

Exodus

By TanC

Chapter 3: BERBILS: HELPING HANDS

He heard her call. The screams ran through his mind and woke Tygra from his sleep. The vision flooded into his own mind as Cheetara was unable to stop it slipping out. Their children, the horrific sight of what evil had done to them, what they had done....Tygra was frantic, but years of training took over and he knew he had to find Cheetara. A calm bathed over him, before he set off around the camp towards the forest.

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She didn't know how long she had been sitting on the forest floor, but Cheetara knew that he had been standing there for awhile, watching her, waiting for the right time to help her back onto her feet. Eventually she felt his hands rest on her shoulders and then they ran down her arms, before claspings at her own claws and bringing her back up.

It was strange that he never said anything, the look of worry on his face was evident enough to tell her that she had been unsuccessful in preventing the vision from getting to him. But now Tygra simply gazed into her eyes and sighed. Eventually his mouth spoke what his mind was thinking.

"Let me to teach you to block them out." he said sternly. "You can't keep having these visions, these hallucinations if it's going to do this to you."

"Do you have the time?" Cheetara asked in the same stubborn manner. "Do you have the time to build the Cat's Lair, oversee Lion-o's training, help put our people to rest AND help me? You have too much..."

"I will find the time."

Cheetara felt his strong resolve, his determination to help her, to help everyone and do what Jaga had expected of him. He wasn't going to back down, he wasn't going to change his mind, no matter what she tried to do. Tygra's feelings may have been under control, but Cheetara could see just a little bit deeper than that. How could she not, when everything was so open. Levels upon levels of different emotions and thoughts just pummelled her, but his control was what kept them from screaming louder.

"Let's go back to camp, before the others sense something's wrong." said Tygra. "We've got a long day ahead of us tomorrow."

"You mean you have. Tygra, you can't expect to carry this burden."

“Until Lion-o under goes the trials, it is my burden. I am to prepare him, teach him....”

“And do everything for everyone else.”

“Do I really have to explain myself to you?” Cheetara heard his thought.

“No.” She replied. “I understand. But you don’t have to have this burden on your own.”

He didn’t need to ask. She was now more than willing to accept his help, to give her the control over her ever increasing powers, but he also had to let her help him. They were mates now, that bond wasn’t going to go away and they had so much to share.

The two of them walked slowly back to the camp, their arms wrapped round each other. Cheetara rested her head against his chest and allowed Tygra to direct them to her tent. For moment, they stood outside the small shelter, refusing to let go, more than content to feel the night breeze ripple their fur, entice their skin and touch. The sensations felt physically and emotionally excited them both, made them long to consummate their bonding, but in their thoughts, the vision of their children lingered, dredging up a sickening fear and worry. Cheetara broke eventually from his grasp.

“I need to sleep.” She looked up into Tygra’s eyes. *“But I don’t want to be alone. Just be with me.”*

Was it just her that was making him crazy? Was Cheetara purposely trying to bury through his own psychic defences? Not that it would be so hard for her...Tygra smiled. The breeze had died, the air was now thick with sticky humidity and he was wanting to just go to sleep on the bed he had made outside. The desire to follow her inside and take his position next to his mate...it was stronger. With her hand pulling the rest of him inside, he couldn’t refuse. No resistance as she stripped, no struggle as he allowed her to undress him.

Cheetara lay on the bed and allowed Tygra to hook himself around her. Just holding each other, just simply being there. Sleep would soon take over.

“Sweet dreams.”

** * *The ethereal plain felt different somehow. Tygra looked around and saw only white and felt only a gentle pleasing warmth from all around. Sure enough he was once again naked, bare and natural as he could be, but there was something missing. He smiled. No. She wasn’t missing. She was playing. Her laughter was echoing all around, but each time he turned to face her, she wasn’t there.*

A hand slapped his bottom. She laughed again when Tygra spun round and saw nothing. But at the corner of his eye there were blurs of gold and he knew what she was doing. She slapped him again, this time her laughter turning into hysterics.

“That’s not fair. Where are you?”

“Can you catch me?”

“You know full well I can’t!”

She slapped his bottom again but this time, she allowed herself to be caught. Tygra spun round and grabbed her. He pulled her right to him and slapped her rear with his own hand. She giggled.

“That hurt.”

“No it didn’t.”

“No. I was lying.”

“About it hurting or wanting to go to sleep?”

“We are asleep.”

The smile vanished. Tygra gently cupped her face in his hands, looked right into those dark eyes and he saw the reason so evident within. He knew and understood. This was in their minds, the souls made everything real here, although their thoughts and feelings only touched, she made it possible for it to be physical too. This was both of their unique and incredible talents enabling them to do what they had wanted to in the real world.

The kiss pulled her in. Huge hands pressed against her back and slipped down to rest on her bottom. No laughing, no playing; everything merged together. This was clarity of soul and uncontrollable passion as the couple consumed each other completely. Within their minds, their bodies got a taste of each other, Tygra and Cheetara gave everything each had to offer.

She lay on her back, her eyes closed, her fingers interlaced with Tygra’s, her chest heaved heavily in anticipation as her mate rested on top of her. He was so gentle; Tygra kissed all around her neck, his hands touched her body, caressing up from her thighs, stroking through her silk fur, tentatively brushing against her breasts before lingering his hands in her golden hair.

Heat screamed out from her very being with every kiss of his lips and with each thrust of his body on top of her. It was all physical, his scent, his sweat, his deep growls, all of it felt so real.

His pride and love, his soul; it ate her up. Cheetara clung onto him with desperation and lust, her claws grasped and dug into his back. The elation and ecstasy raged on in an entanglement of arms and legs, mouths and tongues before the moment, the instant he finally slipped inside of her.

Now they were truly one. This couple weren’t just Tiger and Cheetah, they were more than simply man and woman, neither strong or weak. Everything blended and formed together, past, present and future. They were the nothingness before their births, the boy and girl meeting together for the first time, the young adults becoming mates joined by their souls, the elderly

*couple who had shared so much love and pain, the death that endured afterwards. Their entire existence was the building orgasm, the cries and pleasure, each movement, the gentle push, gasp or moan and the final shot of rapture.****

Wilykit couldn't sleep. She sat up in her bed and looked over at the Lord of the Thundercats on the other side of the medical tent, fast asleep. She didn't even want to try and get some sleep herself, so instead the young lion kitten slipped out from her bed and crept outside. She then began to wander over to the centre of the camp.

Everything was so quiet, even the forest seemed oddly silent and it was the silence she feared the most. The tents and shelters had been put up close to the wreckage of the ship, the place where her parents bodies still lay. Wilykit still thought of her mother and father, wished that they hadn't been killed, but Wilykit wished for so many things and one was to soon put her parents to rest.

Lion-o had told her about a lake, surrounded by trees that cried over the waters, dropping tears of leaves onto the clear surface, and to her it seemed the perfect place. A place to rest, to grieve and to remember.

She reached the stack of crates on which lay the plans Tygra had made for the Cat's Lair. Every detail had been sketched by the architect, from defensive and offensive systems, science labs, tech rooms, right down to individual living quarters, training rooms, games rooms and even the memorial for deceased. However this was more of a passionate drawing of art than a schematic. Wilykit smiled, it was a beautiful and lovingly drawn picture of a huge domed room sheltered away deep in the lair and displaying dazzling homages to Thundera and the many clans. Being from the Tiger clan, Tygra had sketched the memorial room with a crystalline structure, so full of light, that coloured prism beams bounced off every reflective surface. Sections were made for each clan and they were decorated specifically for them. Brilliant reds and browns would decorate the majestic oval room for the lions, oranges, black and silver for the Tigers; those few for the pumas and jaguars shared delicate hints of grey and brown whilst black, white and blues featured in the panthers. Wilykit loved them all and she couldn't stop the tears from rolling down her cheeks. Tygra had even stretched the corridors for the cheetahs, leaving long golden hallways but something was missing from all of them. Kit picked up the pencil nearby and began to draw on the paper.

As she did so, she heard a brief sound of movement. She looked around but there was nothing. Her brother was still asleep in Panthro's tent, no doubt the both of them exhausted from making endless new tech gadgets. But when Wilykit couldn't sleep, Kat normally couldn't either. Their link of twins was too crazy for her at times. She looked around again, no; Kat was not stirring. He was certainly snoring, but he had not sensed that his sister was awake. Lion-o and Snarf were also in slumber, but Kit noticed Tygra wasn't in his tent or (to her surprise) on the made up bed next to his drawings. She rose up from the crates and edged around the camp.

A sudden powerful burst of emotion smacked straight into Kit, the force so wonderful and shocking that it knocked her off her feet. She sat on the ground, panting for breath, sweating and

gasping. Kit had a huge grin on her face, she couldn't stop smiling and at the exact same time she couldn't stop crying. She wiped the tears away from her face, wincing as she caught her wound, and she looked around to see why she had been thrown to the ground by this powerful emotional shock. There was nothing, no sinister shadows or foul stench of mutants and no other creature stirring nearby. But she did notice the two silhouettes curled naked together in the next tent. Tygra...Cheetara?! The grin got wider and her paws began to gently pat together in delight. Tygra and Cheetara, already pairing off, it was wonderful!!

Wilykit scrambled up to her feet, pausing a moment for her legs were unsteady, shaking and trembling. Her whole body felt hot and was aching all over. She briefly looked over at Tygra and Cheetara still sleeping before rushing back to the crates and blueprints. She would finish this drawing and she would also add a few touches herself. Just to help out.

* * *

The next day, Kit was woken to see her brother's face beaming a huge grinning smile right up close to her. Kat was hopping around and laughing, gently pushing his sister's shoulder to get her up.

"What?!" she moaned as she got up to her feet. She looked around, already the rest of the adults were up and busy working. It seemed that Tygra had given Panthro the go ahead to start on the BFT, for the grey panther man was already working away on the circuitry and tread. Lion-o was standing next to Tygra, trying to listen to what the older man was saying about construction, but he just had this great big grin on his face. "What?!" asked Kit again when her brother began to poke her more seriously with a clawed finger.

"It's two things really." said Kat jovially. "One....Panthro is going to let me learn his trade! I'm gonna help him build the BFT!"

"That's nice." Kit didn't seem interested, her eyes darted only back to her drawings, which could have been mistaken for Tygra's own. Then she looked up as Cheetara was walking past. Kit noticed the woman seemed different, but when Cheetara walked up to Tygra and Lion-o, all three of them smiled in a strange and uncomfortable manner. Kit couldn't help but smile as well. It seemed only she knew that Tygra had lain with the cheetah woman, and Kit liked that. It would be her secret.

"But the other one...I think you will like." Kat sighed as if in pretence of telling his twin something absolutely wonderful. "I know that you and I...we sometimes share thoughts, share dreams and such like. I'm hoping you did, but did you feel something last night?"

