead and had been for some time. I did not stick around long enough to find out how she died. I have been taught enough about the Akootona to know that any male Kootona that found him would probably kill him for food."

"Better that rothoo than us, Mvilu. Look, the Akootona and Mory have an understanding. That understanding is this, if a Kootona finds a Mory, the Mory has to fight for his life and vice versa. It is better for this rothoo that he finds his own way to survive."

Despite my resolve to remain calm, I was slowly becoming agitated. “Rora, did you ever think that the reason the Akootona attack the Mory on sight could be the very reason you just mentioned? What if the Mory did not attack the Akootona on sight? Do you think that perhaps the Akootona would reciprocate and not attack the Mory?”

“Besides, I will NOT allow ANY defenseless baby animal die if I can prevent it, especially an animal that could, I repeat could, be of service to us in the future. I know enough about the Akootona to know that they are one of the most efficient hunters on this planet. This little one could grow up to be of service to us in this manner. He could also be a great house guardian. Can you not see what I am trying to say, Rora?”

“I know what you are trying to say, Mviliu; however, even if I agreed with it, there are the problems of the Ka’yno demanding that this creature be destroyed and the village will not stand for a Kootona being within two kilometers of the village, let alone within the village proper, AND what my norotha will say when she finds out.”

“Who says the Ka’yno and the village have to know? Is there not a way to hide him?”
“Hide HIM! May I ask where? If you saw this creature’s norotha, then you know how big they can grow and a chohachy Kootona is about 20% larger than a nohachy. Have you considered how much meat we would have to provide for this thing when it is full grown? Where would we get enough meat to feed him? I know how we could do it! We will have to sacrifice villagers so he can eat!” This last was said with all the sarcasm that you can imagine being put into a sentence.

“Rora, do not be sarcastic with me. You know that if it came down to the villagers or Chy, I would sacrifice Chy but, even as you deserved a right to grow up and survive, so does he. However, I believe that we, you and I, can obtain enough meat to feed him and us.”

“I still do not see how we would be able to sneak him into the village without someone seeing us, and him. Have you forgotten about the garden guards? They will see him, if you carry him, and they will demand that he be killed.”

Rora had started to scratch Chy between his ears by this time. I could see that he was starting to try to think of a way to save the cub from an undeserved death, despite all his protests to the contrary. Perhaps it was because of the defenselessness of the youngster, perhaps not. Perhaps he also noticed how much like a Mory cub Chy looked. All I know is that Rora now seemed to want to help me with him. Chy had even started licking and nibbling on Rora’s fingers. This startled Rora slightly, but he seemed to be enjoying the attention the cub was giving him.

I didn’t trust Chy enough to release his paws from confinement but, I didn’t hesitate to pet him. I scratched his head and muzzle as his mother would have done with her tongue and he lay there and let me do it. He even went so far as to start purring, sounding like a ten-kilogram kitten, which, in a way, he was. It seemed strange that this animal, so like, and yet unlike, a house cat on Terra, would respond so much like a house cat to the attentions that Rora and I were giving him. I felt that I could possibly tame this wild animal, although I wasn’t so trusting as to

believe that he wouldn't possibly turn on me as an adult, given half a chance. I was pulled in two different directions when I considered that in a year or two I may have to kill this very animal to protect one of my friends, or even myself.

While I was lost in these contemplations, Rora spoke to me. "Mvilu, we need to find a safe place for this rothoo until we can figure out a way to sneak him into the village. We also need to find a safe place in the village to keep him so no one will know that he is there. Do you have any ideas?"

"We have about three ahi'nu of sunlight left and we are only about a hi'nu away from the village. So, we have about two ahi'nu to make the plans. A lot can be accomplished in that amount of time."

"You are an eternal optimist, Mvilu. As long as I have known you, you have always seen the positive side to virtually any situation, even the situation you are experiencing as my slave. You have always inspired me with this attitude so, I hope you will inspire me once again."

I smiled and said, "Thanks, Rora. But, kudos will not get us out of this situation. What we need to do is figure out a way to sneak little Chy past the garden guards, into the village and into your norothany home."

"Chy?"

"Yes. I have decided to call him Chy. The Kootona are very fast runners, are they not?"

"Yes, they are. In fact, it is said that nothing on Tashoo can outrun one. But, what does that have to do with anything?"

"Because, my friend, where I am from there is an animal, a feline, that is extremely fast. It is called a cheetah."

