

Heavenly Nobodies

By Purrsia Kat & Spaced Angel

"Another candle, Torr?"

He turned from the window to face the owner of the voice that had startled him from his thoughts. In the doorway, silhouetted by the light that shone in the corridor behind him, was a familiar figure that went with the voice. Torr smiled, knowing Lynxori to be a friend, and waited while the old lynx made his way over to the window to join him.

"A quaint custom," said Lynxori. "A candle in the darkness to guide a lost soul home." A slow smile creased the lines of his face into deep furrows that vanished beneath the bushy growth of his beard.

"You wait for anyone in particular, my young friend?"

This game they played was an old one. Lynxori knew, as did Torr, the reason behind that solitary flame in the midst of so much artificial light. It was a hope that both young and old cherished, implanted in one by the elder, that had grown beyond the tales of yore into a longing for all that had been lost when the world known as Thundera had died one terrible day. Of those who had tried to flee, the vast majority found death amongst the stars, picked off by waiting Mutant ships that had blasted their fragile lives out of existence. The few who had escaped had found themselves to be a scattered people, few in number and unwanted by the rest of the universe. It was a life lived in ships that had no place to stop and nowhere to go. That was until the signal came.

Torr could still remember the excitement of that day. The news passed in whispers from one person to another until the whole ship was giving thanks for their deliverance. People began to talk of a home, permanent and secure, one that was theirs alone. They spoke of land to farm and of the same stars that appeared night after night, of a life lived under the heavens instead of in them. It sounded like an impossible dream, like the tales that Torr had long listened to of times passed that had belonged to kings and warriors called the Thundercats, who followed their lord in the defence of a code that stood for justice, truth, honour and loyalty. Noble people doing noble deeds to Torr's ears, yet none of this was to be found on this Thundera born anew.

What he had found on this destination planet, the one the nobles had originally chosen to meet up on once it was clear Thundera was doomed, were more of his own kind, common people he had thought were lost forever. Others had heeded the signal the first settlers sent out and reached this place before him and his weary band of travelers. Others would trickle in after, but not yet any of the fabled Thundercats. This New Thundera was said to be a rebuilt replica of the old, right down to the towering fortress being built in the lea of a sheltering cliff called the Cat's Lair. To hear this name had fired his young imagination and he had eagerly asked if Thundercats would be living there. The workers had laughed at him and called him foolish. He had slunk away with their laughter ringing in his ears and his

dreams in tatters. All he had been told had seemed so real, so admirable, and why not assume the Lair was being built in anticipation of the arrival of its rightful occupants? He could not believe it was all simply legend, nothing more than mere stories invented for children. He had been too young when Thundera died to recall these great warriors and leaders and had to know the truth.

This he had sought from the one friend he had made during the long years of exile. No one had had much time for old Lynxori on the arkship. They had called him addled, an old man living in the past, but he had found a willing listener in Torr and had poured into his ears and mind tales of great deeds of old. If he was to be believed, he had been a Thundercat and had known King Claudus and had served under Lord Jaga. He even had an insignia, an old, battered disk of red with the head of a cat-like creature picked out on its surface in black. If anyone knew the truth, then Lynxori would. After pouring out his heart about the ridicule he had encountered, Torr found that his faith had not been misplaced.

"Ah, my young friend, but times change," Lynxori had said. "All that I told you was true. Time was that the Thundercats were drawn from the nobles of Thundera, who were chosen to serve the Lord of the Thundercats and protect their world from their enemies. I had hoped that a few might have survived. They stayed until the very end, you see, when Thundera was tearing itself apart. They had sworn their lives to that world and it took them all with it when it died." The old lynx had sighed at that, which accompanied the sinking of Torr's own heart at the bitter conclusion. "And now they are all dead. Dead and gone, like Old Thundera. Alive are they, only in the tales of those of us old enough to remember."