Wilykit snapped to attention. Had Wilykat felt what she had felt when she approached the tent? She didn't need to say anything, her face and reaction had given it all away. Kat's eyes widened in joy and he screeched so loud that everyone turned to look at him. When the adults all realised it was just Kat overreacting to something, they went about their work. Kat however leaned closer into Wilykit and whispered.

“Okay so you did! It was like someone had punched me hard, with all their emotions! Everything! I’ve never felt anything like this! It felt great but it hurt as well....it was...”

“It was very powerful.” said Kit. “I know. Look, Wilykat, the force it knocked me off my feet. I wanted to scream, but I don’t know where it came from. I think it might have something to do with this place, Third Earth might not be the horrible decaying world we once thought.”

“I say we ask Tygra.” said Wilykat. “Also I kinda woke up and....well....well....I er...”

Kit laughed. If something ever embarrassed her brother it was obvious and sometimes he would run away or if he was really troubled he would allow their unique bonding to share his memories. This time he did and Wilykat couldn’t stop laughing. She saw the image of her brother being jolted from his bed and crashing down onto Panthro’s many circuit boards. Kit recalled Panthro being woken and the huge man booming with laughter as well. She screeched so loud that she collapsed to the ground holding her hurting sides.

“That wasn’t FUNNY!” yelled Wilykat. “Stop it Wilykat! I...I...!”

“What’s going on?!” Lion-o and Cheetara walked over to the two children, Wilykat couldn’t stop laughing and the look of total and utter embarrassment on Kat’s face was getting redder and redder. Cheetara gently rested a hand on Wilykat’s shoulder.

“Kit!” Cheetara’s voice held such command that Wilykat controlled her fits and stifled her laughs by putting a hand over mouth. The look from the tall Cheetah woman was stern, and Kit quickly forgot her brother’s memory. “Wilykat, you should be helping Panthro. If you want to learn his trade, it isn’t something that is going to be achieved by playing around. Is there?”

“No.” mumbled Wilykat, his head bowed in shame and embarrassment.

“Kit, what are you doing?” asked Cheetara. “We are already starting building on the Cat’s Lair. Are you coming to help us?”

“Yes, Cheetara.” mumbled Wilykat. “It was just that....Wilykat told me about this dream he had. Well...that we shared...only it wasn’t a dream...it was a very strong emotion, very vibrant and physical. It knocked us both down!”

“You felt it too?” Lion-o spoke up suddenly. The two children did not find this hilarious any more. They looked up at the young Lord, their mouths hanging open in shock. Cheetara also looked stunned. “I was sleeping, dreaming and then my whole body snapped with pure bliss, pure...if it’s the right word...sex?”

“Sex?!” Wilykat and Wilykat spoke in chorus, their faces scrunched up in deep frowns.

“It wasn’t that...” said Kat. “It was everything...all that one person can feel just seemed to whack me hard and push me from my bed.”

Lion-o nodded in agreement. Cheetara only looked worried, turning her head back to where Tygra was working.

“I felt more. I felt adrenaline, heat, unbearable passionate...sex.” Lion-o sighed. It seemed what he had experienced he wasn’t able to put into further words. He looked at Cheetara and all those feelings he associated with her made last night’s memory even more powerful in his mind. Lion-o was confused by her worried expression, so he shrugged his shoulders and chuckled. “It was nice, Cheetara. Maybe there is something in the atmosphere or some creature that can...”

“That is something we have to find out later.” Tygra caused a sudden stir as he approached them. The broad built tiger looked different than usual; his skin and fur looked richer in colour, his wounds not as evident, most seemed non-existent and his mane...if it was possible...it looked more majestic and flowing than Lion-o’s. Wilykit for a moment was in awe of this man, for she knew.

“The lair won’t build on its own.” said Tygra. Kit saw him look at Cheetara, there was a connection between the two that the young girl couldn’t stop admiring. “Kat, go to Panthro now, the sooner he gets this tank done, the better. Everyone else, let’s go. The lair will take a long time to build and every second...counts.”

Wilykat nodded and quickly scampered off to join Panthro. Lion-o waited for Cheetara to head back to the construction site, before following her. Wilykit watched the two of them leave, before looking up at Tygra. He had already gone to his designs and when he picked up Kit’s drawings he seemed more than surprised.

“These are yours?” he asked. Wilykit nodded. “They are very good! All the details are there and I like what you’ve put in for the memorial room.”

“I was inspired by your drawings, Tygra.” she said, almost feeling shy which was not like her. “It’s beautiful, a wonderful tribute for the others. Like heaven.”

“Thank you. But you’ve made the room so much more. Wilykit, come with me, now that your brother is learning a trade, perhaps...”

“I can??!” The excitement was plain on her face. “I can learn from you?”

“Of course. Work by my side and....”

“I know about you and Cheetara!!!!” Wilykit suddenly blurted out. The moment she said it, she had realised her mistake and just stood frozen to the spot with her mouth hanging open. Tygra was more than surprised, but after looking round and seeing that no one had heard, he breathed a sigh of relief. He rested his hand on her shoulder.

“Wilykit...”

“You’re bonded!! Aren’t you?” Wilykit silently cursed herself for carrying on. She couldn’t help it.

“How...what...what do you know....?” Tygra stammered.

Wilykit felt the words bubbling up her throat. There was no stopping her now.

“I saw how my uncle was changed through bonding. He became stronger, confident and so noble. It changed him....it’s changed both you and Cheetara. I’ve never seen her look more beautiful, so golden! She’s like a Queen!! The way both of you carry yourselves and your statue...”

“Stature.”

“Yeah...that...it’s clear that you’ve recently bonded. If you know about these things. My mum told me how she and dad changed when they joined and....”

“Wilykit, perhaps it would be best if....”

“I know!! I can see how much more radiant you both look! Why didn’t you bond openly? Why didn’t you have a proper ceremony?? It would have been great! We could have had a party!!! Aw! Say we can have a party...we could do with one!!! Everything’s been so HORRIBLE here, we could do with something happy! PLEEEEEESE Tygra!!!!”

“Wilykit....” Tygra smiled, though it was a little forced through the slight annoyance of her continuous babbling. “You know where we are and the dangers that we are facing. It is essential that we build this lair, time for anything else is...not important.”

“Then why did you and Cheetara...do it??”

Do it. Tygra winced. Such poor choice of words.

“Little one, when you’re older...you will understand that sometimes bonding isn’t something that can be done with a...rational state of mind.”

Tygra walked with Wilykit to the construction site, where Panthro had already lain out some makeshift machinery which would aid the building. Work for the rest of the day was done mostly in silence, it was only interrupted by Snarf’s occasional yelps if anything looked too dangerous. Tygra worked closely with both Wilykit and Lion-o, tutoring them with his knowledge and overseeing their progress with keen attention. Cheetara kept a discreet distance, but every so often she would catch Tygra’s gaze. Cheetara looked so different now. If it had been possible, she was more beautiful than when he had first met her. Her hair seemed to coil like golden ringlets, longer around her shoulders and her body was much more shapely and pert. Looking at his own hands and fur, Tygra noticed his old wounds faded and a new healthy sheen flowed over him. Had their joining done all this to him? He recalled some of the priestesses being able to heal emotional wounds, but this was something far stronger.

"You have another protégé under your wing?" Cheetara's mind echoed in Tygra's, causing him to stop briefly and look over at her. She was helping Wilykat carry some armour plating for the tank, but she too had paused and was looking back at him. She stood so straight, tall and strong. Nobility and seduction surged from every part of her. Tygra had attended many bondings on Thundera and certainly the couples did change, their empathic links provided them with a new feel on life, but nothing so physical as this! Tygra shook his head, he couldn't let himself lose sight of what he had to do. He had to carry out Jaga's wishes and that meant preparing Lion-o for leadership. Tygra breathed deeply and sent a saddened thought to his mate. It was the only way.

"Cheetara, we can't join again tonight. We can't until the safety of the Thundercats is secured."

"I know." Tygra felt her despair along with his own as she turned away and carried on walking. *"We can't control how we feel about each other...it will be...hard...to stay away from you."*

"I don't know if I can."

Tygra saw her turn round and smile. Her face was illuminated by the sun and the wind whipped up her hair, displaying a vision of a goddess. *"Weakness is not something I associate with you."* She thought.

* * *

Every living thing on Third Earth felt the vibration tear through them. Most didn't understand what exactly it was but those who did revelled in the pleasure. The stench of this raw emotional cry woke one from a sleep.

The coffin slid open and Mumm-Ra, once again cloaked in his red shawl, drifted from his enclosure. He was not fully healed from the lion cub's attack, but he had thought the vision he had sent to the woman, would have affected her. It did, but in a way he never expected. He had used it in the wrong way.

The bodies and souls of his enemies, trapped for centuries in the walls of his tomb were condemned never to feel anything but the pain he inflicted upon them. But as he slept, as his mind tortured those pitiful beings, he had felt their anguish ease.

A burst of pleasure, happiness and joy seeped through them all and for the first time in millennia, they had experienced something good and pure.

Enraged, Mumm-Ra inflicted more misery and pain on them, forcing their screams to pierce the very foundations of his own tomb. He had to suffer his own restraints and those who had defied him in the past would feel his wrath and the evil that rotted his body to the bones. So too would the Thundercats.

His vision to the Cheetah woman had backfired. It seemed her mental abilities were more powerful than he thought. She was not supposed to be the one to worry about. Although she was strong, Mumm-Ra knew that it would be the young lord of the Thundercats who would

ultimately prove to be the worthy apponent. Only a boy, undisciplined, untrained and he could still defeat him with a simple sword; when this whelp grew and received the training, it would be more difficult. Even those souls bound to the Eye would grow stronger along with him and that...would not do.

Mumm-Ra knew what he had to be done, it all boiled down to the Sword Of Omens. Lion-o was helped by those spirits of good, their powers were what made the weapon so formidable. Mumm-Ra's cause of action was all to simple. He had to get hold of the Sword. He had to break apart the Thundercats. Carefully.

Betrayal and revenge was so sweet.

Mumm-Ra walked over to his blood pool and began to conjure up a vision of his own making. The events unfolded in his mind and as he submerged his skeletal arm deep into the blood waters, he felt the sickening emotions of a bonded feline couple crash once more through all of Third Earth. He felt the feelings of the young lord and it all seemed too easy. The vision began to form.

He knew that the three: Lion, Tiger and Cheetah were the key components. They were the ones that needed to be manipulated and it all boiled down to the putrid emotion: love. Two men passionately loved one woman and one had to be betrayed.

