

XXVI

Katoo's Midnight Visit (Day 201 on Tashoo)

Sleep. Wonderful, restful sleep. A hard day working deserves a nice pleasant night of sleep. Sleep punctuated with dreams; pleasant, wonderful, enjoyable dreams. Dreams with a beautiful woman in them, she has blue-blond hair and yellow-in-blue eyes. As usual, it's Tyarza haunting my dreams. We are standing beside a pool. She stands in my dream looking right at me with a pleasant look in her yellow-in-blue eyes. It's a dreamy look, a look of—love? She's wearing a leather two-piece swimsuit. Her lion yellow skin is wet from the pool water she has just emerged from and her long blue-blond hair is wet and pulled back from her face. She laughs at me because I won't swim. I just laugh along with her. She reaches out to me. She puts her arms around me, pulls me toward her and gives me a wet hug and a kiss. But, now she is fading away. Once again, I hear her speaking as she fades away. "Mvilu, now you are free to leave. Please go to Te'ka-Jy before the Ka'yno has you killed." I'm free to leave? What does this mean?

The world around us is turning gray, now black. The black is punctuated with pinpoints of painfully bright white lights. Nightmarish color schemes appear in the dream. Now the colors are coalescing into a familiar scene. I am in the company of the two Khorchans, Dreydos and Rokshesan.

Dreydos is speaking, "As I was saying, when Rokshe spoke earlier this evening during our conversation with you and the Admiral, it was because she thought that the conversation was not going in the direction that would be conducive to arriving at the destination that we wished."

"I still don't know why, out of more than fifty billion humans on all the planets we inhabit, you chose me as the human most typically human."

"It was not my decision, Commander. It was the decision of the Zahr-Khohr."

"Do you mean to tell me that the Zahr-Khohr personally decided that I am the human that is, quote, most human, unquote? I don't believe you?"

"He didn't make the decision personally, Commander. There were others that assisted. The names and general attributes of all of the known adult humans, especially military personnel, were input into one million computers. Each computer chose one hundred humans with traits in common. The traits were tightened and these one-hundred million names were entered into one hundred thousand computers. Each of these computers chose one hundred humans with traits in common. The steps were continued downward until there was a list of twenty names. Then a committee of the Zahr-Khohr and six of his most trusted advisors studied this list. Among the seven of them it was decided that you were the one human that exhibited the most important of the human traits that interest our people in our conflict with the humans."

“Humph! No offense, Dreydos, but I still refuse to believe that it happened in the manner that you describe. I believe that I was chosen specifically for the reasons I described to Admiral Yamashita.” I say this to gauge the reaction of Dreydos and Rokshesan.

Dreydos doesn't even act offended. “I speak the truth, Commander. However, I have no doubt that our experience with you at Tonojen was a major factor in the decision. Because when your name showed up on this list, every one of the Zahr-Khohr's advisors mentioned Tonojen and my experience with you. After all, should the humans capture our greatest war hero, do you not think that they would want to study the type of warrior he is?”

“Capture?”

I detect a slight flinch in Dreydos's demeanor. His reaction, however, is, “Perhaps that was a poor choice of words, Commander. I refer only to the fact that the Terran Alliance is winning the war. Should the roles be reversed, and the Terrans were considering suing for peace, your people would want to study the attributes of our heroes, possibly to use the attributes to train future warriors.”

“Oh, I see. Is that what you and Rokshesan are hoping to do? Use my attributes to train future warriors to use against the Terran Federation?”

My attitude is starting to have the desired effect. Dreydos is starting to show his irritation in his response. “I can see that we have a long way to go to gain your trust, Commander. Your personal mistrust of the Khorchan people is strong and I cannot say that I really blame you.”

“I appreciate that, Dreydos. And, no offense, but I fear it will take a long, long time for me to be able to overcome my distrust of the Khorcha.”

I could feel myself thrashing violently about in my bed. I heard myself moaning softly. The dream didn't seem to end. It went on and on. Who, or what, are these creatures? How do they know me? What do they want with me?

Suddenly, my eyes sprang open wide. The lighting in the room went up slightly. I was breathing softly and shallowly. Fearfully, I looked all around my room. I didn't move as I looked about. I was looking for the creatures from my dream. I thought, “Are they here? Are they coming back to get me and kill me?” I didn't want them to know I was awake. I started shivering slightly, shivering from fear. Since I'd been on Tashoo, I didn't recall being afraid of anything.

Now I could hear voices whispering. Whoever it was they were talking quietly as if they didn't wish to be heard. I strained to hear them. Had the Khorcha returned to kill me? I continued to lie very still and listen. I turned my eyes toward the door in my room. The voices

were coming from the other side of the door. I quickly surveyed my room one more time before I made a decision. I was going to go to the door and listen. I quietly got out of bed and snuck to the door. I placed my ear to the door and listened intently. After listening for a few athata, I determined that there were two voices, a male and a female. There were two Khorcha in my dream, a male and a female.