"Chy ta? Oh, I see. You are naming the rothoo after that animal. That makes sense to me, I suppose. By the way, do you know what that phrase means to a Mory?"

"I am afraid not, Rora. I hope it does not have a negative meaning."

"It does not. It means 'ferocious one'. Chy is a shortened form of chykooza. The Mory nicknamed the Akootona this because they are even more ferocious than the Chakootoa. In fact, the Kootona is the only animal on Tashoo, besides Mory and Uany, which will attack a grown Chakootoa willingly."

"Well, then Chy Ta is a doubly appropriate name. Would you not agree?"

"It is most appropriate."

Holding up a finger, I said, "By the way, Rora, I thought this was Te."

“It is. But, Te is used in counting and referring to a specific person or thing. Ta is a general meaning. When we refer to the Te Zyoiloo (4), we are referring to the Ka’yno. If we say chy ta, we are referring to all of the Akootona.”

“The logic of the language of Tashoo always utterly amazes me, Rora. Anyway, we still need a safe way to get Chy into your norothany home. Any suggestions?”

“As you have said, there is no safe place to hide a Kootona rothoo in the forest. Because it is such a danger to other animals, even the most docile of them will either completely avoid it or they will try to kill it while it is relatively harmless. Normally, its norotha would protect it from these dangers, especially the danger of a chohachy, with her life but, with the norotha dead, there is nothing to protect it, except a soft-hearted Uany hunter.” He said this last sentence with a slight smile playing on his lips.

I took what he said good-naturedly and, smiling, said, “I noticed you were scratching Chy’s head a short while ago. So, am I the only soft-hearted one here?”

After I said this, Rora did one of the most human things I have ever seen him do. He suddenly grabbed my arm, balled up that massive fist of his, and gently poked me in the arm. All the while, he was smiling and laughing at me. To say I was shocked would be a mild understatement. Rora had never shown this, or any other, form of affection, towards me. Even Chy was surprised, because he laid his ears back and growled gently at Rora until I reached over, scratched his head and spoke gently to him. I had never even seen this action between two Mory. So, I could not understand why Rora did it and said so.

“Mvilu,” he said, “it is not unheard of among close friends. But, only among friends that are not likely to truly do battle with each other. I know you well enough to know that we are not likely to ever compete for anything, especially since we are of different species but, also, because you have been so willing to do what you have for my norotha and me.”

I started to say something, but Rora cut me off. “The night that Kyna came to dinner and all I was able to provide was the two little Aa’koony. You willingly gave up your portion of the meat so that my norotha and I would have more. It was embarrassing to have a slave, and a guest, give up meat for us. But, Norotha and I knew that both of you were doing it out of love for us. You would not even eat a piece of scrap meat that was offered to you. We Mory are a tradition minded people. It is difficult for us to do things that go against tradition, but you have taught Norotha and me that sometimes traditions cause more problems than they solve.”

“Rora, how could I do less than I did that night, or any other time since I arrived at Talo-Vy. You saved my life on the day I arrived in Talo-Vy, twice. I owe you a life debt because of it. We do not really follow that tradition where I am from, but I understand how that tradition may have come about. Technically, I was your slave because you captured me but, I would have willingly become your slave for saving my life. As long as I can, I will do whatever I can to see to it that you and your norotha have all that you need. Why do you think I made this spear, this

bow and these arrows? I did not do it for me. Although Uany crave meat, they can survive longer on a diet of vegetables and fruits and the Mory can.”

“This is why, Mvilu, I think of you as more than a Uany. You are my brother in spirit. We think more alike than you can imagine. I can assure you that my norotha, and our neighbors, appreciate the fact that we, you and I, provide them with some of the meat they need. However, I fear that the Ka’yno may be becoming jealous of our success hunting.”

“Do not worry about the Ka’yno. I doubt very seriously that he would do me any harm.”

“You do not know him as I know him.”

“Rora, why do you think I suggested that we give the excess meat to our neighbors? I did it to curry favor with them, and Ka’ Naka. As long as one Ka’ on the Ishoo'se stops him, the Ka’yno cannot pass a death sentence on anyone in the village, right?”

“Yes, other than the *Trial of Life or Death* that a captured adult Uany must endure, a death sentence must be a unanimous vote of the Ishoo'se Aka’ny.” Then a light went on in Rora’s head and he said emphatically, “Yes! I see what you are saying now. Since you are in his Ka’na, if Ka’ Naka vetoes a death sentence, the Ka’yno cannot put you to death. He can only challenge you to a duel to the death but, suppose the Ka’yno does that. What would you do? You could never stand up to him in a fight. You do not have claws and fangs to fight with.”