In his young heart, Torr knew the old lynx was probably right. He was growing up himself and felt it somewhat in his own heart, too. It'd been more than a decade since they reached this new world, and wandering drifters returning "home" to this New Thundera, as they'd called it, were fewer and farther between. None that did find the settlement ever had word on the fate of the great nobles, and most assumed that indeed they'd died with the old world and accepted it with solemn gratitude. A few, Torr sensed, were possessed of a muted happiness that this was likely the case and seemed eager to forget the ways of the old and forge bravely on into a new era, adopting new ways to go with their new world.

Still, some part of Torr hoped that someday he'd meet at least one of the legendary Thundercats face to face, that one of them would pick up on that homing signal and return to them. They were larger than life to him, and just thinking about the Thundercats still living somewhere and what they stood for made Torr feel like maybe they, too, could survive anything and go on to triumph another day. Sure, they had all survived so far, but it never hurt to have such grand and powerful leaders back in place. Their stories inspired him and gave him comfort in these still-uncertain times of rebuilding.

But as time marched on with no word, it seemed that a growing number of survivors were of the opinion that like Old Thundera, the Thundercats should be relegated to the past. This was New Thundera with new ways of thinking, was the growing mantra. There were no nobles here. Those in power ruled by merit, not first by right of blood alone, although old Lynxori had confined in him that one in particular could trace her ancestry back to the old noble families. On this point, Torr was willing to believe him, not least because Lynxana was one of his own kind. According to Lynxori, she had raised rebellion against her own brother when he had been chosen over her for a position of responsibility. She had failed and been exiled for her crime. This act of clemency had saved her life. Rumours were that she

had lived a wild life since those days and some even whispered that she had been a bounty hunter. Whatever the truth, Lynxana was not telling. On New Thundera, she had the position of responsibility she had craved. She for one did not hanker for the past. She certainly didn't seem inclined to be eager to meet up with them as far as Torr could ever tell. Torr could never understand her willingness to shrug off such heroics but Lynxori would urge Torr to watch his tongue and not press too much whenever Lynxana was around. He sensed there was a history there but had promised not to pry.

Not that the past had been left firmly behind any of them. One aspect remained in the increasing Mutant incursions into Thunderian territory. Like wolves around carrion, they sniffed around the edges of New Thundera, waiting for any gap in the defences to appear and give them access. The establishment liked to play down the threat, saying that pirates were to blame for the attacks, but Lynxori claimed another reason lay in their interest. He often spoke of a great weapon, the Eye of Thundera, which he said the Mutants believed the Thundercats had stolen from them. Torr knew this to be true because it had been mentioned when first they arrived on New Thundera. This new world had been sold to them as a utopia, free of the old troubles that had beset their home world, free of the damaging influence of the Eye of Thundera - or at least that's how some felt about it. Several months in residence had been enough to know that was a slight exaggeration, but a few Mutant attacks could not entirely spoil the feel of solid ground beneath his feet or the luxury of breathing air that had not been pumped many times through a ship's recycling unit. Besides which, in the last several years the attacks had declined sharply, and the calm empowered the refugees more than ever that Thunderians would survive - with or without their revered, fierce leaders.

In shedding the old, it seemed they had gained, and yet Torr still felt the loss keenly. Many were the times he wished he could have been old enough to remember what Thundera had been like, given he was just a tot when the great Exodus occurred. Just once would he have liked to have seen these Thundercats and beheld the Eye of Thundera. Lynxori could tell him so much, but he longed to see it with his own eyes. One day, he was certain, he would. Surely a few of those brave warriors Lynxori had told him about survived somewhere out there? He could not believe they had simply ceased to exist. And what of the Eye itself? Had such a timeless weapon and force for good allowed itself to be destroyed? That he could not believe. And if the Mutants had recovered it, surely they would have tried to overpower the survivors with it. No, Torr may be leaving childhood behind, but he still clung to a shred of childlike hope that one day his fondest wish would be realized.