I could barely hear the voices, but one sounded familiar. It was the female voice. Finally, I recognized her voice. It was Ara, the mother of my master, Rora. The other voice sounded vaguely like Rora, but it wasn't his. I decided to open the door slightly and look out. Hopefully, they wouldn't notice the door and I'd discover who was visiting at this time of night. I had an idea, but I wanted confirmation of my suspicions. I opened the door about a centimeter, looked out and had my suspicions confirmed. There, not five meters away, seated across the table from Ara was a Mory chohachy I recognized.

As I opened the door, I noticed that Ara's right ear rotated toward my door, but she didn't turn her head nor react otherwise. Sitting with her at the table was the Ka'yna of Talo-Vy, Lo-Katoo. I could see that he was gently holding Ara's hand across the top of the table and looking into her eyes lovingly. She had her other hand lying on top of his gently caressing it. Neither one was saying anything now; but the look on Katoo's face told me everything I needed to know, as a result, my suspicions were further verified.

He says, "It was wonderful being with you again tonight. I missed it so much but, my chorothy would not let me out of his sight since I got back from going hunting with Mu-Naka."

"I am not surprised. You nearly got killed. If it had not been for Mvilu, you likely would have died."

He laughed quietly and said, "If it had not been for Mvilu, I would not have been able to go." I winced when he said that because I hadn't told Ara the whole story about that aspect of the hunting trip.

"What?! What do you mean?!"

"I wanted to talk to him without risking my chorothy hearing. I wanted to find out some things from him."

"Such as?"

"Such as how much he knows about us, you, me and Rora." This statement gave me quite a shock. So, he does know he is Rora's father. Now I wonder if Naka knows about Kyna and Kyta.

Ara paused for a few athata before responding, "He knows more than you suspect. He would not say it in so many words, but, I believe he knows you are chorotha Rorany. I made a mistake that day and implied that I knew who my chorotha was. I keep forgetting that Mvilu is a very intelligent Uany; but, he is loyal as well. I doubt he would tell anything he knows if it

might cause harm to befall those he cares about. In fact, I do believe he would lie about knowing. I know he cares about Rora and me. I suspect he cares about you, Joola and her family, and Ka' Naka."

"I know he cares about us, my love. I believe he would have saved my life even if he had not offered his life in exchange for mine." Once again, I winced. Will he stop being so open and honest? Doesn't he realize that you can say too much?

Raising her voice slightly, Ara replied, "What!? What did you just say!?"

"Sh! Unless you want them to know for certain what Mvilu already suspects, please keep your voice down." He was looking around as he said this, so I closed the door to my room until I was certain that he was more interested in her.

When I reopened my door, Ara was again whispering, "What do you mean Mvilu offered his life in exchange for yours?"

"Nachoo was not going to allow me to go on the hunt until Mvilu signed a paper promising to sacrifice his life if I got killed."

Ara was silent for a long time. I believe she was trying to digest this bit of information and come to accept how much I was willing to sacrifice to be of assistance to those I care deeply about. Finally, she said, "You know what that means, especially since he saved your life?"

"Yes, I do. The ceremony will be performed soon. Please act surprised when the three of you are summoned to the Suala Ka'ynony."

"I will, my love. It will be hard to see you there and not be able to say anything to you."

"I know. But, we will at least have our nights together."

Ara was silent for a few minutes smiling. Finally, pointing to his leg, she said, "Perhaps I should look more closely at your leg."

Katoo laughed and said, "As if you have not looked at my leg enough times over the years."

Ara's answer was to lean over the table, playfully and gently slap his face and say, "You know what I mean." I couldn't see her face, but I could imagine her playfully glaring at him. She moved around the table and examined his leg. After a few minutes, she said, "It looks as if it is healing up very well. In fact, I believe it is completely healed. Mvilu seems to know how to sew up cuts. I did not know that you could do that, did you?"

"No. He made me drink a lot of whiskey to make me fall asleep. It was while I was asleep that he sewed up my cut. Ka' Mu-Naka told me how he took over the situation and got very angry when no one would do anything to help me."

“Yes. That sounds like Mvilu. You are going to have a nice scar to remember the day you nearly died but, at least, you are still alive and here with me tonight.”

He replied, “One of the last things that Mvilu said to the doctors was, ‘Clean the cut two to three times a day with alcohol. That will kill any germs, prevent infection and promote clean healing.’ The doctors also applied Voocha every time they changed the bandage.”

“Well, obviously, he was right.”

Katoo sat in silence for a while, sipping his cup of tea and looking at Ara lovingly. Finally, he said, “I wonder why you have not borne any more arothoo.”

This caught Ara completely off guard. But, she laughed mischievously and said, “I do not know. It is not like we have not tried.” She was silent for a couple of athata before she laughed again and said, “But, even in failing, trying *is* a lot of fun.”

I smiled broadly. So, this proves my earlier belief, my prim and proper mistress is a sexual creature after all. I wonder what other secrets she has. I turned my attention back to the dining area.

Ara had moved to his side, slid into his lap and, slipping her arms around his neck and smiling mischievously, said, “Are you interested in trying again?”

Katoo smiled and said, “You little shata. You must have missed me and our time together more than I thought.”

“Well, as you said, it has been more than seventeen days.” She stood and offered him her hand.

He sat there for a thata studying her. Finally, he said, “It is late. Are you certain I will be gone before anyone wakes up?”

