

XXIII

Chy Charms the Anohachy (Day 163 on Tashoo)

Fortunately, the hike home was just a short four kilometers; otherwise, the dead weight of Chy would have been totally unbearable and I didn't want Rora to have to explain why he carried a Kootona cub into the village. We made it past the garden guards and to the house without incident of any kind; however, this would be the one day that Ara decided that she wanted to give me a hand with my Etyma Jivekoo. I had a devil of a time convincing her that I didn't need her help without revealing the truth or offending her. She looked at me funny but, fortunately, I succeeded. I went to my room to unload Chy from my pack. He was still fast asleep and didn't seem to want to be disturbed. Once again, he growled a little, lifting one side of his upper lip exposing a tiny canine as I moved him, but he didn't do more than that. I put him in a corner of the room and covered him lightly with some extra furs that were in the closet to hide him and keep him warm.

After I finished in my room, I went outside to help Rora get the meat ready for Ara's final preparations. I was starting to congratulate myself on how easily I had pulled off this trick with Chy when I heard the most ear-piercing scream coming from the inside of Ara's house. The thought that crossed my mind was, "Uh-oh. Why today of all days?"

Rora and I raced inside and found Ara standing at the door to my room. Although I already knew the answer to my question, I asked, "What is wrong, Ara?"

"Those furs in the corner moved. What is under them?" This last was not so much a question as it was a demand for information.

Rora and I looked at each other before I spoke. "Ara," I said somewhat uneasily, "I guess I need to confess something to you but, before I do, I think you need to sit down in the family room. I will show you what is under the furs after you sit down."

"This had better be good, Mvilu," she said as she stalked out of my room.

Rora whispered to me, "Why did you not go on the offensive and demand why she was in your room without your permission?"

I whispered back, "Because I doubt it would work with her. Did it ever work when you were younger?"

Rora thought for a thata and said, "No—no, it did not. What are you going to do?"

"I am going to show her what is under the furs. By the Great Being, I hope that she does not decide to have my ears for what I have done. Hopefully, she will be as understanding with this as she has been with almost everything else I have done. After all, she is a nohachy and a norotha. That may weigh in my, our, favor."

"What do you mean, *our*?"

I laughed and said, “Coward. I mean Chy’s and mine but, you should remember that you helped me bring him home. Ara will not believe that you did not know about him.”

“My norotha will believe me.”

“If she does, she is not a typical norotha.” I laughed.

I uncovered Chy and, followed at a safe distance by Rora, brought him into the family room. He was still bundled so that he couldn’t get his claws free, but he was pretty docile by this time. I guess he had decided that I was his mother since I had fed him lately.

When I brought Chy to where Ara could see him, she instantly went on the defensive. I mean her pupils dilated, her ears laid back, her fur fluffed out, and her claws instantly became exposed. I had a strange feeling that she didn’t like the idea of a Kootona in her house; however, when she saw how docile he was in my hands, her belligerent attitude toward him softened, a little, but she was still a little defensive.

“What—is—that—thing—doing—in—my—house?” She demanded. “Do you not know what that is, Mvilu? Rora, how could you allow him to bring that in here? The Ka’yno will have our ears for sure if he finds out.” Ara didn’t give Rora nor me long enough to respond before she asked her next question.

I said, “I am sorry, Ara. It is my fault. I found him by his dead norotha trying to nurse. His norotha had been dead for a while because she was starting to smell badly. There is no telling how long he had been without a meal when I arrived. I have a tender heart when it comes to defenseless little creatures. I hate to see them die if I can save their life. I took it upon myself to try to save his life. If, in the future, he becomes a danger, I will personally remove him from the village and, as much as I hate the thought, I will kill him myself.”

After I said that, I heard a small voice inside my head saying, “Kill me?” I thought it was a guilty conscious speaking.

“Mvilu, do you know how big that thing will grow? As a chohachy Kootona, he will easily grow to be at least three meters long from the tip of his nose to the tip of his tail and weigh over two hundred kilograms. You will be hard pressed to find a place to hide such a large creature that the Ka’yno will not find him.”

“I understand, Ara. That is why I am hoping that you will be able to help me. Is there not a tradition that allows you to claim any house not being lived in?”

“Yes, so?”

“I know that there are several large houses unoccupied in this Ka'na. If I could find one that might be large enough, would you claim it and let me keep Chy in it? I am sure that no one would say anything if Rora and I lived in it.”

“The Ka'yno would want to know why I want two houses. I do not think that I could get away with it. WHAT AM I SAYING? You want me to become a conspirator with you to defy Mory laws! Are you crazy, Mvihu?”

