

XXV

Returning Home (Day 191 on Tashoo)

I don't know how long I was unconscious, but when I came to, I saw a most frightful sight. Kyna was fighting, with sword and claw only, a Chakootoa, the most dangerous herbivorous animal on all of Tashoo. The Mory fear and respect it even more than they fear and respect the Akootona. I remember seeing a painting of one on my first day in Talo-Vy, but there was one big difference between the painting and reality. The two horns on the lower jaw faced downward not forward. (1)

Ka' Mu-Naka was standing about twenty meters from where the Chakootoa and Kyna were doing deadly battle and they were about thirty meters from me. I had no idea how big this animal was until I saw this battle. Kyna stands about two hundred thirty centimeters tall and the shoulder hump of the Chakootoa was at least sixty centimeters higher than Kyna was tall, making the Chakootoa almost three meters tall at the shoulder.

Kyna was dancing in and out and making stabs into the side of the Chakootoa with his—short sword? At the time, I could not fathom why on Terra or Tashoo he would do such a foolhardy thing. Later after thinking about it, I came to realize that the short sword, being easier to swing, would be a better weapon to use against an animal as large and ferocious as a Chakootoa, even if it was more dangerous.

Since the battle was far enough away from me to allow it, I looked toward Naka and I saw him standing his ground with his long sword in hand but he wasn't advancing. I was at a loss as to why he wasn't assisting Kyna. I looked around for Katoo but couldn't see him. I got up on unsteady legs and stumbled toward Naka. Just as I got within three meters of him, I saw the body of Katoo lying in the tall grass. I thought, "Oh my God! Please let Katoo still be alive! Please!"

Just as I got those thoughts out of my head, I heard a moaning coming from the ground. I looked and I saw Katoo writhing on the ground in pain. I looked at his left leg and I saw a large, deep, ugly gash. I also saw blood pouring out of the gash. I subconsciously thanked God that the blood wasn't spurting. I looked up at Naka and he had a sad look on his face.

I rushed up, knelt down beside Katoo and said, "My Lord, lie still. If you move, you will only bleed more. Please, for your sake, do—not—move!"

I quickly looked around and found some strong-looking, pliable grasses. I immediately gathered several strips of these grasses and bound up the gash temporarily. I knew that if this gash was not sewn up and soon, Katoo could die from blood loss. I didn't have a lot of friends in Talo-Vy and I wasn't going to lose one if I could prevent it, especially one as important as the Ka'yna.

From a distance, I could still hear the sounds of the battle between Kyna and the Chakootoa, but the bellows of the Chakootoa were getting weaker and weaker. Finally, after a couple more athaloo, the fighting stopped. Then, I heard a sound I had only heard one time before. I looked up and saw Kyna with his head reared back and a loud leonine roar was coming out of his mouth. He turned toward me and I saw a blood-lust I had never seen before in the eyes of a Mory chohachy, even during the battle I fought against the achohachy of Te'ka-Jy, except when Rora made his kill the first time we went hunting together.

Naka finally left his post by the side of Katoo and walked over to Kyna and placed his hand on Kyna's shoulder and nodded his head in acceptance of his actions. I also saw Naka speaking to Kyna. The two of them then turned and walked back to where I was tending to Katoo. A look of worry now replaced the look of blood-lust in Kyna's eyes. I know he was worried about Katoo, because Katoo was very popular in Talo-Vy, immensely more popular than his brother, Nachoo.

As I looked toward Kyna after his victory over the Chakootoa, I heard Katoo say, "Did I hear a roar of victory? Did Kyna kill the Chakootoa?" I nodded and he said, "Good. He has done what he wanted to do and will receive his well-deserved reward." I was at a loss as to what Katoo meant by that; but, I accepted that Kyna had earned something very important for saving the life of the Ka'yna, probably a large or important reward.

Just as the two of them reached my side, I heard several roars coming from the woods. Kyna roared again and very shortly twenty hunters were by our side looking at Katoo. I looked around and saw that all they were doing was looking at his injury with their shoulders slumped and sadness in their eyes. I also heard one whisper, "We are going to lose Lo-Katoo as we did Lo-Tamoo a year ago."