“If not, you will just have to stay in my room until I can find a way to get them out of here. I realize that would be something that you will not care for, but you would just have to tolerate it.” She was smiling as she said that.

Laughing softly, he shook his head, took her proffered hand and walked with her to her room.

After the door to Ara's room closed, I closed mine, stood there with my back resting against the door for a short while. As I stood there, I felt a furry body rubbing against my lower leg. I looked down and saw Chy looking up at me. It was then that I remembered that I always fed him if I woke up in the middle of the night. I eased the door to my room open and, making Chy stay in the room, headed to the kitchen to, as quietly as I could, made Chy a small dish of food. I returned to my room, put the dish on the floor and then returned to my bed.

As I lay there, I thought about what I had seen and heard. I wished with all my heart that things could be different. Ara and Katoo looked so happy, especially as they entered her bedroom. Another intriguing thought entered my head as I lay there. Katoo and Ara had been trying to have more cubs since Rora had been born. That was almost fourteen years ago. I wondered if Ara's inability to conceive had something to do with Rora. After all, he is her first born and mothers tend to be a bit more protective of their first born. Perhaps her protectiveness and concern for Rora is why she hadn't conceived again. But, what I learned tonight is a secret that I cannot tell to anyone, especially Rora.

I lay there in my bed listening. Every now and again, I thought I heard muffled sounds coming from the direction of Ara's room. Some of the sounds I heard sounded like giggling. I'd smile when I heard them as I thought about the happiness, and pleasure, Ara must be enjoying. I also thought about the happiness and pleasure that Rora could probably experience with Kyta if it weren't for the archaic laws that Nachoo forced the residents of Talo-Vy to continue to live under. As I lay in my bed, I found my mind wandering. I started wondering if Tyarza and I could be as happy as Ara and Katoo so obviously were. Almost immediately, I felt the blood rush to my face and I realized I was embarrassed by the thought that crossed my mind. I'd never been embarrassed by that thought before. I found myself wondering if this reaction was because Tyarza had only remotely indicated she was interested in me in that manner or if it was because she was promised to someone else. As I lay there in thought, the lighting slowly dimmed until it was completely dark in the room. Shortly thereafter, I felt Chy rejoin me in bed and, a couple of athaloo later, I was once again asleep.

I woke up the next morning without assistance. As I had learned over the weeks I'd been in Talo-Vy, once I had a nightmare, I did not experience another one the rest of the night. Chy had snuggled up against my back and was curled in a tight ball of Kootona cub. He grumbled a little as I eased out of the bed and followed me with his eyes as I walked to my closet.

I got dressed and eased to the door. I placed my ear against it because I didn't want to accidentally embarrass Ara or cause Katoo any consternation. Just about the time I did this, the door opened unexpectedly. So unexpectedly in fact, it almost hit me square in the middle of the forehead. Thank God for my cat-like reflexes.

Through the door came Ara. She had a look of ecstatic happiness on her face. This look changed to one of horrific shock when she saw that she almost hit me with the door.

"Ohmygoodness." She fairly cried. "Mvilu, areyouallright?Ididnotknowyouwerethere! DidIhityou?" The words ran together like one long word.

I laughed and said, "Do not worry, Ara, calm down. I am fine. I had my hand on the handle just as you turned it. I felt the door handle turning, so, I was able to jump out of the way just in time." I stood there for a thata, then added, "You sure look happy this morning. What has

made you feel so good?” I deliberately worded it that way. I was hoping I could catch her with her pants down, so to speak.

She said, “Never you mind. I am just feeling good and happy this morning. Is there anything wrong with that?” She playfully slapped my arm.

I smiled and thought, “If she knew that I know what I know, she would be embarrassed to the extreme.” I just said, “No, Mistress, there is not.”

Ara swung her hand to slap my arm again, laughing as she did. “What have I told you about calling me that ‘Mistress’ name?”

I smiled rubbing my arm and faking a pained wince. “Yes, Mistress. I am sorry, Mistress.”

“Oo-oh. You are as incorrigible as Rora ever was as a rothoo. Come along. If you are going to act like that, you can help me prepare the nakvyv, and I mean really help.”

“Yes, Mistress.” I said as I passed her.

“Oo-oh, you.” She said, laughing, and swung a lioness sized hand/paw swatting me on the backside.

I ran ahead of her. Chy, who had gotten out of the bed right after I did, chased me as I ran. I ran ahead of Ara because I didn’t want her to know how much that swat really hurt, because I didn’t want to ruin her good mood. Even though I had never truly seen her in a bad mood, I had never seen Ara this happy.

By the time we got to the kitchen, I wasn’t hurting any more. I started cutting up the vegetables. Today, when I looked into the cooler, I saw a few eggs. These eggs were about 50% bigger than chicken eggs. Seeing the eggs surprised me because I had never seen Ara, or any other Mory for that matter, eat eggs. After I asked her about it, she said that the Mory love eggs but they are a rare addition to the diet.