“Please Ara. I have never asked anything of you before.” I rolled my eyes before continuing with, “By the Great Being, I sound like a little rothoo but I am serious, Ara. I believe that Chy will be of service to us in the future.”

Ara slowly calmed down as she sat there in thought for a few athaloo before she asked, “Why do you call him Chy?”

“Well, as I explained to Rora earlier, there is an animal where I am from which is called a cheetah. It is the fastest animal where I am from and the Kootona is the fastest here. Therefore, I decided to call him Chy in honor of the cheetah. Rora told me that the Kootona have a nickname of Chy Ta.”

“Yes, they are perhaps the most ferocious of all animals on Tashoo, even the Achakootoa fear them.”

“Will you help me, Ara?”

Chy had started to nuzzle her hand causing her to start to soften her attitude toward him a bit, saying, “He is cute, is he not? Will he bite?”

“So far, only my hand and the meat I have fed him.”

“Your hand!”

“Do not worry, he did not break the skin. He was too weak from hunger at the time to do that but, I taught him to not bite me. Rora even scratched his head and he did not do anything more than purr at the feeling. He has even rubbed his cheek against mine so, I think that he may be understanding that we are here to help him.”

Ara did her best imitation of someone pursing her lips, a difficult task considering the shape of the Mory mouth and lips. I could tell she was deep in thought. Finally, after a considerable amount of time, she said, “All right. He can stay here. I just know I am going to regret this decision. How do you intend to feed him? After all, he is a carnivore.”

“Thank you, Ara.” I said. “He can have whatever portion of meat I would normally receive.”

For the first time since the conversation began, Rora spoke up and said, "If he needs more, he can have mine as well."

Ara looked at Rora, laughed softly, and said, "I do not think either of you will have to give up your meat ration. The way you two bring home meat, we should have plenty. I am just wondering how we will explain to our neighbors the fact that we will be needing more meat."

"I will think of a good explanation, Ara."

"Very well, Mvilu."

I impulsively kissed Ara on the cheek and said, "Thank you, Ara. I doubt you will regret it."

Ara turned her head in the manner that Mory show embarrassment. "Mvilu, you should not do that to me. I am not your norotha, after all."

"I am sorry, Ara, but, sometimes I think of you as a surrogate norotha. I hope that you will not be offended if I do kiss you sometimes. Besides, you did give me the Mory equivalent some time back. Remember?"

Once again, Ara blushed in the Mory manner. Then, she said, "You two get out there and finish with that meat you brought home today."

Rora and I finished cleaning the Taojoo and Zooshaka and brought the meat inside. When we entered, I saw Ara in the living room with Chy in her lap. He was asleep. I could hear a faint purring sound coming from the chair that Ara was sitting in. But, the purring sounded funny. I was trying to figure out what was so unusual about the purring when it hit me. I was hearing two purring sounds. I believe that I, Chy actually, had won Ara over to our way of thinking.

Ara looked at me and put a hand over her mouth and said, quietly, "He is asleep. Is the meat ready to be put away?"

"Yes, ma'am. We just finished. The meat is on the table. What do you want us to do with it?"

"Here, take Chy and I will finish preparing the meat for storage."

I took Chy and headed to my room with him. I placed him on the bed and covered him with the furs. He crawled out from under the furs sniffing around and found my pillow. He placed his head on it and stopped moving. Soon, once again, he started purring loudly. The purring almost sounded like he was snoring. I left him there, closed the door to my room and walked back to the dining area.

I asked, “Ara, what did you do to make Chy fall asleep so soundly.”

From the look on her face, I knew that something had occurred that Ara didn't want to talk about. She kept looking sideways toward Rora. I knew she didn't want him to know. So, I didn't press the issue. Ara took part of the meat and set it aside to prepare for dinner. Then, she prepared the rest of the meat, separating it into piles weighing about five kilograms each, wrapped it in the “freezer paper”, and put it into the box that I have named the freezer.

While Ara was preparing the meat, I took Rora outside and we started sword training again. As we walked outside, Rora said, “Mvilu, do you know why Norotha was embarrassed about how she got Chy to go to sleep?”

“She did not want to admit how she did it in front of you.”

“Do you know how she did it?”

“Yes. Are you sure you want to know?”

“Yes.”

“She allowed him to nurse, Rora.”

“She allowed him to nurse? That sounds indecent. Why would she allow an animal to nurse when she is incapable of producing milk? I mean, she has no arothoo and, therefore, has no milk to nurse him. How can she do that?”

“I understand, Rora. Ara's nursing wasn't to feed him; it was to calm him, to pacify him and allow him to feel like he was at home with his norotha. When he felt completely at home, he fell asleep in her lap.”