The blood pool simmered once more and Mumm-Ra gazed with his hollowed sockets deep and beyond. Six days had passed so quickly, Mumm-Ra observed the Thundercats and their struggle to build their new home. He saw the torment and the anguish of the Tiger and Cheetah, as they had kept themselves apart, afraid of the nightmare future for them and their children. Unconsummated except by the mind. Mumm-Ra felt the anger of all at the lack of progress...they would be weak and defenceless for years.

Mumm-Ra laughed, hacking up his cursed decaying innards, black sputum searing from between his caged ribs and breaking jaws. There was no sign of the Lion-cub, for the rest of them were huddled round the panther's completed contraption. This was a time, an opportunity to make the young lord quail and falter. A time for a little fun of his own.

Lion-o always carried the Sword of Omens and whilst he was away, the others would be subjected to...a little setback.

"Let their hopes die now." Mumm-Ra seethed. "Let them die by this very Earth."

* * *

There was a race. A race who were totally unaffected by the emotional scream that ravaged Third Earth. They were a species who had crashed long before the Thunderians and although they felt emotion, they were oblivious to the telepathy of others.

The inhabitants of Third Earth had welcomed these gentle creatures and over the years they had finally accepted them and their ways. Those aligned with good, came to love them and embrace their wisdom.

* * *

“We DID IT!” cried Wilykat, jumping for joy.

“You made this?!” gasped Wilykit, running her paws over the sleek metal of the wondrous Thunder Tank. Soft loving purrs vibrated from her lips, her affection of this mechanical machine strong and sincere. “You made ALL this from the metal you scavenged from the ship??!”

“SALVAGED.” Panthro strongly emphasised. “Salvaged! But I had help. Wilykat proved his skill at engineering!! He has been a truly exceptional student!”

Wilykit looked towards Tygra. The man never said anything, but his expression said all she already knew. Everything came so easy to the young Lion girl, she had picked up on all techniques she was shown. Wilykit could learn anything when she was told once and Tygra had been more than impressed with her progress, for every job, every task or chore she was given, Kit would indulge herself and finish far sooner than he had expected.

During the last few days, she couldn’t even bring herself to correct her brother, she restrained herself from interfering and correcting him, watching only from a distance. Kit observed Panthro and her brother work and as she did so, she had immediately picked up the engineering feats, skills and put it all to memory. The connection she had with her twin seemed to be one way, as Kat struggled to learn. Wilykit absorbed far more than he ever could and she tried to hide it. But the Thunder Tank was the result of Panthro and her brother’s work. This was his achievement and she wouldn’t deny him that.

And what an achievement it was. The Thunder Tank was a glorious sight, a sleek silver cocoon with two long extended treads shaped like claws. Beneath it all, Wilykit could only imagine what secrets lay within.

“It’s a great addition.” said Tygra as he circled the mechanical wonder. “I never thought it could be done in such a short space of time.”

“You forget what I’m capable of!” said Panthro proudly. The grey man chuckled slightly and then wrapped a brotherly arm around Wilykat. “What WE’RE capable of! This tank is the ultimate defensive and offensive weapon we have at our disposal. Plus its got scientific equipment AND rather neat comfy chairs! It is ready to defend us all, whilst the lair is being constructed.”

“And in good time.” said Tygra. “Well done, the both of you.”

Wilykat beamed with pride. He puffed up his chest and beamed a grin so wide that Kit felt his emotions almost overwhelming her. Then their tie, made at their birth, once again caused both of them to speak in unison. It had been a question both of them had wanted to know since Panthro had uttered those impressive few letters.

“Panthro, what does BFT stand for?”

“It’s a Big Fucking Thunder tank!!!” he cried with far too much enthusiasm.

“PANTHRO!” Cheetara’s shocked response caused Panthro to whack a huge claw over his own mouth. Tygra’s laughs of hysterics certainly didn’t help, even if the two twins looked confused.

“What?” asked Kat and Kit in puzzled synch. Tygra couldn’t stop laughing, clutching at his sides.

“It’s bad language!” said Cheetara, now barely trying to hide her own smirking.

“Crap!!” snapped Panthro. Who having sworn again, growled angrily. “Sorry kids.”

The two kittens, obviously had never been subjected to the kind of language Panthro was prone to spout. Being the offspring of nobles, it wasn’t the sort of language that was ever thought to exist. Panthro looked apologetic to the children, but Tygra was still laughing and it wasn’t setting the right example.

“Don’t you be using that sorta language...you hear??!” Panthro ordered, jabbing a warning finger in the children’s direction. “It ain’t....polite!”

“Yes, Panthro.” they both answered.

With no warning, the sun suddenly disappeared. Light was wrapped in darkness and thunder screamed across the sky. Everyone looked up and saw only blackness. The sky had been ripped apart revealing a black darker than space and it poured the heavens down in a long sickening sludge. Rains spewed down with hail and wind, soddening the ground beneath their feet, mud squirmed under them restricting their movements and forcing them all to find cover.

Storms were not unusual on Thundera, so all the pack collected together in one of the tents, hoping that they would be safe. But the earth joined with the sky. The ground beneath them rumbled, cracked and spewed the very foundations of the Earth.

Stones fell from above, rocks and boulders erupted from beneath, ripping up the camp with torrid rain and hail. Water fell like a river, nothing would provide adequate safety.

“We have to go down!!” cried Cheetara, pointing to the broken doorway that led to the colony ship beneath.

“Not this cat!” yelled Panthro. “I’m not leaving my baby!”

Tygra and Cheetara lead the two children deep into the confines of the original ship, just as the ground erupted around them. The very foundation ripped up, rocks pelted them all, slicing and pounding, yet Panthro was the only one to leap into the newly constructed Thunder Tank. He slipped easily into the pilot's seat and the heavy cover slid over the top. As the shield wrapped around him, Panthro saw a fleeting image of the others delving into the constructs underground, to immerse themselves in the gruelling sights of the dead underneath.

The rocks fell harder...they became bigger, boulders of stone and as they impacted, the ground trembled and broke, great chasms opened up swallowing the tank, camp and the remnants of the colony ship. Panthro cursed and used every swear word he knew as the tank was shaken and tossed around violently, but he wasn't worried about himself. The panther knew the tank would handle this heavy barrage, if it didn't fall too much. Panthro furiously worked at the controls, cursing himself for not telling the others to get in the tank as well. He quickly stopped the tank from falling any further down, by using one of the grapplers to cling onto the more stable side of the chasm. However he couldn't stop the storm and the armour plating was still being pummelled and engulfed.

Panthro wasn't sure how long the storm lasted, but when it finally stopped, he breathed a sigh of relief. He didn't waste any more time in activating the claws, he had to get to the others. He hoped...no he knew they were alive. The Thunder Tank roared into life, the vibration of the claws and the whirring of the tread gave Panthro a very satisfied feeling. This was raw unstoppable power and he loved it.

"Get a hold of your self, sunshine." he muttered as he pushed forward the accelerator. "The others still need your help."

As the tank pushed through the mud and rubble, Panthro still couldn't stop loving his creation. It was a masterpiece of engineering and well it was just too cool! He activated the scanners and began to look for the life signs of the others, which didn't take long. The screen just in front of him lit up with four flashing indicators. They had found the best part of the ship that could have survived the onslaught, sheltering in one of the many suspension pod rooms. The sensors also picked up the slight power fluctuation from the pod's main computer, the preservation cycle for the dead that Panthro himself had activated. He changed the course of the tank and began to tunnel towards his friends. If Panthro got the angle right, it would be possible to separate that section of the ship and push it and his friends to the surface. A small pang of remorse flushed over him, as it would mean disturbing the dead. He had to be careful not to damage or break any of the pods.

He realised that the pod's computer also had a small com system, and he could contact Tygra and co-ordinate the separation. Panthro pressed a button and heard the familiar click of connection.

"Tygra! Tygra! Are you there?"

"I can read you, Panthro. It's good to hear your voice."

"Are you all okay? Any one hurt?"

“No one’s hurt. But being here...let’s just say it’s a little unpleasant.”

“I hear you. I’m nearing your position in the tank. With your help, I can get you and the others out.”

“Okay. Just let me know what you want doing.”

* * *

Snarf didn’t like the idea of this walk, it was too far from the camp . Snarf whined, hissed and spat his disapproval, frantically looking round into the deep undergrowth and imagining all kinds of horrid things could be lurking there.

“Go back then, Snarf!” said Lion-o. “I didn’t force you to come with me. I’m just glad that Tygra permitted me to go! It’s a beautiful day AND I want to go back to the lake.”

Snarf cowered up into a ball and began to whimper. Lion-o stopped in his tracks and looked down at his guardian with a small smirk on his face. He listened to the creature’s yowling, understanding clearly what was bothering Snarf and it didn’t surprise Lion-o at all that his friend was scared.

“You are scared of most things, Snarf. Even your own shadow.”

The hiss of contempt from Snarf only made Lion-o laugh.

“No...I don’t think you create a scary shadow. More of a fluffy variety because you are. Fluffy.”

A long jabbering stream of noises snorted from Snarf’s jaws, whilst at the same time his paws were making rapid circular motions in the air, as if he was about to start a fight. Lion-o knew that Snarf was a brave soul, he recalled his friend’s assistance when he first confronted the mutants, but he seriously doubted that Snarf could take anybody and everything on. Snarf sprung up onto the tip of his tail, still flailing his paws about and spluttering “eeks” and “Snarf” in a rather comical way. It took only a swing of his stubby little paw to unbalance him, and so Snarf fell to the floor with the crash. Lion-o couldn’t stop laughing, but he helped pick up the crumpled ball of hair and detangled Snarf’s limbs and tail. Snarf was not impressed.

“Are we done now?” asked Lion-o when he finally controlled his laughter. “Can we carry on walking?”

Snarf replied with an affirmative whimper and trotted along side Lion-o for the rest of the walk. They had found the lake which Lion-o loved and he was more than pleased at how Snarf appreciated the place. He could see it in his friend’s eyes that Snarf too was in love with this vista of tranquil beauty. They stayed sitting by the side of the lake for a while, watching the weeping trees swaying and crying over the water, but the chance of both of them falling asleep soon became a risk, so they got up and headed off back into the forest.

Very little activity happened with the exception of Snarf trying to chase off a giant armoured skinned creature, which resulted in the creature being startled and trying to chase off Snarf. A few trees had been knocked down by the angry beast and Snarf's ego was sorely embarrassed, even more so when Lion-o couldn't stop laughing.

"That thing was twice as big as you!" Lion-o choked to get his breath back. "Snarf, you could have been seriously injured! But...you weren't. It was just so funny!"