So, had begun his nightly ritual of leaving a candle burning in his window. He had told the officials at the resettlement home where he and his fellow travellers had been placed prior to permanent relocation that he was afraid of the dark. They had accepted this and left him and his candle alone. Only he and Lynxori knew why it was really there. Soon the day would come when they would be split up and he would be sent to live with a foster family to live out his remaining teen years. Torr tried not to think of that. Instead, he thought of those mythical Thundercats, lost and far from home.

Leaning his elbows on the window ledge, he gazed out at the shifting stars. "You think there really are Thundercats out there?"

Lynxori nodded sagely. "Their light burned too brightly to be extinguished by the death of Thundera. The

Eye would have protected them, of that I am sure." Tonight, he too seemed to be in a more optimistic mood regarding their fates.

"Then why haven't they come home?"

A hand came to rest on his shoulder. "They will come when we are most in need of them."

Just like a hero always would, Torr mused. "But how will they know where to find us?"

"The signal we picked up on, years ago - it still travels through space."

"But how?"

"We are all small compared to the universe," Lynxori said. "Yet we found our way home. If they are out there, anywhere, and have the means to pick up that signal, they'll find us in time. Have faith, my young friend. Have faith."

He turned and shuffled out of the room, shutting the door behind him. The darkness closed in, except where the candle kept its solitary vigil. It would burn this night and be gone by the morning. The next night its place would be taken by another and another until the wanderers returned. All it needed was time, patience and this tiny pinprick of light in the night. And then one day, the Thundercats would come home.



Unbeknownst to Torr and worlds away, a startled-looking Thunderkitten was not what Lion-O expected to find when he opened the door of the Council Room. From the expression on Leon's face, he guessed that the cub had his ear pressed up against the door, trying to find out what prompted the extraordinary meeting of the Thundercat Council.

"Well?" he said.

The cub's mouth opened and closed several times before he was able to come up with an answer. "I was passing and I stopped because my boot fell off and then I fell over and I wasn't listening, honest!"

It was hard to be angry with the boy, even when his own mood was tending towards the less generous side of forgiving. Leon bit his lip and waited with an uncertain expression for his father's pronouncement.

"What have I told you about people who listen at doors?" Lion-O said.

"They don't hear anything good about themselves?"

"Exactly."

"But you weren't saying anything about me, just about the..." Leon realised his mistake and slapped a grubby hand over his mouth. "I meant..."

"I know what you meant. Thundercats don't lie, Leon. You should know that by now."

The boy's face crumpled as he hung his head. "Sorry, dad," he mumbled.

"Accepted," said Lion-O.

"I didn't mean no harm."

"You didn't mean any harm," he said, correcting the boy's poor grammar.

Leon grinned up at him. "See, told you so."

Lion-O acknowledged defeat in this game. Leon was already too accomplished for him to keep up. Besides, he had other things on his mind this morning.

"Have you seen Bengali and Pumyra? We're waiting for them."

Leon inserted one finger in his ear and wiggled it about while he considered his reply. "Nope. Haven't seen them all day."

"Very well. Where's your sister?"

"Aw, she's with Velouria again." The grumble that had entered his voice made Lion-O pretty sure he knew what they were doing. With his next gripe, Leon confirmed it. "They're looking at those books again."

Lion-O refrained from adding that Leon might do well to follow his sister's example. He was falling behind her in acquiring basic literary skills to such an extent that Felina had already confided that she thought he should have extra lessons. She had also added the opinion that Lion-O was to blame for the boy's lacklustre progress.

For his part, Lion-O resented the implication. Perhaps he had been responsible for taking Leon out of class a few times, but he was teaching him essential survival skills, not tales and legends that filled his head with idle nonsense. One day, the boy would have to assume the mantle of leadership and a strong arm and the sense to use it would do him greater good than all the book-learning in the world. Anyway, Leon was still young. He had time.

