

The New King

By NoWhere_Man

Chapter 2

Days before the events of 'Song of the Petalars'

"Despair"

After a few days of traveling through the sun-scorched dunes of the sandsea on Tunar's small sandcrusier, which the Wilykittens had officially dubbed '*The Beachbum*', eventually the Thundercats reached the main land. Immediately upon docking on the shore the group was happy to find close by a small clear water lake. After the dogged pace they set out while in pursuit of Mumm-Ra's army as well as their adventure along the Sandsea the small intermission was deeply needed.

Cheetara stretched to her full height as she exited the pure cool waters of the pool. Rivets of water fell from her tall slender body as she dried herself off. She immensely enjoyed the hour long soak she was privately permitted. It was finally a chance to rid her self of all the grim and scratchy dust that attributed from journeying over the ever encompassing wastelands. Cheetara, herself, could not have been gladder to be away from the sandsea. Her hair and sand just did not mix.

She quickly dressed and then took the small path up the hill that returned her to their camp. The Cleric Cheetah took a gingerly pace, appreciating the bright sunning day. As she came back to through the brush she was greeted with an enamoring sight.

Melodious tunes of Wilykit's flute seasoned the air with song as the little kitten twirled around on beat. Her brother captured poor Snarf and used him as a *very* unwilling dance partner.

The sight alone brought a fruitful giggle to Cheetara's lips. Amazed that despite being out on the road in such a foreign place the kittens were still able to have such merry spirits. Cheetara looked around seeing an edging of green armor that departed back into the brush. She guessed that Tygra was prowling around keeping watch, but every so often he'd drift back to camp, probably keep in ear shot of the melodies being played.

A bright smile on her face, Cheetara looked again, seeking for a familiar mane of red. She found her Lord sitting in the shade of tree, equally seemed a peace but noticeably apart from the rest of the group.

Cheetara frowned slightly as she considered this. The Cleric had noticed her King had grown distant and withdrawn ever since their encounter with the Ramlak. Resolving to pry a little a bit, Cheetara crossed the distance to the camp meeting him.

Lord Lion-O's blue eyes looked up to her, taking in her approach. He managed a small smile to her, one she was easily able to mirror, but eventually his gaze returned to the Willykittens at play, while she took a seat right next to him.

Being this close, she couldn't help but take a small look at his profile. This was really the first time since that chance meeting that morning a few weeks ago, that the two of them had been alone. Even now she could see in his features how he certainly favored his father greatly, attaining the King's red flamed mane and regal good looks. But there was a gentleness in his manner, a certain light that flickered in his eyes that Cheetara thought that had to have been attributed to the late Queen, although now his eyes seemed distracted, troubled even.

Again those feelings she wasn't quite able to name started to resurface. But instead of just ignoring them as she did before, she took but a moment to analyze them. Cheetara decided that what she was feeling for her King was real, that maybe...

"It's easy to watch the two of them this way," he said to her suddenly. "It's hard to believe, that just over a month ago; we all just lost our home."

Cheetara nodded solemnly but didn't respond. The Cleric just wanted to appreciate the small moment of serenity they gained for the moment. There was no telling when the next time they'll get it.

"You probably thought I was being foolish didn't you?" Lord Lion-O said to her abruptly. The Cleric Cheetah turned and saw that her King's piercing blue eyes were fixed solely on her. He was speaking of course of their recent outing with the late Captain Cornelius Tunar, an event that surely left some unsettling comparisons with his own behavior previously.

"I think..." Cheetara began softly and she noticed that Lion-O leaned closer intent on hearing her thoughts. That small gesture alone spoke that her opinion weighed greatly on him. Not to mention caused a slight flaring of her cheeks due to the scrutiny. "I think you hadn't acted any differently than any other son who had just lost his father. Or a king that just watched the fall of his kingdom."

The young King let out a frustrated sigh as he fell back upon the grass. His arms folded under his head as he continued, "I acted stupidly. I knew the Book was more important," he tried to explain, "but all I could think about was getting revenge on Mumm-Ra."

Cheetara shifted her weight to one arm, leaning down, directly into his line of sight. "You had a weak moment," she said softly, her gentle crimson eyes staring into his tense bright blue ones, "A moment when all you could see was the enemy in front of you and nothing else. The important thing is, the instant when we needed you the most, you're eyes were clear and you were able to see what really mattered. We're cats Lion-O, we're not perfect."

He didn't refute her words, he just remained silent. Lion-O closed his eyes allowing a cool breeze to fall over him. After some time he said, "Every morning I keep waking up praying that when I open my eyes that all of it was just a dream. That I'm still back in the Castle, I'm still just a

Prince, and my father..." he broke off, not wanting to continue, "Now, it's like there's nothing left. Of what we are, what we were, nothing but dust. Just like in the blink of an eye, everything we had was gone..."

"Lion-O..." Cheetara starts to say, but he's already on his feet and gone. A few long strides bring him back through the path back towards the lake.

Cheetara watches his retreating back as he leaves. Deciding it best to just allow him to go, allow him sometime to play out his feelings. His despair. But he was wrong. Her King was wrong. He still had the Sword. He still had the rest of the Thundercats. And even though he didn't realize it, he still had her.