I jumped up and practically screamed, "What in the Hell are you doing just standing there? Somebody get a needle and thread so we can sew up his wound! If we do not, he will bleed to death!"

When I said this, it shocked them out of their reverie. They all turned on me and I thought they were going to rip me limb from limb. However, Naka spoke first.

"Needle and thread? Sew up his wound? Mvilu, what are you talking about?"

"We can save his life, if we hurry. The blood is just flowing out, so I doubt he had an artery cut. If I am right, then all we will need to do is sew up the wound and bind it so he can't move it until it heals." I turned to one of the hunters and said, "You, I need you to hold his leg in these two places." I indicated the places. I turned to another hunter and said, "I need you to hold his leg in these two places." Again, I indicated the places. Neither one of them moved a muscle. I started to get angry again. I calmly turned to Naka and angrily, yet calmly, said, "My Ka', please, please tell them to do as I say. If we do not hurry, it will be too late."

Naka turned to the hunters and said, "Do as he says. Whatever he says will be the same as if I say it. Do you understand?"

Immediately the two indicated hunters knelt down and grabbed Katoo's leg where I indicated. I turned to another hunter and said, "You, go get some of the beer or whiskey you brought." His eyes got wide and he started to protest. I said, "We do not have time for any arguing. I know you brought it and I am certain the Ka' knows you brought it. Now go get it."

He turned to Naka who nodded his head. I turned to two more hunters and said, "Accompany him, go to my room, you will find a small red bag next to my bedding. Bring it to me. Also bring the bedding. Do you understand?" They nodded curtly and left immediately.

I turned to two more hunters and pointing to one I said, "I need you to find four straight sticks about one meter long." Pointing to the other, I said, "I need you to find and collect several square meters of webbing, spider webbing if possible." I turned to a third hunter and said, "Accompany him. Defend him from any spiders that might take issue with him stealing their webbing." (2)

I turned to another hunter and said, "I need you to go get a large container and fill it with water." I found more hunters and said to them. "I need you to start a fire."

They responded with, "A fire? Why do you need us to start a fire?"

"I need to sterilize everything that I will need to mend the Ka'yna's wound. If we do not kill the germs, the wound could get infected and he could die."

They had a strange look on their faces, they had never heard of germs before, but they nodded, got the firewood and started a fire.

I checked on Lo-Katoo's leg. The pressure that the first two hunters were applying to the wound was having the desired effect. The blood flow was slowing but I knew to completely stop the blood flow, I would need to get Katoo drunk enough to pass out so he wouldn't feel any pain as I probed the wound to verify that there was no severe internal damage, especially severed, even slightly nicked, arteries. I was going to need to possibly sew up the muscle in the leg, unless we got extremely, and unexpectedly, lucky and the jaw horn of the Chakootoa split his leg between muscle groups.

Katoo, who had started become slightly delirious from blood loss, was moaning softly. I was afraid of what he might say or reveal in his delirium, so I sat next to his head and talked to him to try to keep him focused. He kept looking at me and saying I was his closest friend in all of Talo-Vy. He repeated this over and over, adding every now and again that he didn't care whether or not I was Uany. To him, I had proven myself good enough to be a chohachy of Talo-Vy.

Finally, after a few athaloo, the achohachy I had sent to the lodging tree returned. I took the whiskey from the one and asked Katoo to take a drink. At first he refused, but when I took a drink, he accepted. I guess he was afraid of being poisoned, despite the fact that he so recently called me his best friend in all of Talo-Vy. However, he would only take a drink if I took one

first. After the first swallow, I decided to fake taking a drink so he would drink. I didn't want to be even remotely intoxicated when I started sewing up his leg. Finally, after a few more athaloo, the whiskey was starting to have the desired effect. I was still afraid of him saying something that he shouldn't so I continued to sit by his head. Finally, after a few athaloo, he started drifting off to sleep. Soon, his breathing became regular, albeit a bit shallow.