Time, however, was running preciously short this morning. Tygra's insistence on making some sort of announcement had meant Lion-O was already behind in his schedule for the day. The Berbils were

expecting him within the hour and then he had promised to take Leon and Jonca, if she could be dragged away from her books, to visit the Warrior Maidens. There just didn't seem to be enough hours in the day.

He was about to ask Leon to find the missing members of the Council when the sound of voices came to his ears and he glanced down the corridor to find Bengali and Pumyra coming towards him. With his father's attention elsewhere, Leon darted away, scattering the pair as he went.

"He's in a hurry," Bengali said.

"It's a shame you aren't," Lion-O replied. "You should have been here five minutes ago."

"Why? What happened?"

His attempt at humour fell on deaf ears. Just sometimes, Lion-O wished the tiger could be just a little more serious.

"You're late. We're all waiting for you. Some of us have got better things to do, you know."

"Sorry," said Pumyra. "I had a problem in the infirmary and Bengali had to fix it for me."

"Injured myself doing it too," Bengali said, holding up a bandaged hand. He further added to Lion-O's annoyance by pushing past him into the room to take up his grievance with Tygra. "Hey, I think some maintenance is needed around here. This place is falling apart."

"How did it happen?" Lion-O asked Pumyra.

She rolled her eyes. "I asked him to replace a bulb and it shattered in his hand. He only has a slight cut, but he insisted on a bandage. That's why we're so late."

"That's all?"

"Well, that's men for you. Current company excepted, of course," she added quickly.

He wasn't sure if that remark was entirely genuine but chose not to waste any more time by pursuing it. Taking his seat at the council table, he found that from being one of the first ones there, now everyone was waiting for him before the meeting could commence.

"Now we're all here," Tygra began, getting to his feet, "I have an important announcement to make."

"It had better be," said Panthro. "I've got the Thundertank's engine in pieces and I wanna get it up and running before nightfall."

Tygra chose to ignore his grumbles and continued. "For a few weeks, the long-range sensors have been

picking up a signal. It was faint at first, but it's been steadily growing stronger. When I did a routine scan, I found something very interesting."

He paused for effect, which only made the others grow restless.

"Are you gonna tell us or are we gonna have to guess?" said Panthro.

Tygra smiled at his impatience. "The signal is Thunderian in origin."

Lion-O was on his feet in an instant. "Thunderian? Are you sure?"

"Quite sure."

"But that's impossible, unless..."

"Unless there are survivors, trying to make contact with other Thunderians."

"Survivors," Lion-O whispered as he fell back into his seat. "Does the signal give an idea where they might be?"

"Hold on just a minute there," said Panthro. "Before we get excited, how do we know this signal is genuine? It could be an echo. We're a long way from home. A signal from Thundera would have taken that long to reach Third Earth."

"I don't think so," said Tygra. "At least I wouldn't have expected it to grow in strength. Plus, this isn't a random signal. It's quite specific. It has an encoded location beacon that only Thunderian receptors would recognise."

"So, it's true," said WilyKit. "There's other survivors out there. Wow!"

"Wow indeed," said Panthro, grinning up at Tygra. "You crafty old devil. You kept that a secret for long enough."

"I didn't want to say anything before I was certain. No point in raising everyone's hopes unnecessarily."

"What do we do now?" asked Bengali.

"That's obvious," said Lion-O. "Our people are out there. We have to establish contact and let them know they are not alone."

"Is that what they want?" said Cheetara. "Didn't you say the signal carried a location beacon, Tygra? Seems to me they want us to come to them."

Tygra concurred with that statement. "That is true enough. The beacon gives directions to a planet they

call 'New Thundera'."

"That's original," said WilyKat, sharing a grin with his sister.

Ignoring the remark, Tygra went on, "In fact, its coordinates are the same as our original destination planet - the one we were supposed to go to before our flag ship was damaged and thrown way off course by the Mutants and we had to take our chances with Third Earth."

"In that case, the question before us is whether we should investigate."

"Of course we should," Lion-O said without hesitation.