“Tell me something, Rora. I know that if one Mory challenges another Mory, the challenged Mory gets to choose his weapons. Does that hold true if a Mory were to challenge a Uany?”

“I am not certain, Mvilu but, I would think it would hold true. However, I do not see how that would help you.”

“Trust me, Rora, it does. Have you forgotten that I am training you, and other achohachy, in the arts of sword fighting?”

“I had forgotten for a moment; perhaps it will work. Let us get off of this morbid train of thought. I hope the Ka’yno does not challenge you, but if you think you could defeat him, then I believe you can.

“What I wanted to say earlier is this. You are more than a slave to me, and my norotha. You are a friend. I would be willing to do anything I could for you, just as you are willing to do the same for Norotha and me.”

Chy had started whining for attention. I walked over to him and offered him a piece of dried meat. As before, he ate it greedily. As I was feeding him, an idea crossed my mind. For it to work, I would need Rora’s assistance and a little assistance from Chy.

“Rora,” I said, “I have noticed that after eating, Chy becomes very quiet. In fact, he falls asleep. Have you noticed that?”

“Yes, I have. Why do you ask?”

“I think I know what we can do with him to keep him out of harm’s way *and* get him into the village unseen.”

“I do not think I am going to like this, Mvilu. You still have the devious mind of a Uany, even if you seem to show signs of Mory inspiration. What do you propose?”

“We feed Chy until he is so full that he falls asleep. Then we unload my Etyma Jivekoo and put the contents into yours. We put Chy into my Etyma Jivekoo; he should fit perfectly. While he is asleep, we walk into the village carrying our meat and go home. I go to my room and take my Etyma Jivekoo off and leave it there. If we feed him enough, Chy should sleep for at least three ahi’nu, which would give us plenty of time, as long as he does not wiggle in his sleep at the wrong time. After I leave him in my room, I will go outside with you to clean the meat as I normally do.”

“Yes, that devious mind of yours is starting to show again. I should not agree to do this, Mvilu. You know that.”

“But?”

Rora looked at me, took a deep breath and said, “But, I will. By the Great Being, I hope my norotha does not decide to help you for a change. You know she will shriek if she sees a Kootona in her home.”

“That is why I am hoping that she will remember what a creature of habit I am. Of course, she has never violated my privacy since I have been with the two of you. I cannot imagine her changing that now.”

We fed Chy enough meat for two Kootona cubs before he finally refused to eat any more. He must have truly been half starved. He lay on the ground looking at us as we prepared to leave and head back to the village. I kept glancing at him and noticed that soon his eyes were slowly closing. Obviously, he felt safe in our presence even though neither of us was his mother. I guess it was because we had both fed him and not offered to harm him. By the time Rora and I had finished packing the meat and moving the contents of my Etyma Jivekoo to Rora’s, Chy was fast asleep. He was so deeply asleep that I was able to pick him up and put him into my Etyma Jivekoo without waking him. It was like picking up a ten-kilogram bag of flour; that is how limp he was, although he did growl a little.

1-The Zooshaka is an animal that resembles an extra-large sized cow. The body is about three meters in length excluding a tail about one hundred fifty cm long that ends in a tuft of hair that is slightly darker than the hair on the body and tail. The hair on it is relatively long, about ten cm in length, and blood red. The eyes are jade green with round pupils. It has cloven hooves that are midnight black in color. It has three horns on the head, two resembling the horns of a Texas Longhorn that curve toward the front and sprouting from either side of the top of the head and a third horn that is twisted, giving the impression of nothing less than the horn of a unicorn, and growing straight forward out of the middle of the forehead. The ears are conical, like a cow's ears. A bull will weigh in the neighborhood of six hundred seventy-five kilograms and a cow will weigh about four hundred fifty kilograms.

2- This seemed to be true with all the felines on Tashoo. The males, and females, were rather easy to sex from a distance. The adult Mory achohachy, with their manes, are more obvious than most felines on Terra. The adult Mory anohachy have one obviously noticeable feature similar to human females, that being permanently enlarged breasts, so telling their sex is a lot easier. I also learned later that, even though the anohachy have two permanently enlarged breasts, if an anohachy were pregnant with more than two arothoo, an extra pair of breasts enlarge for each extra cub or two in the womb. In other words, if the anohachy is pregnant with five cubs, she will have two extra pair of breasts will swell.

3-No, in the language of Tashoo.

4-Great One