By this time, we had arrived at the Atasho Vaorado; however, I decided against sword fighting. Today, I had Rora practice his balance exercises. I started these exercises by using three boards five-centimeter-thick by ten-centimeter-wide by five-meter-long and standing on its side. I had Rora walk along the boards, heel to toe. As he attempted to walk on the boards, Rora continually fell off.

Finally, after falling off a few times, he turned on me and said, “Mvilu, this cannot be done.”

“Yes, it can, Rora; I can do it. As a matter of fact, I can walk on the edge of a one-centimeter thick board, although I have never done it barefoot.”

Aggravated, he said, “Then show me how to do it.”

I stepped up on the boards and slowly walked along the edge of them. I never watched my feet and walked normally. I walked to the end, turned around and walked back.

I stepped off the boards and said to Rora, “You see, Rora. Of course, there are two things you must remember. One, I have been doing this a lot longer than you have. Two, this is a balance exercise. Like most of us, you have never learned to use your balance properly. When you graduate from the balance exercises, you will be able to walk along a one-centimeter thick rope suspended off the ground and maintain your balance. Remember Rora, balance is very important in battle. If an enemy were to press you in battle, you could lose your balance, then your life. That is what the balance exercises attempt to prevent. Now, are you ready to try again? Remember, it is better to fail here than on the battlefield.”

“Yes Mvilu, I am ready.” Once again, he got up on the boards and started walking along the edge. He got about one and a half meters down the boards before he fell off. He turned and looked at me.

“Do not worry, Rora. Just get back on the boards and continue. Do not try to walk down the boards like I did. Go ahead and use your arms for balance. Eventually, you will not need them. As you continue to practice this exercise, gradually you will be able to walk further and further down the board before you fall off.”

He got back on the boards and walked about two more meters before he fell. Without looking at me, he got back on the boards. This time, he made it to the end. Again, without looking at me, he thought for a couple of athata, turned around after wobbling a bit, and started back. Since he wasn't used to doing this, he fell off after about a meter. He got back on and started again. He fell off the boards four times before he got back to me. He wasn't disheartened by this, though. He truly trusted me and everything I said.

When he got back to me, I said, “Rora, believe it or not, the time will come when you will be able to jump up and down on the board and land without falling off. You will even be able to jump up, turn completely around and land on the edge of the board without losing your balance. It will not come quickly nor easily but, if you keep practicing, it will come. We will stop for today and practice a way of self-defense the Mory have never thought of trying. But, I want you to do the balance exercises every day.”

I started training Rora in judo. “Rora, the first thing you need to learn is how to fall.”

Rora laughed and said, “Mvilu, I already know how to fall. That is one of the easiest things to do.”

“Do you now? All right, then, I want you to run at me like you want to catch me.”

Rora looked at me funny, but did as he was told. When he was about to wrap his arms around me, I caught the lapels of his vest, fell backward onto my back, put my feet into his gut,

and flipped him over onto his back. By the time he landed on his back, I was straddling his chest and looking at him. The look of sheer terror in his eyes was almost comical.

I slid off his chest and, cradling his shoulders in my arms, said, very quietly, “Do not be afraid, Rora. You just got the wind knocked out of you. Relax and take short breaths. Do not panic. Be calm.”

He continued to look at me with fear in his eyes, but tried to do as I suggested. Slowly, his breathing returned to normal. After a couple of athaloo, he was able to sit up, although he was still a bit wobbly. After a couple of more athaloo, he took a deep breath and looked at me. He was still afraid, but there was more awe in his eyes than fear.

“What did you do to me, Mvilu?”

“I did what is an adaptation of a judo forward roll. Judo is a form of self-defense that I told you about. The forward roll is used when someone attacks you unexpectedly and you do not have time to draw your sword. It is also why I said you needed to learn to fall.”

“I should have known that if you told me I needed to learn something; I need to learn it. Will I ever learn to listen to you?”

I laughed and said, “Eventually. Now, here's what you need to do to learn to fall properly. Watch me.”

I ran, took a small jump, ducked my head and twisted my body so that I fell and, landing just behind my right shoulder, hit the ground. When my shoulder hit the ground, I continued to roll forward and was able to jump back onto my feet. When I turned around, I saw Rora slapping his right hand against his vest.

“So, that is how you fall properly.” He said, obviously impressed. “But, the way you threw me would make it difficult to fall that way. What could I have done?”

“You have to understand one thing, Rora. I knew I was going to fall. Would you not agree with that?”

“Yes.”