Earlier, I had the chohachy that had gotten the water to put the container onto the fire. I took my red bag from the chohachy who brought it, opened it and removed a needle and thick thread. I placed the needle and thread into the water. When the water got simmering hot, with a bit of difficulty, I removed the needle and thread and dipped my hands into the water several times to, hopefully, kill any germs that were on them. After I sterilized my hands, I quickly got the hunters to release their pressure on the leg. I opened the wound and washed it out with cooled sterilized water. I saw that we had been luckier than anybody could ever even hope to be. The horn, although seventy millimeters in length, had not gone deep enough to sever a major artery. The horn had also cut between the muscle groups, so I wouldn't have to sew the muscles together. The recovery and healing would be a bit painful, but easier than it would have been had I had to sew the muscles back together. Katoo would be able to walk, although he would likely have a slight limp. I took the bottle of whiskey, which was about one hundred twenty-five proof, and poured it into the wound. Katoo flinched slightly as the alcohol touched raw nerves but, he was too drunk to do more than moan softly.

After I poured the alcohol into the wound, I prepared the needle and thread. I didn't have any real medical training. All I had was basic field medic training; but I was going to do the best I could. I turned on my chronoputer and, using the scanning option, verified that my assessment of Katoo's injuries was correct. One of the abilities of the chronoputer was to create a medical file on the subject being scanned and, by deduction, calculate the proper alignment of organs, muscles and bones. I used the medical files in conjunction with the scan to get the necessary information to adequately sew up the wound. Katoo had treated me with respect ever since the first day we met outside of Ara's home when I was calculating the length of the day on Tashoo so I didn't want to make any mistakes. Besides, if he died, I would die and I had no desire to die.

I rearranged the muscles to the correct positions and trimmed the fur away from the cut as best I could. I pulled the skin together and started sewing. There was something strange about the skin. It was lion yellow in color. I was at a loss as to why this was so until much, much later in my stay on Tashoo. I also noticed that where the stripes were on the fur the skin was striped beneath it.

The cut was about twenty-five centimeters long and, thanks to my lack of medical training, it took about fifteen athaloo to sew it shut. I left a small opening on the cut closest to the knee so it could drain and lower the possibility of infection. After I finished sewing the cut, I took the bedding that the hunter had obtained, cut it into strips, dipped it into the hot water, and wound it around Katoo's leg to cover the wound as a bandage. After I wrapped a couple of layers of the bandaging, I placed the sticks against the bandage, had two achohachy hold them in place and then I wrapped several more layers of bedding around the sticks. I intentionally wanted the sticks to be one hundred centimeters long so I could bind Nachoo's leg below his knee to keep him from bending it. Finally, I wound several layers of web around the leg,

bandages and sticks to serve as a cast. Then, I added several more layers of bedding to complete the cast.

When I finished sewing up the cut on Katoo's leg, I heard several of the achohachy around me saying things like. "Do you see that?" "Who has ever considered sewing up a severe cut like he did?" "He knows things that are not known on Tashoo." "Could he be The One Who Will Unify?" "It is said that The One will have knowledge that no one on Tashoo has."

I keep trying to ignore the references to The One, yet, it seems almost everything I do brings another reference to him. I looked around and saw that Naka had set several of the hunters who had not assisted in saving Katoo's life to butchering the Chakootoa to make it easier to carry back to Talo-Vy. I called two of them over and had them build a litter to carry Katoo. Since they had never built one before, I showed them how to do it. After a few athalloo, we had the litter built and the Chakootoa ready for transport. I had several of the hunters pick up the unconscious Katoo and place him on the litter. With four of the achohachy carrying Katoo's litter, and all of us carrying part of the Chakootoa meat, we went back to the lodge tree and placed him in his room onto his bedding.

The next morning, I awoke early and walked to Katoo's room. I softly knocked on his door and I heard him say, in a pained voice, "Come."