When Ara told me this, an idea crossed my mind. I was going to try to domesticate some birds so the Mory could have eggs whenever they wanted. I knew there were birds that were semi-flightless and, therefore, should be relatively easy to domesticate. Most of the birds that could fly had rather pointy teeth and long sharp talons which indicated that they carnivorous, or at the very least omnivorous; however, the semi-flightless birds didn’t have teeth and tended to get into the gardens at night and would eat the vegetables that grew there. These were the ones that I wanted to capture and try to domesticate.

I asked Ara, “Do you mind if I use a few of these? I have an idea for the nakvyv that, if it works out, might be a wonderful change from our usual morning fare.”

After she said I could use the eggs, I shoed her out of the kitchen and started cutting up the vegetables finer than normal, but still large enough to see and taste. I found some good chunks of meat and cut them up to about the same size as the vegetables. I put the vegetables and meat into a bowl and mixed them together. I got the eggs, two for me and three apiece for Ara and Rora and put a medium-sized frying pan on the fire and started it heating. I broke open the eggs into a large bowl and scrambled them. By this time, the frying pan was hot enough, so I poured some of the egg mixture into it. (1)

As the eggs fried, I took a portion of the vegetable and meat mixture and sprinkled it into the eggs. After it had time to cook sufficiently, I folded it in half and flipped it. Voila! The first omelet ever seen on Tashoo. I made two more and put one on each of three plates. In a separate frying pan, I had put some of the meat and vegetables that I did not use in the omelets and lightly sautéed them and placed them onto the plates as well.

Wanting to heighten the expectation and suspense, I filled three glasses with Kachoka tea that Ara had made the day before and brought them to the table. Then, I brought the pitcher out. Finally, I brought the plates.

Having never seen anything like this before, Rora was a little apprehensive about giving it a try. Ara looked at the omelet, then at me. I picked up my fork and cut the omelet. I picked up the piece I had cut off, looked at Ara and said, “Have I done something wrong? I thought you said the Mory loved eggs, Ara.”

She replied, “You have not actually done anything wrong, Mvilu. It is just that the Mory do not cook eggs. We eat them raw.”

Looking from Rora to Ara and back again, I asked. “Have you ever tried them cooked before?”

Rora said, “No, I cannot say as I have. Are they good when they are cooked?”

I smiled and said, “Just try them. If you like them raw, you should love them cooked.”

I put the piece that I had cut off into my mouth and chewed. Did I say they should love them cooked? That was a gross understatement. These eggs were the tastiest things I could ever remember putting into my mouth, infinitely superior in taste to chicken eggs because they had much more flavor and the meat and vegetables enhanced the flavor. They brought back memories from my childhood I had forgotten about. The combination of vegetables, meat and eggs was exquisite. Whether it was from hunger or a desire for something different, I couldn't tell. I just know that I was in ecstasy. I looked at Ara and Rora. They, too, were enjoying their omelets.

After they finished, they looked at me benignly, nodding slightly with pleasant smiles on their faces. Finally, after several athata, Ara said, “Mvilu, I have never tasted anything even remotely as good as what you prepared for the nakvyv today. What is it called?”

“It is called omelet.”

“Amuletu? Well, whatever it is called, it is very good. The combination of flavors is beyond description. I will have to remember to cook eggs from now on.”

I said, “Now, that everyone is finished eating. I will clean the kitchen. I really made a mess while preparing the omelets.” As an afterthought, I added, “You never know who might stop by.”

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Ara stop suddenly and look at me with horror on her face. I must admit I said it mischievously, but after seeing the look of utter horror on her face, I instantly regretted it. I couldn’t say anything about what I had witnessed last night, so I said that TaJoola could possibly decide to visit on her way to the market. This seemed to allay her fears.

Relieved, I quickly removed the dishes from the table and took them into the kitchen and started washing them. I had barely started before the door to the kitchen opened and Ara entered. She turned and looked out the door for a thata before walking over to me.

After she reached my side, she whispered, “What did you mean when you said, ‘You never know who might stop by.’?”

“I told you, Ara. TaJoola may stop by.”

“That is not what you meant, Mvilu. I want an answer. You have never lied to me before. Why are you starting now?”

I stood there looking at her. I could not think of an answer. I didn’t want to tell her what I knew, but I didn’t want to lie to her either. She had always treated me well, even as well as her own son. The only thing I could think of to say was, “Ara, in my home village we have a saying, ‘Ask me no questions and I will tell you no lies.’ So, please do not make me answer that question. I do not want to lie to you, but I do not want to hurt you either.”

“I think I know what it is you do not want to tell me. I thought I heard your door open last night. You woke up and heard us in the dining area did you not?”

Now I was painted into a corner. I hadn’t actually told her, but I still didn’t want to admit to knowing. I was most definitely in a quandary. Well, when on the horns of a dilemma, face the music. (Boy, talk about a mixed metaphor.) “Yes, I had a nightmare. For some reason, I woke up on my own. Maybe I was hearing your conversation and it woke me. All I know is, I opened the door to my room and I saw you.”

“How long did you eavesdrop?”

“Long enough.” She looked embarrassed. I tried to allay her fears. “Ara, I am happy for you. I believe that everybody needs to be loved by somebody and they need somebody to love.

The love of a parent for a child is not the same as the love of one adult for another. Do you understand what I am trying to say?"

"Yes, Mvilu. I do understand, but, the Law is the Law."