"No reason why not," said Panthro, thoughtfully stroking his chin. "The Feliner's space drives are operative."

There was something in his voice that lacked conviction. "You aren't sure though," said Lion-O.

"About the Feliner? No, I've few worries there. Hasn't been tested for long range flight but...it should be fine. It strikes me though that this is too convenient. It could be a trap."

"On an encoded frequency?"

Panthro let out a soft snort. "Now, Lion-O, we both know that the Mutants are well capable of torturing that sort of information out of some unfortunate and have the technology to replicate it. How old is this frequency, Tygra?"

"It coincides with the time that Thundera was destroyed."

"There you are then. Perfect trap material."

"But how else would another Thunderian send a message to others?" said WilyKat. "They'd have to use an old frequency that others would recognise. Besides, how would they know where we'd originally planned to go? That was some well-guarded information if I remember right."

"Granted," said Panthro. "All I'm saying is that we should be careful. This group of Mutants on Third Earth have their moments, but they shouldn't be underestimated. Who knows what kind of information they breeched when they came aboard our ship, or any other number of like scenarios that might have went down at the same time. They may be just desperate enough now to try something this elaborate. Things aren't too bad at the moment. Let's not go rushing headlong into something we know very little about."

"There is another consideration," said Lynx-O. "If we leave to join our countrymen, we abandon Third Earth to its fate at the hands of Grune and the Mutants. Interlopers, unlike Mumm-Ra, whose presence we are responsible for."

Lion-O sighed, feeling his earlier excitement quickly evaporate. Lynx-O was right. The only reason the Mutants were there at all was because they had followed the Thundercats. Third Earth had gained an ally but had also acquired a formidable enemy. Although their efforts against the Thundercats had grown increasingly feeble of late, they were still able to make themselves a nuisance in harassing the local population. Villages were still burned, and food was still stolen. Grune may have been reanimated thanks to Mumm-Ra, but it was Thunderian kind that had exiled him here. In leaving Third Earth, Lion-O knew they would be stepping out of a situation they had created. It did not sit well with his conscience.

"Yes, that is a problem," he conceded. "The Mutants are definitely here because of us. We are responsible and so we have an obligation to the people of Third Earth to do something about them before we leave."

"Do something? Like what?" asked WilyKat.

"I was hoping for suggestions."

Silence fell until Snarf cleared his throat and spoke up. "Why do anything? They hate us, so it's safe to stay they'll follow us, snarf, snarf. They have a space drive now, too."

"He's right," said Panthro. "Unfortunately, you've just given us another reason not to pursue this signal."

Snarf's expression dropped. "I have? Why?"

"Because the Mutants will follow us as you said," Tygra replied. "Just as they did from Thundera, they'll follow us from Third Earth straight to this new settlement. I don't think we'd be very welcome with Mutants in tow."

This new blow made the mood in the room drop a further few degrees and Lion-O could feel it dragging down his spirits. They had gone from euphoria to despair in a matter of minutes. Was nothing ever to be easy? Their countrymen were out there, waiting for them to join them, and all that stood in their way were a few Mutants. There had to be a way of this mess. They'd been marooned on Third Earth long enough, and though they had made some great new allies and friends, all this talk was making Lion-O positively homesick in ways he hadn't felt in years. He wanted his children to experience their people and culture, beyond what their small tribe could provide. And if he were totally honest with himself, Lion-O desired to become fully what he'd been born to do; lead his people as was his right by birth and by trial. He wanted to fulfil his destiny as Lord of New Thundera, not just Lord of the Thundercats.

"Then I say it's time we found a permanent solution to this problem," said Lion-O, getting to his feet. "I'm sick and tired of this game we play with them. I say it's time we went on the offensive instead of waiting for them to make the first move."

"What did you have in mind?" Tygra asked.

"What do you think I mean?" Lion-O shot back.

Tygra remained calm in the face of this challenge. "Permanent to me sounds like something that would breach the Code of Thundera. Lion-O, if you are suggesting we seek them out to kill them--"

"I'm not."