I entered his room a step and stood at a distance from him. He had such a powerful hangover; I believe I could have taken his pulse from two meters away. Slowly, almost painfully, he turned his head and looked at me. I said, "Good morning, Ka'yana. You are looking in fine fettle this morning."

"I do not know what this 'vayn vetul' is; but, I can do without sarcasm, Mvilu." I laughed and he joined me, wincing. "What happened?"

I told him. After I told him the story, he said, "That explains why my head and leg both hurt so badly. But, I must get up and get ready to go hunting."

As I told Katoo the story of his injury, I had walked over to him and was looking at the bandage/cast on his leg. "You are not going anywhere; at least, you are not going to walk anywhere. I am not going to let you walk anywhere for at least ten days."

"

What! I am going to walk out of here. I cannot allow the hunters to see me like this."

"Too late. They brought you here from the attack site and brought you to your bed on my orders. Besides, you have four large sticks strapped to your leg. These sticks extend from your hip joint to halfway down your calf."

"What are they there for?"

“To keep you from moving your leg until the cut heals. That should take about ten days.”

“When are we going back to Talo-Vy?”

“Shortly after the nakvyv. As a matter of fact, everybody has already packed everything for the return trip.”

“How am I going back to Talo-Vy, if I cannot walk?”

“We have built a litter to carry you. The hunters will carry you on the litter, four at a time for two ahi’nu each. That way, none of the hunters will get overtired and there will be plenty of fresh achohachy to defend us against any potential attack. However, it is going to be fun when we get to the trees we will sleep in tonight and tomorrow night. Perhaps we will tie ropes to each end of the litter and have two of our strongest hunters haul you into the tree like that.”

“You seem to have thought everything out.”

“I try.” He laughed, wincing and moaning in pain. It was nice to know that a hangover is the same to anyone that gets drunk no matter what species they are.

“Well, it looks like the bleeding has virtually stopped. As long as you follow my orders to not walk any more than is absolutely necessary, you should be healed up with little or no problems within the next 10 days.”

Just then, someone started scratching on the door. At Katoo’s invitation, the door opened and Naka stuck his head into the room. He looked at me and said, “I thought I would find you in here. The nakvyv is ready. Should we bring the Ka’yna into the dining area or bring his food in here?”

“Perhaps we should bring him into the dining area. That way we can leave immediately after eating; besides, he is a bit worried about his pride.”

Katoo added, “I most definitely will dine with the achohachy that assisted in saving my life, especially Mvilu and Kyna.”

Naka nodded and left. A thaloo later, four hunters entered the room and, since we had not removed him from the litter last night, each one took a handle on the litter and lifted Katoo and brought him into the dining area. Two of them lifted him by the shoulders and set him into a chair at the head of the table with his right leg extended forward unbending. (It wouldn’t look good for the brother of the Ka’yno to be lying down when everybody else was sitting.) After everybody finished eating, we got up, placed Katoo back onto the litter and headed out onto the trail back to Talo-Vy. At Naka’s suggestion, I walked alongside the litter to be there in case Katoo needed my assistance. I carried on a conversation with him and the litter bearers. It helped to pass the time and kept Katoo's mind off of his injury.

The hunters that weren't carrying the litter were surrounding us in a ring of swords that should, hopefully, deter any attack from animal or chohachy. Every two ahi'nu, the litter bearers changed out. This way the original four had eight ahi'nu of "rest" before they had to carry the litter again.

Three days later, right on time, we returned to Talo-Vy. The hunters that weren't carrying the litter dispersed as soon as we entered the village proper. I guess they feared the Ka'yno's wrath. When we arrived at the Suala Ka'ynony, Vamoo, who was on door guard duty, admitted the eight of us, Kyna had decided to accompany us to the Suala Ka'ynony and face any repercussions that the rest of us would face.

After admitting us, Vamoo left almost immediately to inform the Ka'yno that we had returned. Naka being with us, we did not hesitate but entered the Ishoo'se Choko Aka'ny immediately. When we entered, I saw Nachoo entering through a doorway behind the dais. He rushed up to the litter and looked at his brother, concern written all over his face, a rare sight.