"The Law. I have said it before and I will say it again. Sometimes there are laws so stupid they need to be violated. Do you think I gave one thought as to whether or not I could be killed by the Ka'yno when I defended Talo-Vy from the achohachy of Te'ka-Jy? No, I did not. And do you know what? I would do it again in half a heartbeat. Besides, what law have you broken? Is it truly against the law to love someone?"

"No, Mvilu. I am just afraid of what will become of Rora if he finds out about Katoo. That is the law I am afraid of and I know Rora. He will feel obligated to challenge Katoo as is required by the law."

"Why not tell him just as TaJoola told Kyna and Kyta? They have managed to keep it a secret that they know. Besides, Katoo already knows. If he knows and he has not challenged his chorotheo, why would Rora challenge his chorotha? I also believe that he could keep it a secret, just as Kyna and Kyta have done."

"I do not know, Mvilu; the time is not right yet. When the time is right, one of us will tell him. I hope it is you. Even though he knows the laws, I fear he would be upset with me for not telling him."

"I doubt that, Ara. But, if he is going to be upset with you for not telling him, it will not matter who tells him. However, since you asked me to wait, I will wait. But, Ara, the time is coming and is probably closer than either of us think."

Just as I finished saying this, Rora entered the kitchen. He said, "Mvilu, I have been thinking. Would you like to go hunting again today? I know we have enough meat to last us for a few more days, but with the mota and akatooeka completed, I have a lot of free time right now and I doubt I should, or even could, spend it all at TaJoola's house. Kyta might get tired of seeing my face."

Smiling, I replied, "I doubt that, Rora, but, you know, that sounds like a good idea. If your norooha does not need me for anything, I would love to go hunting again." I looked at Ara expectantly.

"Oh, go ahead. At least it will get the two of you out of my fur. You two have been a pain in my ears ever since the mota was completed."

I said, "Thank you, Ara. Perhaps we will bring home a Chakootoa." I said, laughing. But, when I looked at Ara, she wasn't laughing, or even smiling. She had a look of horror on her face and I knew immediately I had said the wrong thing . . . again. "I am sorry, Ara. I said that without even thinking and as a joke. Please forgive me. I know how well the Ka'yna is loved in Talo-Vy."

“Mvilu, you know how much I fear for your and Rora’s safety when you go hunting. What happened to the Ka’yna was one of my fears. Please do be careful. We do not need meat so badly that you and Rora could be hurt.”

“I know, Ara. We will be careful and I will protect Rora’s life with my own. I promise.”

I collected my hunting equipment and Rora and I left the house. The closest katooeka was due west of our home so, we headed in that direction. The katooeka guards, two of them that would be necessary to turn the windlasses to lift the draw span, stopped us for a *thata* to verify who we were, then allowed us to cross. As we crossed, I saw the horn that would be used in case of an attack hanging from a lanyard next to the windlass as we passed by. I was happy to see that, even though he opposed my ideas from the start, Nachoo had implemented them. Whether it was because he wanted to prove me wrong or because he truly was concerned about the anohachy of the village didn’t matter to me. I was just glad to see that he was following my suggestions.

Rora and I walked due west into the forest for about a *hi’nu*. I kept hearing all sorts of sounds as we walked along. Most of them were game animals, but I did hear several carnivorous animals as well. Occasionally, I would catch a glimpse of a low-slung animal silhouette, obviously one of the numerous dangerous, carnivorous animals in the forest. But, all the animals seemed to steer clear of the two of us. I fully expected to one day run into, figuratively speaking, an *Oocholefala*. Fortunately for Rora and me, we had not done that as yet. Rora said that the *Oocholefala* was an extremely rare animal in this part of Tashoo. He also said that they were normally found much further north and east of Talo-Vy. He said that they preferred living close to the ocean. (2)

After a *hi’nu*, I got Rora’s attention and had him bend down. I whispered in his ear, “Rora, what we need to do is scout around as quietly as possible. Of course, this will be easier for you than me. You go that way,” I pointed to my right. “And I will go that way.” I pointed to my left. “We will walk about one hundred meters. If either of us finds game sign, we will make a ‘*hoot, hoot*’ sound,” I imitated the sound, “to get the attention of the other. If we don’t find any game sign, we will return in about twenty *athaloo* and continue in the same direction. All right?”

“That sounds good to me. Let us go.” (3)

We parted ways and I studied the ground as I walked along. I was looking for footprints and/or game trails. I knew that the Mory, being descended from feline creatures, should be able notice game signs that I might miss. As if to prove my beliefs, about ten *athaloo* after we parted ways, I heard Rora’s *hoot, hoot*. I turned on my heel and headed toward his voice.

Despite the length of time since we parted ways, it took me less than five *athaloo* to find him. When I arrived where Rora was, he didn’t say a word. He placed a hand over his mouth and pointed to the ground. He was learning more and more how to hunt properly, such as talking as little as possible and never above a whisper then. I looked where he was pointing and saw a major game trail with fresh tracks.