"Then what?"

Lion-O tapped his finger on his chin as he gave the matter some thought. "As Snarf said, Slithe has a ship capable of space travel. Why has he never gone back to Plun-darr?"

"Because he wants the Sword of Omens?" ventured WilyKat.

"Because no one likes him?" said his sister.

"Exactly!" said Lion-O. "I'm guessing he's not popular there for a reason. Why not round up Slithe and his friends and take them back to Plun-darr? Let them deal with him."

Panthro let out a long sigh. "Nice idea, except Plun-darr isn't too kind to those who fail. We'd be sending them back to their deaths."

"You don't know that."

He nodded. "I'm pretty certain that's why Slithe has never gone back. It was probably the reason Ratar-O came here."

Lion-O looked from one face to another. "Then what are we saying? That because of Slithe, we can never rejoin our people? That we're stuck here? If that was Ratar-O's mission and he came all that way those years ago, why hasn't anyone been back to finish that job?"

"It looks that way until a solution can be found," answered Tygra, "because from those Plun-Darrian transmissions we've intercepted, they've been having their own problems with civil war anyway, which would explain their lack of another effort to round up Slithe and the others. Given that, I doubt it'll do any good either way. We're going to have to stay put a little while longer, Lion-O."

"Not good enough!" Lion-O said, thumping his fist on the table. Waiting was not an option for him, and he could feel his composure slipping. "I am their king. They need me. What good can I do them here?"

Tygra arched a brow at this display but kept quiet.

"What about if some of us go to New Thundera and some of us remain?" Bengali suggested. "That might work."

Panthro shook his head. "The Mutants would still want to know where we're going. And my hunch is they followed the Eye more than they did us in particular."

Lion-O knew what he should say. He knew he shouldn't let his desire to rule his world and his people stand in the way of the others going home. "I could do it then. I could stay here, with the Eye. Alone. No reason we all have to be stuck."

"The hell there isn't," came Panthro's curt response. "We're a team. We go together or we stay together. That's it."

"Then there's no way out of this," said Pumyra. "Whichever way we turn--"

"Slithe is standing in our way," Lion-O finished for her. When he looked up, he found that all eyes were fixed on him. "I don't believe in a no-win situation. We're Thundercats. There's Thunderians out there and they need us. There IS a way. There has to be."

"But, Lion-O," Snarf began. "Even if we do get rid of the Mutants somehow, there's still Grune--"

He held up his hand. "Everyone, get thinking. There has to be a way around this. Find it soon or that permanent solution will be happening, whether anyone likes it or not!"



Lion-O was gone before anyone had a chance to reply to that. Cheetara watched him go, feeling conflicting emotions tearing at her soul. Yes, she could understand his point of view. From believing that they were the only survivors of Thundera, they had suddenly found out they were not alone in the universe. They hadn't felt this much exhilaration - or turmoil - since discovering that Bengali, Pumyra and Lynx-O were out in the wilds of Third Earth. As much as anyone, she longed to find the others who had sent out that signal. Third Earth had given them shelter when their world had died, but it had never felt like home. A chance to return to a recreated Thundera was too good to miss.

She understood, but she knew she could not accept what Lion-O was proposing. Slithe and the other Mutants wanted them dead. They made no secret of that fact. But to send them to their own deaths was something she could not countenance. She had heard what happened to traitors and failures on Plun-darr. The only surprise was that Slithe had escaped their brand of justice for so long.

She was certain that Lion-O had not meant what he had said. He was angry, but it was more than that. For a few seconds, she had not recognised their normally mild-tempered leader. Fatherhood had changed him in many ways, but until now she had not realised the depth of his feelings about his position. She knew he was grooming Leon to be his successor. Clearly, however, he had more in mind than that he should follow him solely into the Lordship of the Thundercats. He was after all Claudus' son and he had been king. If Lion-O felt he had a right to that kingship, even on a recreated world, she wondered how far he would go to pursue his claim.