“Okay, since I knew I was going to fall, I relaxed my body. That is the secret to falling properly. Accept that you are going to fall, relax your body and go with the fall. It is when you fight the fall that you get hurt. So, what I will need you to do daily is just run, fall and roll. You should do that at least five times in a row.”

“Yes, Mvilu. I will do it.”

“When you have learned to fall properly, we will take the next step in learning unarmed self-defense.”

“Yes, Mvilu.”

Rora took off running and fell, flat on his face. I ducked my head and smiled. He looked back at me and tried again. Once again, he fell flat on his face. This time he walked back and asked me what he was doing wrong. I told him and he tried again. This time he managed to land on his elbow and almost dislocated his shoulder. I was a bit concerned, but he got up and tried again. This time he landed on his shoulder properly, but didn't make the flip. I could tell he had hurt himself because he winced and grabbed his shoulder, but he tried one last time. Finally, he landed properly, flipped properly and landed on his feet, but he continued forward and landed on his face again.

“Come along, Rora. You did your five tries. I believe you will be able to make the flip in a couple of days.” I looked him over and said, “Besides, I think you may have injured your shoulder and I believe you will need to bathe to clean yourself up properly.”

He looked at himself and laughed. “I have not been this dirty since I was six years old and was playing tag with Kyta, Kyna and Vamoo. Norotha will be shocked when she sees me.” Then, he laughed all the harder.

We went inside and, as he expected, Ara was so shocked she ordered him into the bathroom to bathe properly. After Rora closed the bathroom door, Ara asked me why he was so dirty.

When I told her, she just shook her head and said, “I thought the two of you were adults, Mvilu. Why did you have him playing in the dirt like a rothoo?”

“Believe it or not, I was teaching him unarmed self-defense.”

Ara just harrumphed and headed into the kitchen to complete dinner.

About half a hi’nu later, dinner was ready. Rora had finished bathing; so, I cleaned up and we sat at the table. Ara had taken one of the tenderloins of the Zooshaka and broiled it after surrounding it with several herbs, one of which was similar to garlic in flavor and smell, making a fantastic roast. Fortunately, the tenderloins of Zooshaka weigh close to ten kilograms each. So, we had plenty of meat to eat. After dinner, I asked if I could take some of the remaining meat to Chy. I told Ara that I thought he was getting old enough to start eating solid food. She agreed with me and gave me about one hundred grams to feed him. I took the meat, mixed it with some steamed vegetables, mashed them all together into a gruel looking concoction and took it to my room.

Chy was awake now and crying softly. I took the mixture and dipped my finger into it and put it to his mouth. He sniffed it and then licked it off biting my finger in the process. I placed the dish on the floor and placed him next to it, close enough that he could smell it and

crawl to it. He could barely pick himself up off the floor, but he got to the bowl. He licked up the mixture until his belly was sticking out, making him look like a furry ball with a head, legs and tail. Then he started looking around from side to side and finally started crawling toward me. When he got to me, he crawled into my lap, snuggled until he was comfortable and fell asleep. I picked him up and took him to my bed. I lay him on the bed, got undressed and crawled under the furs and fell asleep myself.

The next afternoon, Rora and I went out back of Ara's house and I had Rora practice his balance by walking on the boards. After he walked the boards a few times, gaining a little more balance each time he walked, I then had him start his fall practice. Once again, he ran and fell five times, gaining a bit more balance with each fall and flip, despite the slight injury to his shoulder, which I determined was nothing more than a bad bruise. Finally, we started the sword training. He was getting better, but he still wasn't anywhere near good enough. I had to occasionally remind him by showing him something that he didn't know but, every time I every time I did this, he all but demanded that I show him how to do it. Most of the time, I would do this gladly, although, sometimes, due to the complexity of the move, I would have to put him off for a while. Besides, most trainers never show *all* of their secrets. While we were practicing, I heard a familiar laugh. I turned and saw Kyna standing there.

He said, "Rora, are you never going to learn?"

Rora, slightly agitated at being bested, again, and the laughter, said, "If you think you know all of his tricks, you take over. Show me where I am going wrong."

I said, "Rora, you know Kyna has more experience sword fighting than you do so, he will probably do better than you." I looked over at Kyna and, with a knowing smile, said, "But, I doubt very seriously he could best me. Remember, I proved that the first day I started training you."

This statement was a slap at Kyna's pride. The look on his face told me that and his reaction was just what I had hoped it would be. He walked over, picked up one of the adauanka, and held it at the ready. He said, "I have been practicing, Mvilu so, be prepared to be surprised."

