

Under a Forgotten Moon

By Nine Tiger

The runes decorating his chamber glittered silver. The figure wished that he understood what they meant. It was the first thought that he had each time he awakened. He slid off the ebony granite slab upon which he had lain. The bandages that had clothed his body fluttered down to his feet, lost butterflies upon the sandstone floor. So cold. Always so cold, he thought ruefully, as if that discomfort had been something to which he had never agreed.

Odd scraps of knowledge suffused his awareness. His footfalls echoed against the ivory-black marble walls, the delicate overtones resonating for some time after he stepped into the shaft of pearly moonlight piercing the open point of his pyramid. The ice in his veins thawed. He took a deep breath, exalting in the warmth that his beating heart generated.

With curiosity he traced the dark stripes that pattered his orange fur. Tygra, he mused, before realizing the significance of the word had eluded him.

Somewhere stone slid against stone, and the world beyond his chamber beckoned. The winds of the desert traversed the labyrinth of corridors to ruffle his long white mane, and tempt him with the spicy scents of females. They wait outside, he thought, knowing his statement for the truth.

He counted the twists and turns in the path, a comforting ritual. A tent rested on a nearby dune beyond the entrance of the pyramid. Ankle bells tinkled, heralding the approach of five cheetah females. Trailing veils of thin silk concealed their tawny faces and spotted curves. Four halted. The one that continued toward him wore a diadem of gold set with a oval of amethyst. She steadily held his gaze with sea green eyes. Placing her bejeweled fingers over her heart, she bowed her head. "Lord Tygra," she purred. "I have waited for your favor."

By offering my name, he thought, wondering how he had ever forgotten the word's meaning.

The cheetah trembled, but not with the mild chill of the desert night. She is too young to be sorrowful, Tygra decided. He clasped her hand. "What do you fear, sweet princess?" he asked, surprised at the sound of his mellifluous baritone, and the compassion it possessed for her hidden suffering.

The answer played about her lips, but she remained silent. The cheetah indicated the tent. Secrets will open, he decided as he followed the entourage.

Beyond the linen gateway, only he and the princess passed, but moon shadows patterned the cloth, desperate moths seeking entry. Perfumes from night blossoms arching from clear glass vases set on low wooden tables delighted him with their complexity. Under the flickering light of tiny oil lamps, he admired himself in the oval mirror that adorned the tent, pleased at the strength and virility of his tigrine form. The princess lightly brushed his muscled arms. Her veils parted.

Tygra gave a throaty laugh and descended with her onto a soft bower of rugs and pillows. Entwined waves, they moved in tidal bliss until their cresting bodies cast their roars into the night.

The princess quivered beneath him. "Your name," he asked, gently fingering each inky spot dotting her shimmering blonde mane.

Her fear had evaporated under his touch. "I am Siri, the youngest daughter of the Queen of all Thunderans. The viziers consulted the stars, and rejoiced at my birth. I was specifically chosen for you, my Lord Tygra." She placed her hands over her flat white abdomen. "I will swell with the twentieth great sorceress of your bloodline, who will keep Third Earth safe. It is as Lady Cheetara and you, Slayer of Evil, have decreed."

The final taunt of Mumm-Ra the Everliving, impaled by him on the Sword of Omens, struck his awareness, a lightning bolt liberating all that he had forgotten. "You have destroyed me, but your despair will reverberate across the millennia, and be my eternal revenge. Enjoy the immortal decay that you have claimed by your actions." Tygra, last Lord of the Thundercats, flung back his head and screamed, lost in the horror of the memories that rained upon him.

Siri held him fast until the tempest dissipated. "Most royal one, it is time to return to your tomb until the people summon you once more," she murmured with a finality he could not debate.

Tygra rose. The mirror already reflected his transformation. Large clumps of his fur had fallen onto the carpets. Siri folded her hand into his. He ran his finger along the smooth line of her jaw. She did not flinch. Of a brave house, he decided, pleased. "You need not follow," he said.

She squeezed his hand. "It is my desire."

A fitting vessel for my most precious cub, he thought.

Together they exited the tent under a slowly brightening sky. Terror at the monstrous thing he was becoming kept the other Thunderans from appearing. No one watched their passage into his tomb.

Tygra recited the turns as they travelled toward the center so that Siri would remember the way back to her people. Suddenly, the vaulted chamber opened before them, the slab the only choice left to him.

"Thank you for the respite of your love, and the hope of salvation that you cradle," he said.

"And for your sacrifice, my Lord," Siri replied. Her eyes had begun to drop tears. He raised his hand to touch her one last time, but thought better of it. The skin on fingers had already dried, and was close to the point of cracking.

"Farewell," he commanded.

A warm breeze wafted into the tomb, and carried her back to the world lost to him.

"One day, your magic will free me from this curse, Cheetara. Then...." he said to the emptiness surrounding him, longing breaking his dream of a better future.

In the distance, stone slid against stone. Tygra recited the spell carved into the walls, his voice dwindling as his organs hardened. The air vibrated with the tone of a maddened swarm of bees. He levitated off the floor. The fallen bandages snaked around him, wrapping his body, and sealing his pain. Tygra floated over the slab, then settled upon it. Drums sounded, faraway heartbeats of a people he had long served. The blue sky above him disappeared as the apex of the pyramid closed for another hundred years.

All victories are defeats, Tygra decided, entombed in the darkness of his own making.