Leaving the others to discuss their options, she followed Lion-O and found him in the Sword Chamber, his hands resting on the Eye of Thundera.

"Are you all right?" she asked.

His shoulders heaved up and down as he took a deep breath. "Yes, Cheetara. I'm fine."

"You didn't sound it back there. You sounded..." She chose her words carefully. "You sounded angry."

"I have a right to be." He turned to face her. "Aren't you?"

She leant up against the wall and considered her reply. "Yes. I want to go home. But not at the expense of others."

"Then you're content to stay here the rest of your life? Well, I'm not. My people need me."

There it was again, the change from a collective to a single ownership. She had to address this issue with him now. "They seem to be managing pretty well without us."

Lion-O's eyes widened just enough to let her see his reaction to that remark. "How do you know that? That signal might have been a call for help. If so, I can help them. I should be there."

His attitude was starting to grate on her nerves. "You, alone? What about us?" she retorted. "Or don't you need us any more? Really, Lion-O, I thought you'd long out-grown a tendency toward rash foolishness."

"That's not what I meant."

"It certainly sounded like it, Lion-O. In fact, the way you're talking, I'm beginning to wonder exactly what we are to you."

He looked taken aback. "What do you mean?"

"Are we friends or are we subjects?"

Whatever he was about to say was quashed when WilyKat appeared in the doorway. He took one look at Lion-O's face and quickly mumbled his apologies.

"I was wondering if you were still going to the Berbil village. Snarf needs some supplies and--"

"Yes, I am," Lion-O interrupted him. "We'll leave in ten minutes."

He took a deep breath and Cheetara saw some of his earlier anger subside as he made his way out of

the chamber. Her remarks had clearly given him something to think about. Her worry remained though and she wondered just what Lion-O would have said if WilyKat had not appeared. She could not believe that he was transforming into some autocratic tyrant, but it was obvious he was frustrated with his situation. A king without a kingdom must feel that loss. It remained to see how far he was willing to go to rectify that situation.

"WilyKat, would you do something for me?" she said, calling him back.

"Anything."

"Will you keep an eye on Lion-O? I have a feeling he's planning something, and I want us to be ready for whatever it is." She'd like to think only the rash Lion-O of a decade ago would act without involving his friends, but in his current state of mind, Cheetara couldn't take comfort in that.

WilyKat grinned. "If you have a feeling, Cheetara, then certainly I will. I trust your feelings more than some people's certainties."

"Well, it's probably nothing."

She patted him on the arm. He had grown so tall that his shoulder was out of reach where once she might have placed her hand. Change was inevitable, except she had never entirely grown out of that feeling of impending doom that had plagued her dreams when Leon and Jonca were younglings. Its force had weakened over the years, but just lately she felt it growing strong again. Like the signal from Thundera, she had yet to decide whether it was the herald of good or evil, but for Lion-O's sake, for all their sakes, she hoped it was the former.



Lurking and waiting in the long shadows of the forest near the Lair was Jax, and if he could have known what was in the wistful heart of young Torr hundreds of thousands of miles away, he'd have had different tales to spin about the ThunderCats. He'd spent his time reflecting on the pivotal matters in his life as he sat on the cusp of adulthood himself, and wondered as many his age do, how it'd all happened and where he could go from there.

Much of it was bleak, both the past and the future, but there had been a brief bright spot. There was a time when Jax admired those who, to much of his brethren, were sworn enemies. He'd gotten over his initial fear and bonded with the group that'd given him a chance and taken him in, despite many factors. He'd thought through them he was saved and perhaps had a chance to experience a decent life; one devoid of drifting, wandering and running. He'd been young, but the memories remained with him, burning brighter now that he was again near the Thundercats.