My smile became even broader. The first part of an opponent's downfall, after all, is overconfidence. I assumed the ready position. "I am ready, Kyna, any time you are."

He gripped the dauanka with two hands, made a feint to my right, spun around and swung at my left side. Unfortunately for him, I guessed that this was going to be his move. After all, when I started training him, Rora had used the same move to try to impress me so I did not react to his feint and already had my dauanka waiting for his swipe. The look of surprise on his face was almost comical, especially when I broke the contact of the adauanka and lunged at him. In his attempt to parry my thrust, he lost his footing and I was on top of him with my dauanka poised over his heart.

He looked at me sheepishly and said, “I guess I still have plenty to learn.”

I offered him a hand and said, “Yes, you do. One thing you have to learn, along with most of the Mory-Talo-Vy, is to not be overconfident. Always assume your opponent knows something you do not know. That way, you will always be prepared, and you will not likely be surprised by him.”

Rora said, “Another thing you need to learn is to walk the boards.”

“Walk the boards?” Kyna asked, looking at me.

I laughed, “Yes, I am teaching Rora balance by making him walk along the edge of some boards.”

“Walk along the edge of boards? How does that teach balance?”

I smiled and said, “Come with me.”

I led him to the boards that I had set up for Rora. “Now, Kyna, step up on the boards and walk to the end and return.”

He looked at me and said, “You are not serious, are you?”

“I am very serious. Give it a try.”

He stepped up onto the edge of the boards, took one step and promptly lost his balance. He turned to me and said, “Can you do it?”

Rora and I shared a smile and I stepped up on the boards, walked to the end, turned around and started back. Halfway back, I stopped and, to show Rora what I meant yesterday, jumped up and down on the boards. Next, I jumped up, turned completely around and landed on the boards. I turned around and completed the return to where Rora and Kyna were standing.

“There.” I said. “Be prepared, Kyna, everyone will be required to complete the walk before they can graduate from training. You will not have to do the extracurricular stuff that I did, but you will need to learn to walk the boards.”

He laughed and said, “Once again you surprise me, Mvilu. I hope I am never surprised by you again.”

“Do not worry, you will be. I have barely touched on that I know while teaching. By the way, what are you doing over here?”

“Oh. I almost forgot. Norotha brought us all over to have dinner with TaAra. You and Rora are the best hunters in the Ka'na, if not the whole village, now.”

“Well, since you are all here, I think that perhaps Rora and I should suspend our training and go inside.”

We all headed inside and, much to my pleasant surprise, Tyarza walked right over and stood beside me. As a matter of fact, she acted as if she was auditioning for the role of my shadow. There were a couple of times, in fact, that I turned suddenly and almost knocked her over. Even though it was a bit distracting, I wasn't unhappy about it.

While we were visiting, I heard somebody scratching on the door. I got Ara's attention and told her about the visitor. She opened the door and, when she saw who it was, she turned and announced the Ka' Naka and gave him the traditional Mory invitation to enter. He gave her to appropriate response and entered. Joola, who had followed Ara to the door smiled that fearful looking, but friendly, Mory smile when she saw Ka' Naka. He returned the smile and accompanied them into the house. Rora was standing and talking to Kyta in a very quiet and hushed manner. I smiled as I saw them, but I couldn't say anything since I really wanted to do the same thing with Tyarza.

After a few athaloo, I suddenly remembered Chy. I excused myself and walked to my room; I opened the door and entered. Chy had extricated himself from the furs and was crawling about looking around. He was at the edge of the bed and, even though he couldn't see very well, investigating the drop. I walked up to him and softly called his name. He crawled over and nuzzled my leg. I was amazed at how quickly he learned what his name was and responded to it. If I didn't know better, I would have thought that he could understand my thoughts and knew that, when I called Chy, I was referring to him.

I knew he was hungry. As a matter of fact, he was starting to cry for food but I had no idea how to get food to him without raising the suspicions of everybody not in the know where he was concerned. Fortunately, his crying was on the quiet side. It kind of reminded me of a small bird chirping; so, I wasn't overly concerned that anyone would hear.

All of a sudden, at my ear, I heard, “Ooh. It is so cute.” I turned suddenly and was looking directly into the yellow-in-blue eyes of Tyarza.

I was thinking, *“I thought I had closed that door.”* and *“What is she going to do?”* However, I said to her, “How did you get in here?”

“I followed you, silly. I walked in when you did.”

OooohmyGod! In my concern about Chy, I had temporarily forgotten about my shadow. What is she going to say? Is she going to raise an alarm? She has to know that Chy is a Kootona. However, she did something totally unexpected. She reached out and scratched his head.

“Where did he come from?”