Rora turned and looked up the trail. He touched my shoulder and pointed. I looked and saw that the trail came out of a large clearing, about 8 hectares, just as it had the first time Rora and I went hunting. I also saw a small herd of *Ashanyka* walking toward us. (4)

Using signs, Rora told me to use the same hunting method we used the first time. I nodded and set off. I would occasionally look through openings in the scrub brush that

surrounded the clearing to be certain that the Ashanyka were still there grazing in the clearing. About half-way around the clearing, I let the Ashanyka see me walking around the clearing. Just as the Ataojoo did before, the Ashanyka kept a wary eye on me. When I reached the major trail on the opposite side of the clearing, I turned into the clearing. As I slowly approached the herd, I nocked an arrow. Since they had never seen a bow and arrow before, the Ashanyka didn't panic; however, they saw me as a Uany and, pushed by my approach, the Ashanyka slowly moved toward Rora, who was crouched alongside the trail at the far end of the clearing. Once again, when I reached the middle of the clearing, I made a dash toward the Ashanyka who, in a panicked state, bolted toward the opening in the brush where Rora was. He showed a little more patience this time and allowed a few to pass by before he sprang. He leaped onto the back of a rather large buck and sank his impressive canines into its neck. This caused the rest of the herd to break up and circle the clearing. By the time I reached the spot where Rora lay with his kill, I had picked out my target. I dropped to one knee and let my arrow fly. This time, my arrow struck a doe in the side while she ran. She ran about thirty meters then fell in a heap. I decided against taking one with my spear this time. We had a major undertaking on our first hunt when we brought the three Ataojoo home and I didn't want a repeat of that undertaking, especially since the Shanyka is about 10 – 25% larger than the Taojoo.

I turned toward Rora and saw him staring at me. I saw a look of awe in his eyes. Since he knew about my prowess with the bow, there must have been something else that I did to impress him.

“What is wrong, Rora?” I asked.

“I never saw you shoot an *erroa* at a moving target before. I did not know you could do it.”

I smiled and said, “You would be surprised at what I can do. Come on, let us collect our meat and head back home.”

Rora nodded and grabbed his kill by the antlers and started dragging it toward the doe I had killed. When he got there, he studied for a thalloo then he took a piece of rope out of his Jivekoo Etyma (5) and a shorter piece of string. The rope was about five meters in length. He looped the rope about the larger pair of antlers and tied a very strong, yet simple, knot in the ends, made a simple harness in the other end and put the harness on his shoulders. Before he put the harness on, he took the smaller piece of string and tied the front legs behind the neck. He reached down and picked up the doe and slung her across his shoulders.

He said, “We are ready, Mvilu. Let us go.”

I felt kind of bad. I didn't think that Rora should be shouldering the work, literally but, every time I asked him if I could be of help, he just said that he was fine. He said that I could keep an eye out for any possible attack, either by Mory, Uany or animal. Since this was all he wanted me to do, I decided to do it to the best of my ability.

We stopped every fifteen athalloo so Rora could rest. He still refused to allow me to do any physical labor with the Ashanyka. I didn't ask for a sword to protect us. I, and Rora, knew that I was very proficient with a bow. So, I didn't need the sword. Besides, we both doubted that I could get the sword back to him before we arrived within sight of Talo-Vy and, since I was still a slave, I could be killed for even carrying a sword.

After almost two ahi'nu, we finally made it to the katooeke we had crossed earlier. The guards were visibly impressed with our luck. These guards knew me quite well and also knew that Rora didn't treat me in the typical master-slave relationship. They knew that I was more like a weakling little brother to him. So, they said nothing about the situation and allowed us to pass.

We continued on and finally got home after another twenty athaloo or so. During our walk home, we were met with many looks of awe and surprise since we were still the only ones that were having any real luck hunting.

Rora lay the Ashanyka down outside the door to our home and scratched on the door. He opened the door and immediately stopped in his tracks. I looked around him and saw Ka' Naka sitting at the dining table. When Ara saw us, she smiled and Naka turned. When he saw us, he stood up and came over to us.

Naka said, "Chitekuro Rora and Mvilu. Please come in. I have a message from the Ka'yno. I must give the message to all of you at the same time." He looked out the door, saw our luck and gave us a smile of approval. "Errr. It looks as if you had some good luck hunting today, two Ashanyka. Very good. My congratulations."

I said, "Chitekuro and thank you, my Ka'. Rora got one and I got the other. Since we have finished constructing the mota, we may be able to obtain significantly more meat from now on."

"I knew from the first time I ever saw you that you were going to be a fantastically helpful addition to this household, despite what the Ka'yno said about you."

I said, "You said you had a message for the three of us?"

Mu-Naka said, "Ah, yes. The three of you are to be at the Suala Ka'ynony tomorrow morning at the third hi'nu. (6) There is to be a very important ceremony tomorrow involving you, Mvilu."

"Really? What kind of ceremony?" I asked.

"I am not at liberty to divulge that information. But, I do know that the entire Ishoo'se Aka'ny, the Ka'yno and the Ka'yna will be in attendance, along with TaJoola's family."

I let out a low whistle. "Whatever the ceremony is, it *must* be important, if the anohachy are being allowed attendance."