Only a few times during his young life, had Lion-o ever seen Snarf really angry and now certainly qualified as one. The frown on the scrunchy face was more than angry, it was furious and the young man knew that the situation wasn't funny any more. Snarf hissed, what could have only been a few choice expletives in his own tongue and Lion-o bowed his head.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have laughed. You could have been killed." Lion-o heard the distinctive sounds that he translated as: You wouldn't have liked it if it had been you. That phrase he had heard too often from his companion and he frowned. "Next time, Snarf...don't try and attack things that can flatten you with just their big toe...it's not going to work."

Realising that he had been in the wrong to begin with, Snarf hurried off in front, in a rotten mood. Lion-o sighed and slowly carried on after him. It was nearly time to head back to camp, for Tygra and the others would be wondering where they were, so Lion-o quickened the pace. Snarf was still down about his brush with the beast, grunting and snarling to himself in disgust and eventually his sour mood was starting to effect Lion-o. The young lord cleared his throat with a loud deliberate cough.

"Snarf...can I ask you something?" asked Lion-o. There was a dismissive eek in reply. "I've often wondered...do you have a family?"

Snarf stopped and looked round and up at Lion-o. He was a little startled by this question, but he answered with a brief series of snorts and what sounded almost like whistles.

"Do you...do you have a mate?"

The little creature shook his hairy face, saddened at having to admit this, but he waited for Lion-o to continue with this new line of conversation, intrigued as to what the young lord could be thinking.

"I'm technically still only twelve...but I look and feel as if I am a man. More so when I'm around...Cheetara."

Ah. Snarf had been wondering when he was going to bring this subject up. He trotted up to Lion-o's side and the two of them carried on walking back to the camp. This was going to be interesting.

"She is more than beautiful, Snarf...she's perfect! I look at her and I get all these strange feelings inside that just don't make sense. I want to be around her...I want to be near her, because

everything else is perfect when I am. Her smile, her laugh...the way she speaks...the way she walks...her hair...her whole body...everything about her just makes me feel all....strange inside. But in a good way. I think I'm in love. I think I do actually...love her...do I?"

Snarf jabbered a long string of different noises as they walked, Lion-o listened and when Snarf finished saying what he had to say, Lion-o just sighed a frustrated and heavy breath.

"That obvious, huh? Well...thanks Snarf. But what am I going to do? I still feel like I'm a kid but in her presence I know I'm not! She's not a lioness but that doesn't matter to me. Cheetara is the embodiment of beauty and I can't shake these thoughts of wanting to hold her and kiss her! Do you think she loves me back? Is there a chance of me being able to take her as my mate, because if not I don't think I can handle it. I couldn't bare not being with her."

Snarf replied with just a single phrase and it wasn't one that Lion-o liked.

"But I'm not! I'm more than that! I am the lord of the Thundercats! The highest lineage of all the cats! I am a man and...it does seem a bit far fetched...but hell! I can't help feeling like this! Do you think I ought to talk to Tygra? Or Panthro? Would they be able to tell me what to do?"

Lion-o didn't see the trap until it was too late. The ground beneath his feet gave way suddenly, revealing a deep round hole. Lion-o fell, scrambling at the wall, but it was pointless as they were edged with something slick. He landed on the bottom with a heavy thud, but thankfully nothing was injured.

"Snarf! Snarf!!"

There came a small squeaky reply.

"Yes, I KNOW I've fallen down a very large hole!"

There was another squeak. Lion-o scrambled at the walls again, but he couldn't grab on to anything, the substances oozing all around him was almost like oil and offered no chance in letting him get out.

"I can't get out, Snarf. I can't even get a good stance to attempt a leap! You will have to find something with which to pull me up."

Lion-o heard a scurrying of paws and a little "Eeee!" noise as a lone piece of vine was thrown over the side. Lion-o grabbed hold of the end and when he felt a pulling tug, he scrambled as best he could with his feet up the wall. It was a slow process, Snarf was grunting with effort, no doubt struggling with having to pull Lion-o's heavy weight, but eventually the creature's own strength gave up and his hold on the vine slipped away. Lion-o was sent crashing back down to the bottom where he landed on his rear. Lion-o felt the smarting pain in his buttocks and realised he had expected too much from his companion. It would be just as easy to use the Sword of Omens and call for help from the others.

He was just about to do so when he heard a strange symphony of noises. They may have been voices, but Lion-o recognised a computerised tone, electronic and long drawls of high and low pitched whines. It certainly wasn't Snarf. Before he could call out, numerous thick ropes were thrown over the side, and it was done with such accuracy that the loops on the ends slipped over Lion-o's head and secured around his waist and arms. The electronic voices sounded again and this time Lion-o was hoisted right off his feet and pulled to the surface.

He scrambled over the edge and when he looked up, he saw Snarf, tied and bound, but surrounding him were these strange creatures. They could not have been more than three or four feet high and they were completely covered in fur. They had little stumpy ears and only had three fingers on each hand. Their faces were also covered in fur, but their eyes were red with light. Lion-o had never seen anything like this, and as he watched, he saw some of them muttering to themselves. Their voices were electronic and they were speaking in a dialect even more bizarre than Snarf's.

Lion-o got to his feet, but the ropes were still bound around him.

"Release me!" he cried. "Untie me from these binds! I am Lion-o! Lord of the Thundercats!!"

This seemed to fascinate the creatures who all slowly approached him. There was no malevolence about them, their little faces showed so much emotion as they looked up at him with wonder. One stepped out ahead of the others and approached Lion-o. It said something, but Lion-o didn't understand, he squirmed slightly as the being reached out its hand and placed three fingers on his stomach.

"Cat?" the word hummed with a pulsing and pleasant robotic voice. Lion-o nodded.

"I am Thunderian. We came here from the sky!"

This certainly excited the creatures. The one who had touched Lion-o briefly turned round to calm the others down, before he held out both of his stubby arms and began to scurry around. From its open mouth, there was the sound of roaring engines, weapons fire and when an explosion erupted, the creature fell flat on its face. Lion-o was more than impressed.

These were robots and mimicked the sounds of the colony ship's engines perfectly.

"Yes...we crashed here! We're stranded!"

The robots quickly conversed once more in their bizarre tones, obviously deciding what to do with Lion-o and Snarf. Then, all those who had been holding the ropes began to escort Lion-o and Snarf deeper into the forest.

* * *

The storm had destroyed everything. All their hard work was buried beneath the rubble, and now a single large chasm blocked off the mountain. Panthro climbed out of the Thunder Tank and his

heart sank and burned at the sight of all the chaos. His attention was quickly snapped away when he heard the door of the pod room being blown off it's hinges. Panthro rushed over to see the others emerging from within. Cheetara came out with her arms wrapped round the kittens, who had obviously been crying. Tygra followed and he was covered in dirt and dust. But none of them were seriously injured.

"Are you okay?" asked Panthro, as Wilykat rushed into his arms sobbing.

"I thought we were going to die!" he murmured. "But you got us out! Thank you Panthro!"

"Thank yourself, young kitten." he replied, brushing some dust and debris from the boy's tangled mane. "You helped me build the tank and by Jaga, it exceeded all expectations! But..."

He didn't need to finish, the others saw the ruins and ripped soil. It was more than the children could bare. Kit began to cry once more.

"But everything....it's...." she pulled herself from Cheetara's grasp and began to frantically search in the mud and rocks. Tygra ran after her and as she tried to claw at the ground, he pulled her back.

"Wilykit!"

"Your drawings! Your plans! I left them on the...they should be here! They should be here! Your beautiful drawings!!!"

Tygra wrapped his arms around the young girl, his strong grasp held her struggles and frenzied squirms, until she could no longer resist. Her body stilled and she allowed the strong arms of the tiger to comfort her as she cried.

"We've got to start again." he said softly, not just to her but the others. "Our survival depends on it. Cheetara, I need you and the children to salvage anything you can find. The scanners on the tank might be able to assist."

"What about Lion-o?" asked Wilykat, wiping his eyes and nose on his arm. "Where is he?!"

Tygra looked towards the forest, which had remained untouched. The storm had not ravaged the rest of this place and his mind was sent reeling. This had been an attack on the Thundercats, and it was far beyond the abilities of the mutants. The grey demon. It could only have been that vile creature who did this.

"Our priorities are to find food, thundrillium cells, anything that can be used for us endure on this world."

"But Lion-o..." cried Wilykat.

“Even if he were here, he couldn’t have prevented this!” Tygra then turned round to Cheetara. Through the storm, she had taken the brunt of the overwhelming emotions from the two kittens, as well as her own. She met his gaze.

“He is well. Unharmed. As is Snarf.” she said. Eventually a small smile spread across her face. “I sense a new hope...the young lord has just met some rather interesting creatures.”

“Hope.” Panthro nodded. “That sounds like a plus to me.”

“Besides, if he is in danger, he can use the Sword of Omens.” said Tygra. “Cheetara...”

Tygra felt her troubled emotions. She had sensed more than just scared feelings from the children. She couldn’t hide anything from him as her thoughts envisioned the same grey demon he had thought of.

“It’s angry, Tygra.” Her angelic but frightened voice sounded in his head. *“I can feel such a rage that, I’m finding it difficult to keep control.”*

“You can control it. I know you can.”

She said nothing about how wrong he was. She quickly beckoned the children to follow her.

She and Tygra both knew that she was struggling, any more of these mental assaults from the demon and she would break. That’s why Tygra needed help.

“Panthro...” Tygra turned and spoke to his friend once the others were busy. “I need you to do me a favour.”

“You’re bonded to her. Aren’t you?”

“Did Wilykit tell you?” Tygra asked in frustration.

“No. She didn’t. A blind man could see what’s happened between the two of you.” Panthro allowed a small weak smile upon his lips. “Your miraculous healing? This new shiny sheen to your pelt, your glowing aura? Not to mention the way you gawp at her with your mouth open?”

“I didn’t mean for it to happen.”

“But it did. She must be more powerful than I expected. Only a trained high priestess can empathically bond a couple together, and that silent telepathic conversation you two just had, tells me that Cheetara has powers beyond even the strongest priestesses. More than old Chi, Tyranis or Jana.”

“It’s not just empathy, Panthro. I feel everything she does. She’s linked with me and she can’t control it. For reasons I can’t go into....I need to keep my distance from her for a while. Not that distance prevents us from....I need to stay focused. Lion-o needs my help...”

“More than your mate?”

“Don’t try and turn things round! You know full well what I mean! I have offered to help her control her powers, I thought I could. The last few days I have tried, but I guess our feelings keep getting in the way. I’ve been unable to meditate, my mental powers have been sluggish and I just can’t seem to find my balance.”

“Love can be confusing and troublesome, can’t it?”

“Panthro...I know that panthers don’t have a history of mental abilities...but you...”

“I ain’t got none, you know that.”

“I know you can help her. I’ve taught you that much and she...we...would benefit from your input.”