“I found him while Rora and I were hunting yesterday. Rora did not know anything about it. I stuffed him into my Etyma Jivekoo.” Once again, I told her a little white lie. This was starting to become a habit, a bad habit.

She looked at me as if she could see right down to my soul. In fact, I was becoming very uncomfortable at the way she looked at me. To give you an idea of the look, imagine someone giving you a “Yeahright” look combined with a look of “Don’t patronize me”. But, she seemed to understand and accept why I hadn’t been completely honest with her.

Tyarza said, “Mvilu, I thought you said you would never knowingly lie to me.”

I ducked my head in my shame. “I am sorry, Tyarza. I lied to you to protect Rora. I did not want him to possibly get into trouble for knowing that I had brought a Kootona into Talo-Vy.”

Then, she asked, “Does it have a name?”

“I have decided to call him Chy.”

“Interesting choice. You named the most ferocious animal on Tashoo a name that is the diminutive of ferocious. Does TaAra know you have him?”

I was thinking, “She has to suspect that Ara knows. Besides, she has already caught me lying; so, I might as well tell her the truth.” I said, “Yes, she does. She did not, and does not, like it but, she has accepted that I am going to keep him and take responsibility for him.”

“Do you plan on telling my master and mistress or the Ka’ Naka about him?”

“I had not really thought about it. I do know that the more people that know a secret, the more likely that the secret will be discovered but, I do know that sooner or later, others will have to be told.”

“Do not fear. I will not tell anyone. I would hate for you to get into trouble for being kind-hearted.”

I thought, “If she knew about the nightmares I have been having, she would withdraw her statement about me being kind-hearted; however, for her I would be anything she wanted me to be.” But, I am certain that most men are like that about women they are in love with. As we were talking, I had heard a slight creaking sound, but paid no attention to it. Then, I heard an unexpected hiss. I looked up knowing more visitors knew the secret.

Kyta, along with Rora, had entered my room. Kyta, having seen Chy, had backed to the far wall hissing, sounding not a little like an angry *large* house cat. Her ears had flattened against the top of her head, her pupils had dilated until no color was visible, her claws were

exposed, her fur had fluffed out, and she was snarling. All in all, Kyta was just the opposite of her normal calm, cool and collected self.

Just as soon as he noticed, which wasn't as quickly as I would have hoped, Rora jumped in front of her, and had pinned her arms back. Kyta was thrashing about trying to escape his grip. Rora was holding her, but I could see that it was a mighty struggle as to who would be the winner. All of a sudden, and equally unexpectedly, Tyarza jumped to Kyta's side and was talking to her in a quiet tone. Tyarza was also softly stroking Kyta's arm fur. Kyta looked at her with fire in her eyes and looked for a thata like she was going to bite a chunk out of Tyarza's arm. After a few athata, the soft talking and stroking started having the desired effect. Kyta started to calm down. She looked from Chy to Rora to Tyarza to me and back again. The fire in her eyes was slowly dying and she was calming down. Finally, after a few athata, Kyta was as calm as she normally was.

She looked at Rora and said, almost plaintively, "Why did you stop me? You *know* what that thing is as well as I do."

Rora responded, "Because Chy belongs to Mvilu. That is why I stopped you. He has taken complete responsibility for him. We have no right to harm the Chorothoo Kootona without his permission."

She looked at me and said, "Please tell me this *thing* does not belong to you, Mvilu. I have always thought you were more intelligent than that. Do you not know what that is?"

"I know exactly what he is, Kyta. He is an orphan; his norotha is dead. I do not know how his norotha died, but I cannot stand the thought of seeing an animal die unnecessarily when I could save its life, especially a rothoo."

"Mvilu, those things are the sworn enemies of the Mory. They will kill a Mory before they will kill a Uany."

"So, I have been told, Kyta but, he is still a baby. He needs protection. Do you not have any norothado (1) instincts? Even Tyarza showed norothado instincts when she first saw him. Here, let me show you how dangerous he is." I picked up Chy and held him out to her. "Please hold him. You will see how dangerous he is. You will see how much he wants to kill you."

Kyta drew back, then, tentatively, took the cub. She held him close enough that he could feel her body heat and, just like he did with Ara, he started nuzzling around. Once again, I got to see a Mory female be embarrassed. Once again, I saw Rora act embarrassed as well. The only ones in the room that weren't embarrassed were Tyarza and me. The funny thing was that, unlike Ara, Kyta seemed to be happy that Chy was trying to nurse. She even started to smile slightly, almost benignly. Rora, on the other hand, got all the more embarrassed when Kyta smiled, looking at him, which caused Tyarza and me to turn our heads and laugh quietly.