Mu-Naka gave a small shrug, such a human looking action brought a smile to my face. I almost expected to hear him say, "Eh." He started for the door. At the door, he said, "Please remember. You have to be at the Suala Ka'ynony no later than the third hi'nu tomorrow morning."

Ara said, "Have no fear, Ka' Naka, we will be there and on time."

After Naka left, Rora and I went outside to prepare the Ashanyka. (7) It took us about a hi'nu to skin and clean each of the Ashanyka. When we finished with the first one, we took the meat inside so Ara could complete the preparations. She fussed a little about all the meat that we suddenly had. She complained about not having enough room in the cooler or freezing unit to keep it all. I had to laugh to myself about her complaints. On the day I became a part of her household, just a few weeks ago, she didn't have enough meat to, as she put it, keep a Kynooa from starving to death. (8) Now she said we had too much meat. You just can't satisfy some people.

After we finished cleaning the second Shanyka, Rora and I brought the meat inside to Ara and went to clean up. Ara kept one of the back-straps aside for our dinner. She wrapped the rest of the meat and put it into the freezing unit. About the time she finished doing this, Rora and I were returning from cleaning up. Ara told us we needed to go to some of our neighbors and offer them some extra meat. Two of the names she mentioned specifically were Joola and Moona.

Receiving our orders, Rora and I did as Ara asked us to do. The first two houses we went to, in order, were those of TaJoola and TaMoona. They gladly accepted the offer, especially TaMoona.

I had met Hy-Moona not long after Ara had explained to me what chorothoo meant. She has two cubs by the names of Hy-Namoo and Hy-Vizy, her daughter and son respectively. Her cubs were her first set so, she didn't have any chohachy cubs old enough to provide her with her meat needs. She was, in essence, poorer than Ara had been before I arrived. However, being a first-time mother, she was given a larger share of the communal meat than anohachy with older male cubs. Unfortunately, due to the failure of the hunting parties over the last few months, this wasn't much. The hunting luck of Rora and me came just in the nick of time for her. Her cubs had started being weaned and they needed meat more now than at any other time in their lives.

By the time Rora and I returned, TaJoola and TaMoona had arrived and were receiving the meat that they wanted. Ara is a very generous nohachy with her good fortune but, she also had strong recent memories of her bad times and how nice TaJoola had been to her. She was basically repaying the kindness that TaJoola had shown her *and* was passing that kindness on.

As TaMoona started to leave with her meat, I noticed she took a few athata to speak to Rora. He responded to her, but I could see that he was a little nervous. TaMoona tried her best to get Rora to converse with her; however, while he wasn't unfriendly, he wouldn't say much to her. TaMoona's strenuous attempts to get Rora to speak with her struck me as a bit out of the ordinary, but I thought that it was because they had been cubhood friends.

Ara had sent us to three other families and, after these three had received the meat they needed, they were effusive in their thanks to Ara, Rora and me. Each of them gave Rora and me a Mory "kiss".

After everyone left with their meat, Ara brought out the nakyvo, leftovers from the previous evening's meal along with a few extra vegetables. While we ate, Ara was thanking me for showing Rora the proper way to hunt and both of us for providing us, and our neighbors, with plenty of meat. When we finished eating and cleaning up the kitchen, Ara, as is her normal procedure, started preparing our dinner, the nakymoty.

Ara took a large bowl that was about eleven liters and put about two liters of water into it. Into the water, she place several leaves that looked similar to bay leaves, a few kernels of something that looked like cloves, a finely sliced clove of an aromatic herb reminiscent of garlic, about 60 ml of an aromatic dark liquid that reminded me of teriyaki sauce, about 60 ml of a liquid that smelled like weak red wine vinegar, and 15 ml of what can only be described as honey, except this honey was about 50% thicker than Terran honey. She stirred the ingredients together and set them on the stove to simmer for a few athalloo. About half a hi'nu after putting the bowl onto the stove, Ara removed it and allowed it to cool. When the liquid had cooled to room temperature, she placed the back-strap she had set aside earlier into the bowl making certain that it was completely covered with the liquid. After the back-strap had marinated for a few ahi'nu, Ara took it out of the marinate sauce and cut it in half. She took one half and seasoned it with spices never heard of on Terra and are equally difficult to describe; they were the same spices that she used in her stews and vegetable dishes. She also took a special, very thin bladed knife and pierced the back strap completely through. Into each of these piercings she pushed an herb that smelled similar to garlic although it had a different, softer, texture. After she finished this process, she placed the half back strap and several vegetables and aromatic herbs onto a cloth, tied it up and placed the cloth into a pot with just enough water in it to cover it. She turned on the stove high enough to bring the water to a simmer but not a full boil.

As the first back-strap was simmering, she sliced the other half of the back strap into one and a half centimeter thick slices. She placed the slices on something resembling a cookie sheet along with different vegetables and spices and placed it into the oven. She prepared three vegetable dishes to go with all the meat. All in all, the meal was as wonderful as any other meal she had prepared from the meat that Rora and I had gotten recently.

While Ara was preparing our dinner, Rora and I went outside to work on his sword training. Rora said, "I have been practicing the sword moves you showed me, Mvilu. Would you like for me to show you?"

I looked at him for a thata before I said, "Well, pick up a dauanka and show me. Oh, bring one for me as well."