He shook his head as his keen eyes watched through the leaves, catching the motion of the great doors of the Lair opening and some Thundercats emerging into the sunlight. His eyes narrowed to slits as he

watched, and wondered again what a fool he was to think they'd understood or were heroic enough to care for a wretch like him. The thought struck him that perhaps he'd been better off never having met them. The false hopes and the crushing let down of a reunion gone wrong often felt worse than many of the other things he'd endured or seen in his short life wallowing in the slums of Plun-Darr.

Rubbing his muzzle with the top of his arm, he sat back against the trunk of the tree he was sitting up in and took stock of what his next move should be. Everything had its ugly underneath and the Thundercats, he'd decided, were no different. No different than any other Mutant, really. That left Jax to rely on the only person he ever really could, and that was himself. However, that resolve failed to give him true comfort, neither did it provide any useful solution to what he was going to do with his life. He didn't feel he could just live in the forest and eke his way through a lonely life. It seemed no matter what he chose to do satisfaction would elude him. The life of a loner seemed to be what he was destined for, but his soul fought the notion, for because of that little bit of compassion he'd be exposed to those years ago, it still yearned for true understanding, companionship and love. But the ThunderCats had rejected him, and he knew the Mutants of Castle Plun-Darr wouldn't welcome him with open arms and with that, his choices were thin on where to turn.

He certainly couldn't sit in the branches watching and longing anymore. Jax surely had to accept that and move on. Instead, he behaved like a soul in shock, choosing to remain and stare in disbelief that he could have been so wrong about this group that held up such idealistic and noble tenets such as Justice, Truth, Honor, and Loyalty as their Code. But since Felina turned him away, surely the others would feel free of the obligation to tolerate him again.

Jax shook his head again as if to shake off the conflicting thoughts. It was no good dwelling on any of it, he decided, and perhaps he should explore more of the planet and see what was out there for him. The farther away from the old Cats' Lair he went, the better too. Revenge, it wasn't something he desired mostly because like many of the forces that had worked against him, he felt he was powerless to get the better of them anyway. His survival instincts were strong enough to get him this far in life, which some liked to call cowardice in his species. But Jax thought it was good common sense in that, unless he felt like committing suicide, taking on a pack of Thundercats he'd felt had wronged him was not a smart idea. He hadn't been robbed of his basic will to live just yet.

He leapt off his perch, landing agilely on his feet to the grassy surface below. Just as he started on his way, a low but powerful voice from somewhere behind him gave him a start. Jax turned ready to face the owner of the voice and his eyes grew wide. The big, single-saber toothed Thunderian was not a soul he'd ever forget, and there he was standing close enough to Jax that if he'd wanted to, Grune could reach out and snap the jackal teenager like a stick.

In retrospect, he should have known running into the intimidating ex-Thundercat was a possibility on this world, but Jax had hoped that somehow fate would grant him at least that much of a break. Clearly, that was not the case. Though Jax wanted to run, he found himself frozen to the spot and gaping at the lopsided sneer Grune wore while waiting for fate to deal its final, cruel blow.

*Just because they seem to understand the way you feel
It doesn't mean they'll feel the same way too
Just because they seem to hold a mirror to your life
It doesn't follow that they'll be just like you*

*Take no heroes,
It's no good
They don't stand up to you
Just take the bit you think they can use*

*I remember when I was younger
I thought the answers were locked in people
So I admired the ones whose lives were a source of envy to people like me*

*But do you really want to meet
The ones who write your dreams
Believe me, it's a fantasy
You won't like the reality
If you want heroes keep them safe
They don't stand up to life
So lock them in your soul and lose the key*

*(I love you, I don't want to meet you)
When I see you it makes me feel
There's someone else out there like me
You touch my soul with what you do
It all makes sense when I hear you
You understand the way I feel
I know exactly what you mean
It's like I've known you all my life
I think of you I feel alright*

*But in the flesh how would it be
If you could really see
The weaknesses you never knew
Alive and staring back at you
If you want heroes keep them safe
They don't stand up to life
So lock them in your soul and lose the key*

--Heavenly Nobodies, Lush