Kyta said, "I should show my norotha." Before I could react, she was out the door with Chy in her arms.

Rora and I bolted out the door just in time to see Joola take Chy from Kyta, hold him close to her and stroke his fur. Kyna and Naka were standing back a couple of steps with their hands on their swords, obviously prepared to decapitate the cub if he did anything that warranted it.

Once again, Chy was nuzzling around. Joola looked at me and said, "Why is this rothoo hungry? Are you not capable of nursing it?" She was smiling when she asked the second question. Whew! At least she is not demanding Chy's head or some such.

I decided to play along with Joola and said, "I am afraid not, TaJoola. I have found that I am incapable even though I *have* tried and tried."

She looked at me, smiling, then opened Chy's mouth and looked inside. After examining his teeth, she said, "I assume you are feeding him solid food?"

"Yes, I am, TaJoola. I do not think the Mory use milk except to nurse their own arothoo."

"Yes, that is the only time the Mory have anything to do with milk at all." Looking toward Naka, she said, "Since I have no arothoo," this caused Naka a little discomfort, "nor does Ara, we are incapable of nursing a rothoo. I noticed that his milk teeth have erupted, so I just assumed that you were feeding him solid food. Do you have anything to feed him now?"

Ara said, "Mvilu fed him part of our nakymoty last night. If I did not know better, I would have sworn he had nurtured a rothoo of some kind in his life. He took part of the meat and some vegetables, mashed them all together, with a little water and took it to Chy last night. He did the same again this morning."

Joola looked at me, obviously impressed. She then laughed and said, "You know you are going to have to bathe him, do you not?"

Now it was my turn to be shocked and embarrassed. I said, "I do not know what to do about that, TaJoola. My tongue is not rough enough to bathe him." That statement caused a ripple of laughter to run through the crowd. "What is so funny?" I asked somewhat offended and equally embarrassed by the nature of the laughter.

Ara said, "Mvilu, the Mory do not bathe arothoo like that. The Kootona do that. That is why Joola was laughing. She knows how difficult it can be to give a Mory rothoo a bath. A Kootona rothoo will probably be worse but, we will worry about that later. Come along, the nakymoty is ready."

We all went to the table and sat down. I started to take Chy from Joola and put him back into my room, but she refused to give him up. Not wanting to cause a scene, I just went to my seat, next to Tyarza. I laughed to myself as I watched Joola. It was like watching a human mother holding her baby while she ate. Chy had his front paws on the table and was looking around as best he could using his relatively weak neck muscles and even weaker eyesight. I was

a bit shocked when I saw Joola take a mouthful of food, chew it up, and put it into her hand. She placed her hand near Chy's mouth. He lapped up the food and turned his head toward her and mewled softly. Joola ate a bite and then fed Chy. She did this until he no longer ate and started to fall asleep in her arms. I took him, returned him to my room, put him into his corner and covered him with my furs.

As we ate, I asked Naka if he thought the Ka'yno would find out. He replied, "Only if someone tells him."

"Do you intend to keep it a secret from him?"

He thought for a few athata before replying, "If he asks me directly if you have a Kootona, I will have to answer him honestly and say, 'Yes.' However, unless, and until, he does, I am not obligated to volunteer information about anything that I do not deem to be subversive to the village. Nevertheless, you do know you are playing a dangerous game, though. Do you not?"

Whew! That bit of information eased my mind quite a bit. Although he never lost his cool where Chy was concerned, I knew that instincts had caused him to prepare for battle. I said, "You do not consider having a Kootona in the village a bit subversive?"

"He is a rothoo and, being barely weaned, a very young one at that. I doubt very seriously that he is dangerous. Perhaps you can train him to not attack Mory on sight. I have heard stories about the Kootona having an ability to understand what is said to them. If you take care of him, you might be able to prove or disprove this. Still, I must know. What are you going to do if he proves to be dangerous?"

"I know that the Kootona can be very dangerous animals. I am hoping that if I raise him to trust me, he will listen when I tell him to not do something; however, if he proves to be dangerous, then I, and no one else, will kill him. It is the least I can do."

Naka nodded and continued, "Did you kill the norotha to obtain him?"

"No, my Ka'. I found him next to her and she was dead. It is possible that she had been mortally wounded, how, I do not know, and died after returning to nurse him and his siblings. Unfortunately, or fortunately depending on how you want to look at it, he was the only rothoo that was alive when I arrived at the den."