Panthro knew what his friend referred to. A centred and controlled mind was a peaceful one, balanced and enlightened. Of all the time he had known Tygra, Panthro knew him to be the most composed man he had ever met. Jaga had taught the tiger to bring out his unique abilities, but now love and bonding with such another powerful mind was throwing Tygra off balance. Panthro had been a wild and hot tempered man, he still could be, but his friend had helped him. Tygra was only asking for that same help for Cheetara.

“You really do love her.....don’t you?” he asked, resting a hand on Tygra’s shoulder.

“More than I ever thought possible. Will you help us?”

“Sure. I’ll try. Right now, I think the others can use a hand.”

“I hope Lion-o will turn up soon. We could use his help.”

“Don’t worry too much about him, Tygra. He’s a man now.”

* * *

Lion-o and Snarf watched the bustling of these strange beings, still tied and bound and hoping that their sweet and cuddly appearance wasn’t just that. It didn’t take long for the strange voices to stop and they all parted to make way for a single lone being. It was exactly like the others, only the fur that covered him was darker, Lion-o could only conclude that this was their leader.

The creature walked straight up to Lion-o and like the previous one, rested it’s three fingered hand on Lion-o’s stomach. Unlike before, Lion-o felt a small pulse shock through his body. It didn’t hurt, in fact it tingled and tickled. The leader took its hand away and it’s little head tilted to one side. Deep down there was whirring, ticking and bleeping, before it straightened up and a small smile widened across its face.

“Berbils.” The word garbled through an electronic haze of gentle feedback. At the mention of this word, the others joined in. After a few minutes, they stopped, waiting for a response from Lion-o.

He looked down at Snarf who shook his head, but Lion-o was determined. If these creatures were friendly, he would try and talk to them.

“Erble, burble, flurble, dibbly durble.....fur....ble.”

The look of confusion on the creatures faces was quite pronounced and Lion-o didn’t blame them. He had just talked a load of rubbish.

“Berbils. Robear Berbils. From the planet Robear.” The leader held out a friendly hand.

It took a few seconds but then Lion-o smiled.

“Oh! You’re CALLED Berbils. Right....gotcha.”

“We’ve been here berbil years.”

“That’s a long time, I’m guessing.”

The leader of the Berbils nodded and then with a few words in his native tongue, ordered the others to untie the two “captives.”

“You fell into one of our traps.” said the leader, pulling away the ropes.

“Yeah, but I’m okay. Thank you for getting me out.”

“You are welcome, cat.”

“Lion-o.”

“Lion-oooo.” The leader patted his furry paws together in glee. “Come! Follow! Follow, Lion-ooo!” “It’s Lion-oh!”

The Berbils didn’t seem to care and Lion-o didn’t really grudge them, so when the leader began to walk through a large cluster of bushes, Lion-o and Snarf followed. They walked for a while, Snarf whimpering that they had no idea where they were and that they were further and further away from the camp. He even started to complain about being hungry, but then a huge clearing appeared through the bushes, revealing a valley.

The hills swept high and low and were filled with fields and tiny houses. They were round domed structures, some situated on the ground, others constructed within the trees above. This was the Berbil village. Lion-o was in awe at this beautiful vista and the sight of hundreds of

Berbils made him smile. Their greetings in their electronic tongue was sweet to hear and some of them even gently pawed at him, trying to press against his stomach like the others.

These wonderful creatures had made an astounding home, crops of many different fruits he didn't recognise, sprouted from every field and tree, filling the air with sweet and aromatic scents that made his mouth salivate. The crowd of Berbils swarmed still around him and Snarf, but their leader pushed them away. He turned to Lion-o and held out his hand once more.

“Robear-Bill.”

Lion-o grinned an euphoric smile and took the hand of the leader, shaking and beginning the friendship between the two peoples.

“Bill.” Lion-o acknowledged the leader's name. “I am Lord Lion-o of the Thundercats and this is my faithful companion, Snarf!”

Bill and a couple of the other Berbils approached Snarf and offered their hands of friendship too. Bill pressed his hand against Snarf's stomach, which caused the fluffy creature to gurgle with laughter. Then, Bill turned to the nearest hut and called.

“Robear-belle! We have guests!”

Lion-o then saw another Berbil emerge from the hut. When he did, he could see the difference between the sexes. This creature/woman had fur of a delicate and lighter colour and when he looked around, Lion-o saw that others also had the same tinge. So they were the female of the species. How these robotic creatures reproduced seemed a puzzlement to Lion-o.

The female called Robear-belle had in her tiny paws a tray which was over flowing with a round white creamy fruit. The smell emanating from them was a lush and milky scent and Lion-o licked his lips in expectation. The female Berbil held the tray up for Lion-o, offering him the sumptuous fruit, but before he could take one, Snarf (who's stomach had been rumbling quite loudly.) pushed him aside and snatched a piece from the tray. He grunted and snarfed about them possibly being poison, before he shoved the whole creamy ball into his mouth. A brief moment later, Snarf swallowed the fruit whole and loud content purrs of excitement wafted from his lips. One of his legs started to stomp and pound on the floor and his arms waved about in pleasure.

“That good, huh?” asked Lion-o as Snarf fell on his back and began rubbing his tummy with his paws. All the response he got were coos and pleased purred snarfs. Lion-o then reached out and picked up one of the fruits. Biting into it, the fruit had a rough grainy feel, juice squeezed from within, oozing a ripe and milky sensation down Lion-o's tongue and throat. It was the best he had ever tasted.

“We have much to offer.” Bill's voice trilled. “We have fruit of all variety. Meat fruit, vegetable fruit, bread fruit...candy fruit...”

Snarf had been Lion-o's "nursemaid" for all his life. Once the young cub had been capable of Thunderian speech, the strange and pleasant verbal noises of the Snarf had been a difficult language to understand.

Each grunt and snuffle, every "snarf" and coo meant many different things, but never had Lion-o heard his companion and friend utter a word in his tongue. He didn't think it was possible. Until now.

"Candy?!!!"

The Snarf whizzed off on all four paws, darting from bush to bush, looking at the fruits, sniffing and prodding, before finding the obvious crop that filled his wishes. Unlike the milky round substance he had just sampled, this particular produce was shaped indeed like candy. Brightly coloured and twisted in alluring shapes, Snarf wasted no time in ripping them from their vines and swallowing them whole. The sugar rush sent the small fluff ball into a rolling happy frenzy, buzzing with an extraordinary high.

"I think someone's happy." said Lion-o, pulling a piece from the tree himself.

Before he could even place the sugary cane to his lips, there was a high sounding metallic siren from above. He looked up, the cane dropping from his fingers. From one of the tree top homes, a single Berbil was screaming, his mouth wide open in fear.

"Attack! Attack! Berbils under attack! Trollogs! Trollogs are attacking!"

Lion-o felt the swarm of Berbils rush past him, running towards the far line of their valley. Every one of them held in their hands, small wooden blow pipes and at the furthest line of huts, they took up a defensive position, holding the pipes to their mouths. Lion-o ran after Bill as he gave orders in his electronic tongue. Lion-o didn't see what was causing such a fuss, but eventually he saw the blurring lines emerging over the hills. These Berbils certainly had better eye sight than he did.

He stood helpless as this on coming swarm came closer; each one of the Berbils knelt down on the grass, their blowpipes ready. Though he knew deep down, these creatures were mechanical, there was no mistaking the fear emanating from them. Lion-o followed Bill as he ran along the lines of his people, his high pitched orders wailing, but he paused and remembered his guest.

"Trollogs." he cried. "They have come to steal the Berbil fruit!"

The Trollogs. By now, Lion-o could see them approaching. With furless white/grey wrinkled skin, they were bulky in build, wearing only loin cloths around their waists, but they held huge and sharp spiked clubs in their grubby claws. Their faces were small and screwed up, dogged and scarred. Sharp long yellow and decaying fangs stuck out from their mouths, savage and gross. These beasts ripped at the trees, snaring the fruits and placing them in soggy brown sacks, yet as they did so, Lion-o saw the Berbils blow on the pipes.

Hundreds of small darts flew across the air and all of them impacted with the continuous line of Trollogs baring down on them. A few of them actually fell over, before getting back up and joining their comrades once more with the onslaught. Lion-o couldn't believe it, there was nothing that the Berbils could do.

"Those darts aren't doing anything, Robear Bill!!!" he cried. The Trollogs progressed, pushing aside some of the Berbils and ravaging the fields. Lion-o could see the despair in Bill's eyes, but the creature shrugged.

"No. They never do."

"But why resist?!" Lion-o's mind was screaming with confusion. He just couldn't understand. "If they want the fruit, why don't you just let them take it??"

"We should become cowards?"

Cowards? Lion-o finally understood why these pleasant beings were making a hopeless stand. All this beautiful valley had been the fruition of their labour. The Berbils had worked hard at creating this village and crops, so why should they allow outsiders to pillage the benefits? The only worry that tore at Lion-o was that these Trollogs would harm these people. Things....beings. Bill rested a clawed hand on his arm.

"I can't STAND this!!"

Lion-o, with all his sense of honour, considered these Berbils friends. A rage boiled inside of him, for he could not stand and allow these Trollogs to plunder and wreck this great achievement. He took the Sword of Omens from the Claw glove and ran forward towards the attacking horde. Snarf and Bill scurried after him, but they kept a reasonable distance.

Bill was more than surprised to be seeing this tall Thundercat baring down on the Trollogs and he cried out for caution. Lion-o took heed, he knew that these beasts would be no match for him and the Sword of Omens, but he wasn't going to slaughter them. He would send them away, show them that the Berbils had made a new friend and that they would now be defended.

As Lion-o got closer to the Trollogs, he took a flying jump, lifting the sword high above his head. When he landed with ease right in front of them, the sword swung in a circular motion around him. It spun round and round, buzzing with power and spark and forming the force field protecting himself, Snarf and the Berbils.

The Trollogs recoiled in fear, stumbling over their own feet and each other. Squealing whines cried from their drooling jaws and when one got too curious and tried to touch the force field with a wrinkly claw, it was thrown off its feet and sent flying back towards the hills. The rest of them weren't waiting for their turn, they all turned around and went running back to where they came from.

Lion-o watched them vanish before dropping the sword back down to his side.

Applause and cries of praise sounded from all the Berbils as they circled once more around Lion-o. The elation and happiness from these creatures was quite overwhelming, but he certainly welcomed it.

“Thank you, Cat-Lion-o!” said Bill taking Lion-o’s claw in his hand and shaking it.

“It’s just Lion-o, Bill.”

“But that was a dangerous thing to do, Lion-o. You didn’t have to--!”

“But friends help each other, Bill.” said Lion-o. “I couldn’t stand by and let them ravage your village. You won’t be seeing any more of them from now on.”