Katoo looked at his brother and said, "I am fine, Chorothy. Mvilu saved my life."

Nachoo turned, glared at me and said, "So, you allowed my chorothy to be injured. By your agreement, you now forfeit your life."

I looked at him calmly and thought. "His desire for my death overrides the fact that I actually saved his brother's life." However, I replied, "Great One, perhaps you should read the agreement out loud."

By the time I said this, the entire Ishoo'se Aka'ny was filtering into the room from the back of the Suala Ka'ynony. The Ka'yno turned to Kikoo and said, "Ky-Kikoo, produce the document that the slave signed before he left to go on the hunt." Kikoo did just that and handed it to Nachoo. Nachoo took it and read it out loud. "I, Mvilu Uatusun, offer my life in exchange for the life of the Ka'yna should he die while in company with the hunting party of the Ka' Mu-Naka." After reading it out loud, he read it to himself a second time. Then he read it a third time. After reading it the third time, he slowly looked up from the paper, crumpled it up and angrily threw it to the floor. He turned to me and said vehemently, "So, you tricked me again. You will make a mistake one of these days and, when you do, I will have what I want, your head."

Katoo said to him, "Nachoo, Mvilu saved my life. Does that not mean anything to you? You feared me dying and I would have died had it not been for him."

All Nachoo did was glare at me and say, "You know what that means, Chorothy. Is that what you want?"

"Yes, I know what it means and whether or not I want it, it is the Law; however, I believe he deserves it and I most definitely want it as well. He has done so much for Talo-Vy since he arrived here. Surely, even you can see that." For an answer, Nachoo merely turned and left the room.

As someone else's slave, and a Uany, I was not allowed into the residence quarters of the Suala Ka'ynony. So, the hunters that had carried Katoo into the Suala Ka'ynony carried him into the residence quarters. Naka stayed behind. I was at a loss as to what Nachoo was referring when he said, "You know what that means."

After a few athata, three Mory came from the same door that the Ka'yno had just exited. They walked up to me and said they were doctors and wanted to know what I had done to Katoo's leg. After I told them, they were a little shocked and asked what had to be done to assist in the healing of the injury. I told them that they needed to change the dressing at least once a day and preferably at least twice a day. I told them about boiling water and placing the fresh bandages into the boiling water for several athaloo before applying them to the wound. I also told them they needed to gently wash the wound with alcohol when they changed the dressing, the stronger the alcohol, the better. They asked if it would be acceptable to apply Voocha to the wound to assist and speed healing. I had never heard of Voocha before and said so. The doctors described Voocha (3) and its properties. After hearing this, I said that it would most definitely be acceptable especially after applying the alcohol. As an afterthought, I added that Katoo should not walk any more than is absolutely necessary for the next five days and he should walk no more than ten athaloo at a time for the next five days after that. I wanted to be certain the muscles healed properly before he started using them again. I included a final, if not extremely important, admonition, make absolutely certain he eats properly for those ten days to be certain that his body gets the proper amount of nutrients it would need to heal properly. After I gave them these instructions, the doctors nodded, said they would follow my instructions to the letter and left through the door that Katoo had been carried.

Kyna told me he would escort me home and, since Ara's home was on the way to his Suala Ka'ny, Naka joined us. Along the way, we chatted about all that had happened during the previous seven days. I asked Naka what Nachoo, although I called him by his title, meant when he said what he said. Naka's answer was a simple, "You will see. Like the Ka'yna, I am glad to see it finally happen."

When we passed within sight of his Suala Ka'ny, Naka took his leave of us; it only took him as long as it took to tell me good-bye. Kyna and I continued to Ara's home. I asked him if he knew what Nachoo meant and he answered in the affirmative but would give me no more information than Naka had. When we arrived at Ara's home, Kyna told me that he was going home and, before leaving, placed his right hand on my right shoulder to show me his friendship. After this gesture, he turned and walked toward his home. I knocked on the door. Rora answered the door and looked at me in shock. He asked me to enter and, when I entered, I received surprised looks from everybody in the room. By everybody, I mean Ara, Joola and her family and Chy. Tyarza arose and walked over to me. When Chy saw me, he bounded up to me demanding attention. I laughed and picked him up, although he must have weighed close to 25 kilos by now. He licked my face and neck like he was licking meat off of a bone. After about 30 athata of his attentions, I put him back on the floor.