Rora confidently walked over to the adauanka and picked up two of them. He offered me my choice, but I allowed him to pick the one he wanted. After he made his choice, we started sparring. He chose to defend himself. After bowing to him, I started my attack. I must admit that Rora did a fair job at defending against my attack; but, I still tagged him several times. About four ahi'nu after we started sparring, Ara called to us that dinner was ready.

After dinner, I prepared dinner for Chy. I went into my room with his meal and found him lying on the bed. How he got up there without my assistance was beyond my ability to figure out since I had always had to help him get into the bed. He jumped down, his eyesight had improved significantly since his arrival, and went to what I called his corner and sat down as he waited for me to put his food and water down.

After I fed Chy, I returned and helped Ara clean up the kitchen. She fussed about my assistance, as usual, the whole time I was in the kitchen. She kept saying I was getting in her way. When we got the kitchen cleaned up, I excused myself and returned to my room. I picked up Chy's plate and water bowl. I returned to the kitchen and washed them so I could reuse them tomorrow morning. After this, I returned to my room and went straight to bed. All the walking, hunting, cleaning the Ashanyka, and working with Rora had really worn me out. All that, plus the fact that Naka had told us to be at the Suala Ka'ynony by the third hi'nu had made me feel like I had been drug behind a wild Nashthykoo stallion (9) for eight kilometers. I went to bed and, a few athata after I got into bed, Chy joined me. He literally jumped up onto the bed. Within a thaloo after Chy joined me, I was sound asleep. As a matter of fact, I fell asleep so quickly the lighting was still relatively bright.

1-I found it amazing during my stay on Tashoo that, despite all the frying that was done to prepare meals, at no time did I ever see anyone use any kind of oil or grease in a frying pan, yet, food never stuck to the frying pan.

2-I was glad to hear that. I was fearful as to whether or not I could kill one with my bow or spear. I had been told that they moved very quickly for an animal so large. In fact, it was said that, to kill one, you had to strike where the animal was going to be, not where it was when you saw it. I had also been told that, if an Oocholefala saw you, climbing a tree to get away from them is useless because they can climb trees easily; however, because they couldn't move as quickly while climbing a tree, it was easier to kill one while you were in the tree. On the other hand, if you are already in a tree, their neck is so short that they can't look up very high thereby preventing them from seeing you if you are more than five meters off the ground.

3-Rora has become much more confident since our original success hunting and from learning how to handle a sword better. I wouldn't be surprised if he didn't try to show off his swordsmanship sometime in the near future. Despite his newfound abilities, I was a bit worried about him. I had to occasionally remind him of his shortcomings with the sword so he didn't get overconfident. I believe that overconfidence has led to more injuries and death than anything else. That is why I continually showed him he wasn't as good as he thought when we would spar during sword fighting training.

4-The Shanyka is a medium sized herbivorous animal. They stand about 175 cm tall at the shoulder and weigh in the neighborhood of 135 kg. They are covered with a burgundy-brown hair with bluish-gray spots evenly spaced over the body down to the knees. On the males, the eyes are gray-green in color with horizontal oval pupils; on the females, the eyes are the burgundy-brown color of the body hair. The males have two pairs of antlers, one set is large, about one and a half meters in length and the other set, which is inside the larger pair, is about half the size of the larger pair. The females have antlers also, but only one pair. This pair is located where the smaller pair of antlers on the male is located. The feet are divided into two toed hooves. The tail is about 125 cm in length and is reminiscent of a horse's tail. The hair on the tail is the same color as the eyes of the animal.

5-The Jivekoo Etyma is a bag that every Mory chohachy carries with him. It contains almost anything that he should need in almost any given situation, including bringing two Ashanyka home from a hunt.

6- It seems that almost every important thing is started at or around the third hi'nu, which would be roughly 0900 Terran time.

7-I had constructed a gambrel to hang any game animal that we killed shortly after the first time Rora and I went hunting. I did this to make cleaning them easier. When other Mory had seen what I had done, many of them begged me to construct one for them as well. They also offered to pay for my services. Since I was on my guard to do anything that may make me look better in the eyes of the local Mory families, I agreed to do this for them with no reservations, or cost except for the necessary parts, although I always seemed find as much as 20 Shurtan in my Etyma Jivekoo when I cleaned it out that night. (20 Shurtan is equivalent to \$60.00, which is more than Rora earned as a garden guard in four days and I could build two gambrels a day.)

8-A Kynooa is an extremely small carnivorous animal on Tashoo. The Kynooa is about five centimeters long and about two of those centimeters are tail.

9-The Nashthykoo is an animal with a body similar in size and shape to a horse's, but the head is similar to a crocodile's with multifaceted eyes that cover about one-quarter of the head. The facets of the eyes are jade green. The size and shape of the teeth indicate that the animal is either herbivorous or omnivorous. It has ears not unlike a donkey's ears situated just behind the eyes. It has eight legs with two sets of forelegs and two sets of hind legs. The tail is about one-third as long as the body and hairless reminiscent to a rat's, except that it is scaly and muscular. The body is covered with curly rust brown fur. Like the tail, the head is hairless, scaly and reptilian looking.