“I know.” Bill bowed and shook his head with sadness. “Those poor Trollogs.” Lion-o couldn’t believe what he had just heard. He couldn’t believe the others around him as they too all wailed in upset.

“You...you feel SORRY for those things? They raid your village and steal your crops!”

“The Trollogs don’t eat Robear Berbil fruit.” said Bill. The leader of the Berbils took hold of Lion-o’s hand and led him to one of the highest hills in the valley. From the top, Bill pointed towards a mountain just sticking out in the distance. It looked a foreboding and rocky place, but at the very top was a lush green cluster of foliage. “They can only eat the berries from the Krawberry bushes, which grow above their caves.”

“The Trollogs looked carnivorous to me.”

“The berries have a vital vitamin they need to survive. Berbil fruit doesn’t. The Krawberry bushes are guarded by the Gigantors.”

Snarf shuddered and wrapped himself around Lion-o’s ankles. Lion-o himself didn’t like the sound of these Gigantors, but as he looked closely at the peak, he made out some large lumbering figures.

“They sound lovely.” he said sarcastically.

“Oh no.” The sarcasm was completely lost on Bill. “The Gigantors are savages. Our first harvest was lost due to them, many Berbils perished. The Gigantors love our Robear Berbil fruit and only allow the Trollogs their Krawberries if they give them Robear Berbil fruit. Trollogs are at their mercy, Lion-o. When they refused in the beginning, Gigantors slaughtered lots of them and many more Berbils. When the Trollogs go back to them now, empty handed, they surely will be punished and so will we.”

The other Berbils s whined in fear, looking towards their leader, hoping for answers. Robear Bill shook his head. There was nothing they could do, many more of their lives would be sacrificed.

Lion-o could see their hope completely diminish, but he would see to it, that their hope and their lives would live on.

“I have friends, Bill!” he said, gently clutching the Sword of Omens to his chest. “We can all help protect you and your people!”

“No. We couldn’t....” Bill wept.

“Bill....your people will be killed! Your village destroyed, I can’t let that happen!!”

A bombardment of high pitched happy Berbil cries flooded all around Lion-o as he raised the Sword of Omens up to his face. The Eye was pulsing, already knowing what it’s lord needed to do. The blade glowed with a brilliant aura and extended to its full length.

The roar ripped out loud and strong, the brilliant red signal coursed across the skies and in the distance, angry screams of fury answered back in defiance.

* * *

The search had not gone well. Panthro picked up pieces of junk that even he knew would be difficult to “salvage.” There were only a few workable Thundrillium cells, some of his tools were barely useable and there were no food rations whatsoever.

“Buggerit! Dammit!” he sneered, throwing a broken hydro spanner onto the pile of junk that had formed by his feet. Panthro sighed, he had to control his temper.

His father had often chided him about this and his “colourful phrases.” But everything seemed so pathetic and hopeless. Their hard work had been destroyed. The others looked just as downhearted, but when he saw Cheetara, he felt even worse.

Tygra had asked him to help teach her to control her abilities. How could he, when he could hardly keep his anger from thumping a hole in the side of the Thunder Tank, when he could hardly stop himself from swearing with fury?

The truth finally sunk in. This was to be their home for the rest of their lives, they were the last of the beautiful world of Thundera. Panthro, descendent of Partha and Pja, nobles of the second eldest family of their clan, was all that was left. His father and mother were gone...Kalia...his love, his soul mate would have bonded with him, would have welcomed him to her Royal family. But now, he never would. There would be no children for him, no wonderful mate to comfort, hold and love. A deep envy towards Tygra stuck in him like a knife and twisted deep.

He would never bond and carry on his lineage. All that was left for him, was this new family. His life was now indebted to Lion-o. Panthro was a Thundercat and the code of Thundera would guide him.

He felt the roar before the red blazoned signal screamed out before his eyes, fuelling the strength within. The call pulled at him, his lord...Lion-o was in danger.

“The signal!!” cried Tygra. There was no doubt that the others had felt this immense beckoning as their eyes glowing yellow. They were all ready to come to their Lord’s aid and the Thunder Tank would get them there a lot quicker. Panthro smiled.

Thank Jaga, that this baby was still intact. It was just too cool!

* * *

They should be here! They should be here to help him at any minute!

Lion-o stood on the brink of the hills, already seeing the mountain in the distance crumbling with impact of the fury of the Gigantors. The beasts were coming, and seeing their towering forms from this distance, Lion-o was a little worried as to how big they would be.

Already Snarf was spitting and howling his earlier statement.

“This is a bit different, Snarf.” Lion-o muttered. “Yeah, they can squash me with their big toe, but they plan to do so on purpose and with extreme hatred! I also have the sword and back-up on the way!! Other lives depend on me!!”

Robear-Bill was frantically beckoning most of the Berbils away from far reaches of their village, but many were still lagging behind. Lion-o saw the Gigantors pushing through the forest, their deformed and gaunt faces towered above the tree tops. Within minutes they had travelled so far and bearing down on them all, fast.

“Snarf, you keep back! These things are no match for you! I don’t want to see you hurt!”

His companion screamed in defiance. He would not abandon the Lord of the Thunder Cats.

“Snarf! I’m TELLING you! GET BACK!”

Snarf’s howls soon became background noise to the booming of the earth and crashing of the trees. Roars of the Gigantors deafened Lion-o, but it was the sight of more than twenty of these beasts that made his courage waver slightly. Whereas the Berbils were only three or four feet tall, the Gigantors ranged from ten to twenty!

Their pale skins were wrinkly and matted with white hair; spit and drool slobbered from their greedy mouths, wanting to devour the ripening fruits from the Berbil fields. Their limbs were long and bulky, fat stomachs were gorged and blood and anger were in their wide infuriated eyes. Lion-o knew that their gazes were looking for death. But it would not be his and it wouldn’t be the Berbils. He would defend them!

The Sword of Omens thrummed, the potency of power and strength increasing as the Gigantors came closer. Savage was the word for these beings as their pounding feet broke the soils and fields and hands tore apart the huts. Lion-o rushed forward, holding the sword tightly in both hands.

In amongst the smashing feet of the Gigantors, Lion-o tried to keep himself balanced on the cracking ground, swiping the blade at their skin. But each attack he inflicted felt only like pinpricks or scratches on them, most of the giants ignoring his efforts as they continued on with their destruction. Yet he still tried, swinging round the sword, slicing and cutting and achieving nothing but being thrown about in a mass of terrifying dirtied and stinking feet. Too close did he come to being squashed, but Lion-o rolled and jumped, kept his momentum flowing. These physical attacks were doing nothing!

Panicked electronic screams sounded from above and looking up Lion-o could see, to his horror, that he had failed to save some of the Berbils. The Gigantors had swooped them up from the ground by the handfuls and crushed their bodies, sending mechanical parts and limbs flying.

“NO!!” Lion-o clutched the sword with both hands once more and held it up above his head. The Eye howled and from the jewel shot a pulse of crackling blue energy. It surrounded all those Gigantors closest, singeing their flesh and for the first time, causing them pain. The fury of these things cried with agonizing intensity, but Lion-o still kept on, forcing them away as best he could from the other Berbils.

He didn’t see the huge hand swooping towards him. Thick hard skinned fingers entwined around him and pulled him up into the air. The Sword shook, the energy ceased emitting from the eye as Lion-o starred into the face of the Gigantor. He couldn’t move, Lion-o struggled, tried to use all his strength to break the hold, but the fingers wouldn’t budge.

Where were the others? They should be here!!

Slowly the hand began to squeeze.

But his body never cracked. Instead a burning blaze, red and fierce, lashed against the Gigantor’s hand. The skin burnt and broke, blood gushed and a pain it had never felt before surged all over. Lion-o was released and he fell to the ground, only to land conveniently into the passenger seat of the Thunder Tank.

“Huh?!”

“Getting yourself into trouble AGAIN, Lion-o?!” laughed Panthro as the tank ploughed through the Gigantors. Lion-o was confused, he looked round at the battle and saw rings of fire encircling the Gigantors. The tank swerved suddenly to avoid hitting one of the terrified beasts, it was so sharp that Lion-o felt his stomach churn.

Lion-o watched as from thin air, a billow of flames were sent rippling from a whip, catching a couple of the Gigantors as they tried to destroy more of the village. Lion-o saw the whip vanish

just as quickly as it had appeared and he knew that Tygra was still around. The invisible Thunder Cat was attacking constantly in his shielded form, decisive and dangerous. But not as deadly as he had been to the mutants on the colony ship.

“They’ve killed some of the Berbils!” cried Lion-o. “They’re not backing down! We have to stop them before they completely destroy these creatures!”

“With you on that one!” said Panthro, shoving the accelerator forward hard. “Snarf kindly let us in on the situation! Can’t let these buggers kill our new friends!”

Lion-o’s heart lifted as he saw a beam of gold streak past the tank. Cheetara and Tygra were quickly trapping off the Gigantors, circling them as cattle and driving them back. With fire and disorientation, they were herded off, wounded and pained; but there were few who wanted to drive on. The roars of outrage, spitting hatred blasted throughout the valley.

“Think I’ll need a hearing aid now!” winced Panthro as the Tank too weaved around, shepherding the beast. Panthro leaned forward to touch a red button on the controls. “Kids!!! Now!”

Panthro touched the button and Lion-o saw the back of the tank pop up. The two thunder kittens were thrown from the back seats and they soared through the air like birds. Wilykit and Wilykat showed off their acrobatics by spinning and turning somersaults in the air. There was a piercing exuberant howl from Kat, but both brother and sister threw from their tiny claws a number of the Multi-pellets. The capsules impacted deep in the dirt by the Gigantor’s feet and exploded, throwing thick fog and smoke into the air.

Wilykit and Wilykat spun some more aerobatics in the air, before executing their spectacular landings. Cheetara had slowed just in time to catch Wilykat in her arms, traces of her golden blur trailed behind her like wisps of light falling off her hair. Kat dropped from her arms, crouching in a defensive stance and with a very big grin on his face.

“Hell yeah!!!” he screamed, punching the air with his fist.

His sister had flown through the air, stabbing both feet at a cowering Gigantor and as she descended, Tygra became visible and she landed with a thump in his arms. She squealed a triumphant cry before hugging him with a tight embrace. They had all done their bit, smothering the Gigantors with fire, smoke, pain and confusion, and now the four of them allowed the Thunder Tank to scream past them, heading straight towards the slowly retreating savages.

The tank was going at full pelt, kicking up dirt and grass and standing on the bonnet, was Lion-o, holding aloft the Sword Of Omens. Once again, the Eye was ablaze with lightening red energy. He would finish them off, he would be the one to send the Gigantors away and it is with the Sword of Omens that they would know, they could never come back.