Tyarza said, "Where have you been for the last seven days? I have missed seeing you." I told her and she said, "I would have thought you would have been gone longer than this. I know that, when the Ka' Mu-Naka goes on his hunting trips, they are usually gone for ten to fifteen days." Everybody else in the room nodded in agreement.

I said, "There was a problem." I explained what had happened. The more I said, the more excited everybody in the room got. I couldn't understand their excitement. However, a look of fear and shock crossed Ara's face when I first started telling my tale. When I assured her that the Ka'yna was well but would be incapacitated for a few days, she looked relieved.

We heard someone scratching on the door and Rora, who was still standing next it, answered the door and invited the one outside to enter. Kyna entered and told us that when he got home, he found nobody there and figured everyone was here.

With it being nearly sundown, Joola and her family left a couple of athaloo after I got home. But, Tyarza gave me a hug before she left. Once again, my mind was whirling. I still couldn't understand her attitude toward me but, I accepted the hug, returned it and enjoyed every thata of it.

Right after Joola's family left, Ara went into the kitchen and returned with dinner. As we ate, Ara asked me how Katoo, once again she used his title rather than his name, was doing.

I said, "He is in a lot of pain from the wound but, otherwise, he is fine. I told him and the doctors that he should not walk any more than is absolutely necessary for the next five days. I believe he'll probably have a slight limp for the rest of his life because of his injury, but I doubt it will be a hindrance."

She had a relieved look on her face when I told her about Katoo's condition. When she saw me smiling as I looked at her, she said, "Why are you looking at me like that?" I just smiled. "I do not know what you are thinking, Mvilu, but, get those thoughts out of your head."

Even though she didn't know why I was smiling, I'm certain from this response that she had an idea, well, the response and the glare she threw my way. Rora, however, had a very confused look on his face because he wasn't privy to our secret and I intended to keep it that way for as long as I could.

After dinner, I helped Ara with the dishes and headed off to bed. I spent a couple of ahi'nu lying in bed going over the things that had happened since the last time I slept at home. I thought about the cryptic statement Nachoo had said just before he left the Ishoo'se Choko Aka'ny. Katoo said he thought I deserved the honor and that it was about time. Naka and Kyna both had also said it was about time that it had happened. But, to what were they referring? I knew that time would tell. I just hoped that it was something good. I also thought about Ara's

relief upon learning that Katoo would be all right. Despite wanting to give her a hard time about it, I didn't want Rora to learn what I knew because I feared that he, wanting to make certain he didn't violate any of the Mory laws, would probably take matters into his own hands and Katoo, being the kind of chohachy he is, would likely not defend himself properly. The last thing I thought about was the warm, pleasant feeling I enjoyed when Tyarza hugged me before she left. I really must do everything in my power to return her to her home so she can face the chohachy to whom she is promised. Hopefully, he will realize how much we love each other and release her from her promise to him.

1-I learned later that there are four different and distinct species of Chakootoa. Each is differentiated by the angle and positioning of one or more of the horns on the head, the shading of the body fur, as well as the overall size of the animal. Unfortunately for us, this particular Chakootoa is a member of the largest species.

2-There is only one species of spider on Tashoo. They are almost five times as large as the largest Terran tarantula and about three times more venomous than a Brazilian Wandering spider. I later learned the reason that the Tashoo spider could grow so large was because, unlike Terran spiders, Tashoo spiders have primitive lungs located in their abdomen and breathe through nostrils located on top of their ten-eyed heads instead of through holes throughout their body like Terran spiders do.

3-Voocha is an antiseptic sap from the Voocha tree. It assists in the healing process not unlike the antiseptic creams so common today on Terra.