"That is good. It is also good for Chy that you found him instead of a chohachy Kootona. Supposedly, they kill and eat arothoo. It is thought that the achohachy kill the arothoo to bring the anohachy back to a mating mood and, before you ask, it has been suggested that the Mory are descended from the Akootona. I do not know for sure but, I do know that the Mory are much too civilized to even consider doing anything like that. We know the importance of arothoo to the future of the Mory species."

After we finished dinner, I asked Joola why she wasn't surprised when Kyta took Chy out to her. She said, "Ara had already told Ka' Naka, Kyna and me about Chy when Kyta brought him out to show me."

"Why did Kyta react so violently when she saw Chy?"

"Rora and Kyta had started to your room before we were told so she did not know about him."

"TaJoola, I thought Ara reacted violently when she first saw him, but Kyta had to be held by Rora and calmed by Tyarza. It took Tyarza quite a while before she calmed Kyta down enough that I felt safe allowing her to hold him."

Joola said, "You know that the Ka'yno will be extremely vexed when he finds out. Do you think you can train him to not attack Mory on sight?"

I replied, "TaJoola, I cannot make any promises, but I am going to do my best to train him to be friendly to anyone I want him to be friendly to. At this time, that is every Mory and Uany in Talo-Vy."

"How do you intend to do that?"

"I am not certain, but I thought I would try the way a Kootona norotha would probably train him. If he does something I disapprove of, I will use the tips of my fingers, slap his nose and say 'Ky!' After a while, he should start associating, "Ky!" with a small amount of pain and stop doing what I want him to stop doing. It worked when he bit me yesterday after I picked him up the first time."

"Well, that has always worked for the Mory. Perhaps it will work on a Kootona as well."

"I will also try to him to associate the word "Thonoo" (2) with a reward of some kind. That way, when I say thonoo and refer to someone in particular, he will not be inclined to harm them. I may, or may not, decide to train him to protect by associating him with the word kythonoo (3) with someone that is not to be trusted."

"Perhaps it will work. You realize that if you succeed you will have fulfilled another of the prophecies of *The One Who Will Unify*, do you not?"

All I could do was moan quietly, "Oh, no. Not another one. Will I never be able to escape that prophecy?" I shook my head wearily. Everyone in the room laughed at my reaction.

"What will you do if he attacks someone without provocation?"

"Then, as much as I hate the thought, I will kill him myself. Since he will have learned to associate us with food, he probably would not be able to survive in the wild."

“What you are thinking about doing is good. I believe it will be sufficient should the Ka’yno find out about Chy and demand he be killed. You could also demand a trial for Chy should the Ka’yno make such a demand.”

“Then that is what I intend to do should that ever happen.”

Joola said, “Well, I believe it is time for us to leave. Come, everyone. Ara, we will visit again soon.” She turned and saw Rora and Kyta talking intimately and continued, “Perhaps sooner than you might expect.” She laughed and started toward the door. When she reached the door, she turned again and saw that Kyta hadn’t moved. She cleared her throat loudly, getting Kyta’s attention and motioned toward the door. Kyta dutifully headed out the door, followed by Kyna and Joola. I had to laugh to myself as Kyta walked with bowed head like a child who had been caught with his hand in the cookie jar; however, she paused at the door, turned, looked at Rora and smiled somewhat seductively at him, causing Rora a bit of embarrassment.

Tyarza hesitated at the door for a moment, turned, grabbed me and kissed me once again. She said, “I just wanted to know if it was as enjoyable the second time as it was the first.” Then, her cheeks darkened slightly, she turned and ran after Joola and her family.

I turned back into the room and saw Ara and Rora looking at me, smiling. I just smiled and said, “What are you two looking at? Have you never seen anybody get kissed before?”

They laughed and I joined them. I must admit that I had been hoping that Tyarza would kiss me again, because I had enjoyed it so much the first time. I hoped that she enjoyed it as much as I did.

I walked to my room, got ready and climbed into bed. Chy crawled up to the side of the bed, pulled himself up and started crying softly. I knew I shouldn’t, but I couldn’t resist and picked him up and put him in the bed with me. He crawled around a bit, found a comfortable spot next to me and snuggled against me. As I lay there, I started stroking him and was thinking. I was happy to know that Joola and her family had accepted that Chy was now a part of Ara’s family. I also felt certain that they would not tell anyone about Chy and would trust me to train him properly. I thought more and more about Tyarza every day. I must do anything within my power to earn my freedom. If I was no longer a slave, it would be easier for me to keep my promise to protect her from any danger that she should encounter. As I lay there thinking, the room was getting darker and darker. Soon, it was absolutely dark and I had fallen asleep.

1-mothering

2-Good or Nice

3-Bad, Not good, not nice