Deep down inside the young lord, the growl formed, a low rumble building and escalating with a power reaching back through to the beginning of the Thundercats. All his predecessors filled him

with their strength, all the good and honour boiled in Lion-o's veins as the growl emerged into a howling roar from his lips. The Eye screamed forth the blinding red panther signal, whipping the winds of the earth with a fury so hard that it knocked the Gigantor's off their feet .

The pitiful things wailed, the Thundercat signal enlarged as tall as they were and it's force shoved them back, further and further into the woods, where their cries bellowed in torment. They had been defeated.

Lion-o leapt from the hood of the thunder tank and watched with pride as their foe vanished from the Berbil village. As his fellow Thundercats approached him, Lion-o surveyed the damage done to their new friend's territory. It was a ghastly sight, for many of the homes, fields and crops of the Berbils had been ravished, lush green and bright coloured fruits had been replaced with dirt and dust. Lion-o's pride faltered and turned to grief. Even though he and the others had driven the Gigantors from this place, life had still been lost. The sorrow seeped from his soul and his fellow Thundercats felt it with him.

With his head bowed, he knew the others were around him and that their own spirits were broken. Lion-o dug the blade into the ground, fuelled by an angry and guilty loss for the Berbils. He had failed him.

"You haven't failed, Lion-o. You've saved them."

Her touch on his shoulder was more than he could contain. Lion-o looked up into such a vision of loveliness, that he thought a being of the ancient gods was standing before him. Cheetara was full of empathy, her eyes watered as she wrapped her arms around him and embraced Lion-o in a way he thought only possible in his dreams. He embraced her back, all of his grief and insane love coiled round her, feeling her body pressing against his, her scent and essence screamed inside him. He felt the horrible guilt for the Berbils lessen and he now sensed a strong love and compassion flow through him. He broke away from his comfortable embrace and saw Cheetara, crying soft gentle silvery tears.

"Thank you..." Lion-o didn't think that was enough for what she had done for him. Taking some of his pain was a wonderful thing, but seeing her tremble with his emotions, it didn't seem right. A tentative hand reached out for her, he wanted to hold her once more, to stroke her hair and kiss those tears away.

But suddenly a swarm of Berbils crowded around him. Lion-o staggered under their immense wave of hugs and high pitched thanks, but he managed to stable himself, holding back Bill and his followers. He looked over at Cheetara, seeing her taking comfort in Tygra's arms. She needed someone to hold whilst he talked to the Berbils.

The other Thunder cats were starrng in amazement at these creatures, but for Lion-o, the sight of some crushed Berbil bodies was too much. He fell to his knees.

"Your people..." Lion-o tried to be strong, but his voice was faltering. "I couldn't..."

“Lion-o.” said Panthro, resting a hand on Lion-o’s shoulder. “Do you really expect to save everyone?”

“Lord Lion-o...if you had not been here...all of us would have perished!” Robear Bill helped Lion-o to his feet and rested his hand on the Lion’s stomach. Bill’s glowing red eyes were actually glistening with tears, but the smile on his little furry face was that of great gratitude and joy. “You have save us! You’ve saved our homes and fields! Not all of them have been destroyed and it is all because of you and your friends!”

“But that any of it happened, Robear Bill....”

“The Gigantors could have just simply asked for the food, Lion-o.” Bill shrugged his shoulders. “Why they had to be so brutal and angry? I don’t know. We don’t have much use for it. We don’t eat. The Gigantors have brought it upon themselves. Thank you Lord Lion-o.”

The gratitude of all the other Berbils lifted Lion-o’s spirits, if they could be so optimistic about this tragedy, then so could he. These were the first creatures on Third Earth to become their friends and Lion-o was determined to keep helping them. Remembering who he was, Lion-o stood up tall and proud and then addressed both the Berbils and the other Thundercats.

“My friends...Robear Bill...these are the Thundercats. Tygra, Cheetara, Panthro and the twins Wilykit and Wilykat.”

The Berbils chirped happily in their tongue, all going up to the other Thundercats and greeting them in their strange little way. The two children absolutely adored them, for when some of the Berbils had finished touching there tummies, Wilykit and Wilykat picked up a Berbil each and gave them huge hugs. Panthro was more than fascinated as he had picked out a scanner from the tank and was trying to get readings of their mechanical builds. He started to ask one Berbil called Bob, a thousand and one questions and he was just giddy as the twins. When the Berbils touched Cheetara, they seemed to purr with affection and many of them wouldn’t leave her alone. Robear Belle approached Tygra and as she touched his stomach, her head inclined to one side.

“You are in pain?” asked her feminine voice. Tygra frowned and shook his head.

“No. Though I think I might have just banged my knee on a landing.”

“You ARE in pain.”

“You’d better check yourself for other injuries, Tygra.” said Lion-o, just as Snarf leapt onto his shoulders. Tygra shook his head firmly.

“No! I’m fine. Honest.”

Robear Belle didn’t accept his answer.

“Don’t suppress your pain, cat-Tygra. The mind is precious. It needs looking after.”

The female Berbil didn't want for a response, she turned and walked away with some of the other female Berbils trailing behind. Lion-o was a little confused as to why Belle had said this and he was about to ask Tygra when the older man spoke instead.

"Lion-o. Something happened whilst you were away."

"Oh no! Was it the mutants? Damn! I knew I shouldn't have left!"

"It wasn't the mutants," Tygra sighed. "but the camp has been destroyed. Our building on the new lair completely obliterated. There is nothing, we have no food, no cells and the colony ship with our people is buried under hundreds of feet of rock."

"We can help!!" cried Bill, jumping for joy. "You have helped us, now the Berbils can help the Thundercats! We can help build your new home!"

"Sorry, Bill..." Tygra shook his head. "I'm afraid there is nothing with which to build our home. Not even scraps."

"We can do it. The Berbils are very good at building from nothing, will you let us try? What are friends for?"

Lion-o and Tygra exchanged looks. There was so much they didn't know about these Robears, maybe there was a chance they could do something and to say no would have been foolish. Tygra smiled and nodded.

"We would be glad to accept your help, Robear Bill. I will have to make some new designs though. And, we will also help to restore the damage the Gigantors did to your village."

"Yes! Yes!" What sounded like a gleeful sonic laugh came from Bill's lips. "Tomorrow we will start work on your home! Tonight, you will dine and rest in our village! This is a great beginning!! Robear Berbils, prepare! A great banquet for our new friends!"

A huge cheer went up from all the Berbils in the village and their were heightened calls of their electronic language as they set about to make preparations for the evening. Lion-o was more than elated, he patted Tygra on the back. From the sorrow of the rampage on the village and the loss of their own camp, there was a great expectation for the future. Third Earth was now looking a lot brighter.

* * *

The feast was indeed a joyous occasion. The Berbils had set up on one of the hills, a large table, filled to the brim with endless fruits and nectar drinks and decorated with beautiful white and lilac flowers. All the Thundercats were seated round the table with Bill, Belle and some of the other Berbils. All of the others of the village were nearby, listening intently to the conversations and observing the tall feline's behaviour. Wilykit and Wilykat were distracted by some Berbils

who kept coming up close to them to feel their fur and more than a few times the children were told to stop pestering them.

“We’re not doing anything wrong!” said Kat.

“They’re so cute!!” added Kit.

A Berbil purred from behind the twins seats and gently stroked Wilykit’s long red mane.

“Soft...smooth soft fur!” It cooed.

“Eat your food.” said Panthro. “And don’t just take the candy fruit, too much of it and you’ll be buzzing a high greater than the Astral Plane!”

“But Snarf’s scoffing all the candy and you’re not telling HIM off!” wailed the twins.

Panthro was just about to tell them to stop complaining, when Tygra simply set a plate in between the two children and smiled. The kids sniffed it for the fruit on this plate didn’t look as appetising as all the others.

“It’s good for your teeth.” he said. “Makes them strong.”

As they all tucked in, a Berbil sitting next to Cheetara rose from his chair. Although the Berbils didn’t eat, they were certainly able to drink. It seemed the nectar had some other ingredient added to it, for the little furry creature was swaying slightly.

“Bread. I would like to make a bread.”

“Toast.” said Cheetara, who tried to hide her amusement as the berbil on her other side, handed her some roasting bread fruit. “Robear-Ben, we call it a toast.”

“A toast. Thank you, Cat-Cheetara.” Robear Ben patted Cheetara’s arm, purring. He then rose his glass of nectar high into the air. “To the beginning of the Cat’s Lair!”

Then the Berbil made a garbled version of a roar. It sent all the Thundercats into a fit of hysterics, even more so when Ben went to sit back down and missed his chair completely.

The evening passed on so well. All were pleased of everyone’s company and later some of the Berbils even performed some music for the Thundercats. It was very jolly and full of emotion that it was difficult at times to believe they were robots. Sentient and intelligent, but robots all the same.

No one, with the exception of Cheetara, had noticed Tygra slipping away from the party. Throughout the evening, the two of them kept stealing glances at each other, but their lingering gazes would only break off when their emotions and thoughts threatened to break their restraint.

So whilst the music was still playing, as the children and Snarf danced, Cheetara felt Tygra's desire to leave.

She turned round and saw him walking away and off to one of the other hills behind. In his hands, he clutched the papers and pencils the Berbils had made for him, but his mind was not on the new Lair plans. Cheetara closed her eyes and allowed his words to touch her.

"I just want to be on my own. For the moment."

"You are getting too good at being alone, Tygra. Don't make it a habit. Please."

She saw him turn and smile.

"I'll try." And Tygra disappeared from sight.

* * *

Cheetara had been given one of the tree top huts in which to stay in. It was very homely, decorated in a manner that she didn't think the Berbils would have adopted. The round room had three sections, the centre being the bedroom and sporting a large bed that had so many pillows on it that Cheetara couldn't help but smile. Off to the left was a small room, no doubt for the Berbil to do any maintenance on themselves. It was the only room that was typical for a Berbil, filled with strange mechanical devices that beeped and whirred very much like the Berbils themselves.

The other room was decorated with pictures that could have been Robear, as well as many different kind of ornaments. Cheetara had looked at some, confused as to what they could be, but she didn't pry too much. Instead she took to standing out on the balcony and starrng off to the distance.

He was still there. She could see him standing up on the hill, with his arms crossed over his broad chest and his head back as he looked up at the stars. He was grieving, she could feel it all. Tygra was missing Thundera, his family...he was feeling so sad. So very sad.

"Don't. Please don't." Cheetara cried, the tears streamed down her cheeks as his sorrow combined with her own despair of missing home. He tried to. He tried to control his swamping feelings but he couldn't. *"Tygra...please don't!"*

"I can't. I'm sorry."

"Knock! Knock!! Are you in Cheetara?"

The sound of Panthro's voice caught her off guard. She hurriedly wiped her eyes with the back of her hand and pulled back the curtain that hung over the door. Panthro's large grin turned into a grimace.

"Sheesh! Your place is almost as bad as mine!"

“Yes.” Cheetara forced the laugh through her tears. “It is quite...pink...isn’t it?”

“Well, at least your place hasn’t got frills on everything! You would have thought I could have had a man’s home to sleep in?” Panthro chuckled, but when he entered he turned round and had a much more sombre look upon his face. “He’s still up there?”

Cheetara nodded.

“He’s been up there all night.”

“Is everything okay?”

“We’re fine. I guess. He’s feeling homesick and I’m feeling not only my own but his as well. It’s hard to stop crying when its so intense as this. But enough of me, how is Lion-o?”

“Sleeping. How he can through Snarf’s snoring, I don’t know. The kids knackered themselves out completely and are still asleep under the milk fruit bushes.” Panthro sighed. “Just to let you know, Robear-Bob and a group of other Berbils have secured the pod capsule. I’ve just come from there and they’ve been amazing. Our people should be safe tonight.”

“That is good news. Panthro, do you think they will be able to build Cat’s Lair?”

Panthro smirked a crafty grin.

“Why don’t you tell me?”

“It’s possible...” Cheetara was startled. For the moment she had looked into Panthro’s mind, the emotions and visions from her mate didn’t seem quite intense. She tried again, looking deep into the older man’s thoughts.

Kalia. Cheetara remembered her, from the first time she had caught Panthro’s mind, but also from her own past. The tall beautiful panther woman with long black braided hair and black fur, was daughter of Karsha, the panther’s queen and Cheetara’s mother’s friend.

Cheetara saw Kalia wrapped in Panthro’s arms, their bodies and lips locked tightly together, she saw the playfulness and teasing, two nobles so different but so right for each other. One, a troublemaker but an newly honoured Thundercat, the other a proud woman loved by many who would soon become Queen. They loved each other so much, but could never bring themselves to bond.

Cheetara pulled her mind away and she stumbled back onto the bed. Panthro rushed to her side and steadied her as best he could.

“Are you okay?”

“A little startled I guess. Panthro, I’m sorry I didn’t mean to....”

“I know...but what happened to your connection with Tygra?”

He knew. Panthro knew that if Cheetara concentrated on a different mind, focused on someone else, it would put a block on all of the screaming memories and emotions she received from Tygra. It scared her a little.

“I can feel him again. For a moment, he wasn’t there....” Cheetara buried her face in her hands.
“I...I didn’t like it...but I don’t like the...”

She looked up at Panthro and then she realised. It had all been too clear before.

“He knew all I had to do was concentrate...focus my powers on someone else.”

“His own mental powers are outta whack over your bonding, Chee.” Panthro sighed and as he tried to get himself comfortable on the bed, he threw numerous pillows away in annoyance.
“You two are messing each other up, no wonder both of your powers have gone all haywire! You two kids are all loved up!”

“That is such a...”

“Hey, you are! You’ve got to stop thinking about each other so you can both get a grip on your mental abilities.”

“But we can’t stop thinking about each other. He’s there, he’s me...he is everything!”

“Well...I’m here now. Tygra asked me to help you. By Jaga’s wrinkly butt....”

“Panthro!!”

“Sorry...but by Jaga, Tygra has helped me in the past. Helped centred me.”

“He didn’t do a good job.”

Panthro laughed.

“He did the best he could with this wildcat. But now, I’m going to help you. I don’t have any mental powers like you two, but he and I reckon that I could use what I learnt from him to aid you into getting a barrier up. If you want...we can do this...now.”

“Yes. I would like to try.”

“Okay. Cool. Sit like me and close your eyes.”

Cheetara shifted her position on the bed so she faced Panthro. They both crossed their legs and Cheetara closed her eyes.

"Don't think of me, Cheetara." came Tygra's voice. *"Listen to Panthro."*

Big strong claws took hold of her own. Panthro clasped her hands tightly and rested them in her lap. She heard him as he took long deep breaths, in through his mouth and out through his nose.

"Breathe as I do. Calm yourself."

The calm only allowed her connection with Tygra to intensify. Her body became excited, she began to feel quite hot and sexual desires from her and her mate shattered the calm in seconds.

"Cheetara...concentrate." said Panthro, his voice deep and demanding. *"Don't give in to both of your wants."*

"It's easy for you to say." gasped Cheetara. *"Tygra isn't feeling homesick any more."*

"Sssh!!" Panthro sounded quite angry. *"Don't talk! Just listen to me! Concentrate. I want you to think of a memory. A good memory."*

* * *

The sweat poured off them both under the intensifying thrusts and passionate screams. The bonding was happening, Tygra was becoming a part of her, even though he was already inside.

* * *

"Cheetara, think of a good memory that DOESN'T involve Tygra."

* * *

"Cheetara! Chana! Come back!!"

Cheetara skidded to a halt and turned round. She smiled. Little Fen was still trying to catch up. But he was getting quicker. He was running as fast as he could, arms pumping hard and as always his tongue was sticking out the side of his mouth. She sighed, he never listened to her.

Fen stopped beside her, gasping for breath.

"Did you see me running?!" he cried with elation. *"Did you see how FAST I was?"*

Cheetara picked up her younger brother and squeezed him hard, before wiping the floppy locks of golden and black spotted hair from his face.

"You would be faster if you just ran." she said. *"Don't think about it! It will all come to you!"*

“I see Chana didn’t stop.” he moaned when he jumped back to the ground. “What’s going on any way? Is mother ill?”

“No! She’s not ill.”

Not yet. Cheetara shook the unpleasant memory of her first vision from her thoughts. She hadn’t told anyone about it and she certainly wasn’t going to. No, mother wasn’t ill. This was good news.

“Fen...we’re going to have some more brothers and sisters!”

“More?!!!” he wailed. “How much more?!”

“Mum might not have a full litter. It might just be two this time.”

“Aw...like YOU don’t know! Mistress Chi’s star pupil, Mistress Chi’s successor to the High Divinity!”

Cheetara screwed her face up in disgust. She hated having lessons with that old crone, for the old Cheetah woman would always dig her claws in her head to see if she was having another vision. Father had been so proud to hear that one of his daughters had the sight, for what better honour could be bestowed on a member of the Royal family? The religious career held no interest for the young teen. There was only one thing she wanted to do and that would be to train under Lord Jaga, to become a Thundercat. An even better honour she felt.

Cheetara was startled to feel the birthing pains of her mother. It was happening and they were still miles away from the palace.

“Fen! It’s happening! Quick, if we go now we can get there in a few minutes! Remember! Just run!”

And they did. Cheetara pelted away as fast she could and Fen had finally taken her advice. Through her own golden blur, she saw her brother keeping up with her.

“YEAH!!!”

Fen was more than happy. This was what he had striven to do, at only six, he was now running with the speeds of a true Cheetah. Their parents had tried with him, but to no avail. The fact that it had been Cheetara who released his potential. She couldn’t have been happier!

Unlike Chana and her other sisters, Cheetara loved nothing more than to run with her siblings and now Fen would know that feeling. It was so easy now, the two of them keeping side by side as the long rolling plains of their country flew past in discoloured blurs and soon the great palace, her home, came rushing up to greet them.

Cheetara slowed right at the gates, barely out of breath, but her brother was extremely worn. He was panting for breath through tiredness and his euphoria of being finally able to run.

"I did it!!! YEAH! I did it!!!" he wheezed, sagging down onto his knees. Cheetara laughed and picked him up once more. She rejoiced in her brother's achievement, but he wouldn't be able to navigate the corridors to their mother's bedroom. Cheetara had to carry him.

Some of the royal guards hurried along with them, making sure that none of the other lords and politicians prevented them from getting past. As they neared, Cheetara heard her mother's screams, as well as the encouraged shouts from her father and the midwife.

Outside, Chana and her other siblings were already waiting. All were excited about this, worried, but excited at the same time. All except Chana. As the eldest of eight, she wasn't keen on having more siblings. Especially if they were boys.

"Cheetara!!" Cas rushed up to her sister and squealed. "It's happening! It's happening!"

"I know. How long?"

"Don't pretend you don't know, Cheetara." said Chana spitefully.

"Give it a rest, I'm not in the mood for your bitterness now!" Cheetara edged to the door with Fen holding on to her skirt with a fierce grip. His grin hadn't left his face. What he had just achieved was far more exciting to him than the arrival of MORE sisters or brothers. She wrapped her arm around his shoulder and waited.

It wasn't long before the door burst open and the sound of crying mews came from inside. In the doorway stood their father, beaming a smile so wide and proud that Cheetara thought if he forced it more, his face would split.

"Come in! Come in!!! Come and see your new brothers!!!"

Fen, as the youngest rushed in first, followed by Cas and the others. Cheetara looked up at her father, there were tears of happiness in his eyes and she felt her own welling up. She rushed up to him and hugged him with all her might.

"My little Cheetara...come inside."

"Mother is well?"

"Cheetara, she is more than well!"

Chana brushed past first before Cheetara's father led her in. In the large bed, exhausted beyond belief was her mother. Her beautiful mother and two new little cubs crying in her arms.

“Everyone, I want to introduce to you, your brothers.” she said, holding them up so all could see. “Chalen and Corvin.”

As everyone else gathered round closer to see the new twins, Cheetara stood still in her father’s arms. Everyone’s emotions felt so wonderful, even Chana’s. Everyone was so happy and Cheetara was swept under by the tide of beautiful feelings.

“Father.”

“Yes, Cheetara?”

“One day...I want to be a mother.”

“And you will little one.” her father kissed her on the forehead. “If that is what you wish. I would love for you to meet a nice cheetah man and carry on our family. In fact, I know you will and I know you will be a GREAT mother.”

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“That’s good.” said Panthro. “Think of another one.”

Cheetara began her deep breaths once more. But the memory that came to her mind was not a memory. Nor was it good.

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There was nothing but blood. It covered the floors of the Lair, the walls and ceilings, it flowed like a river down the great steps. Cheetara lay screaming to the man who had taken her children. Not even Lion-o could have stopped him, for the attack would have been even more brutal. If it could have been possible.

She should have read the signs, she should have noticed his change in behaviour, his sudden and drastic decrease in health and morality. She had made so many mistakes and the hurt she had caused him was the worst.

“Don’t do this!!! PLEASE! I BEG YOU! I beg you, don’t take our children!!!”

He turned round. The man who held all five of their cubs, was a mere shadow of the one he once was. There was no brightness in his eyes, only rage. The once beautiful orange pelt was dishevelled and dark, any hint of colour had faded to black.

“All I did was love you.” he said. “All I EVER wanted was to love you. No. It’s too late now.”
And Tygra disappeared from sight.