Gaining Perspective

By Lyngard

Pumyra

Rolling to my side, I opened my eyes to constant darkness. There was no natural, ambient light of stars or moonscape shining in my room to indicate the time or place. Sighing, I pushed myself to my elbows and glanced at the chronometer set on the nightstand. The illuminated dial indicated only five minutes from the last time I had questioned the hour. Using the green glow filtering from the timepiece, I looked at the shadows finally taking shape. Next to the nightstand, I could make out the bulky shape of a headboard anchoring a mattress to the wall. The only other object creating a shadow in the room, other than myself, was the practically empty wardrobe case positioned against the wall directly opposite the bed.

Tomorrow, I promised myself. I would try and last the night on the bed tomorrow. When Snarf had shown me my room in the Lair for the first time, I had such high hopes of lying on the comfortable mattress made from some soft materials given to the ThunderCats by the Wollos. The mattress was indeed luxurious compared to the simple woven mat that I had been sleeping on since reaching Third Earth. Yet, every night I would find myself longing for that simple mat, and in the end, I would give in and curl up on the floor. Perhaps, it was loneliness that drove me to the ground. I no longer had the familiar scents of my constant companions, Lynx-O and Bengali, nor their sleeping sounds to lull me off to a comfortable respite. Instead, I was resigned to the memories I had collected on that woven fabric.

Stretching to standing, I pushed back my hair from my face and opened the shutters from the large window occupying the other wall of my domicile. Clouds scooted across the sky making the slight illumination from the moon and stars murky and uncertain, much like my mood, I supposed.

I couldn't decide if it were excitement or trepidation that I felt at the festivities meant to honor us this night. I was so very proud to be named a ThunderCat. My family had never been in the line of Pumas to be considered to act as nobles to the ThunderCat guard. We were healers, trained to be physicians to the populace of Thundera. Unfortunately, I had never had the chance to finish my training in the Court of Healers. Thundera's demise had seen those dreams destroyed with her. Yet, here I was an invited guest of Cat's Lair and tonight an official noble of Thundera, a ThunderCat. My life's role would change; my fear was what that change might be.

Shaking my head, I walked over to the wardrobe case and opened the doors. To my surprise, several outfits hung neatly on hangers and pairs of matching boots lined the floor underneath them. I was astounded to see so many pieces of clothing in one place. Garments had not been common on most of Thundera nor necessary for those that lived in the great city or within the walls of the Cat's Lair. However, in outlying villages, like my own, clothing had offered some protection against the weather especially during the mercurial winter months.

Since our forced exodus from Thundera, I had been making due with the clothes that I had literally on my back. Robear Bob had given me some fabric when we first landed on the island, but since I didn't have the seamstress skills for tailoring anything more elaborate, I had crafted a simple sleeping wrap for myself, which doubled as a robe when I was washing my clothes.

I fingered the well-worn fabric of the skirt that hung on the first hangar. It was faded from use, the sun, and washings too numerous to count. There were various segments that had obviously been mended. This was my original outfit. I felt moisture burn my eyes and blinked it away as I looked at the other five outfits hanging in the closet along with two formal robes obviously for more official ceremonies. I was touched that some one would go to all of this trouble for me, but even more so, that the same person would not throw out the old worn outfit that I had not realized until this moment I had attached such significance. In the small drawer case residing within the main wardrobe case, I found several additional sleeping wraps and a large robe from the same terrycloth material the Lair's towels were made. Carefully, I moved my old raiment from the hangar, folded it, and placed it in the empty bottom drawer. Then, I pulled the first new outfit from the rack. Seeing a small piece of paper pinned to the front, I paused.

Dear Pumyra, I read, *I hope you like these bodice and skirts. Snarf and I worked hard trying to compliment your existing style, color, and fabric. We are very excited to welcome you to our family. Sincerely, Kit.*

This time a stray tear did escape from the corner of my eye. All of the ThunderCats had gone to great lengths to welcome us, but it had been WilyKit who had made me feel like family. And, now this gift…if my sister had survived the explosion of Thundera, I could only hope that she would be like Kit.

Pushing such bittersweet memories away, I removed my wrap and tried on the new clothes. They fit perfectly, probably even better than my old ones. I had lost some weight since fleeing Thundera. It happens when your meals go from meats to mainly vegetarian fare. And, although my lifestyle on Thundera had not been extravagant, surviving on an uncharted, mostly primitive planet removes all chance of excess.

I wrapped the sash of my pellet pouch around my waist and followed suit with my sling. I finished the ensemble with an armband I wore high on my left arm. It had been a gift from my father when I had been accepted into the Court of Healers, and it was the only item I possessed from my family and Thundera. The last item I chose to put on was an abalone shell necklace that Bengali had helped me craft during our time on the island. Peering at my reflection, I nodded in approval. I would at least look the part of a Thunderian noble.

Knowing that more sleep was an impossible task for me, I tiptoed, mindful of the young hour, down the hall past the sleeping quarters of the rest of the ThunderCats. As I made my way toward the kitchen, I decided that today would be as good as any other to make a mark on the lab that had been designated a sickbay.

Apparently, I was not the only early riser in the Lair this morning. I caught the site of Panthro's silhouette in the door backing surreptitiously from the kitchen. As he silently closed the door, I

tapped him on the shoulder. Startled, he swung around, and I came face to face with a panther trying to decide whether to fight or flee.

“Woah, easy there!” I breathed backing slightly away from him. “Just wanted to see what you were doing.” I saw recognition dawn on him and was relieved to see him stand down.

“By Jaga’s ghost! Pumyra, are you trying to kill me?”

“That wouldn’t be very good for business,” I smiled and noted how he still held an arm in protection around his ribs. “Still giving you some pain?”

“Nah, just acts up in times of stress.”

“What were you doing in there?”

Panthro gave me a sheepish grin and held up two breadfruit muffins he still clutched in his other hand. “Snarf’s in there cooking up a storm for Lion-O’s breakfast and getting things prepared for tonight. I thought, I’d get a jump on the morning and help myself before heading to the vehicle bay.”

“Well, at least, you’re not outright skipping breakfast. You know, I should probably look at those ribs and re-tape them before you go around putting the tank back together again.”

“How about you just give me a visual now, and I share,” he bartered holding out one of the pastries as collateral.

“I’ll take you up on the breakfast,” I replied taking one of the proffered morsels, and lacing my hand through his arm, I pulled him in the direction of sickbay. “And you can take a quick detour to the lab with me. I promise I can re-tape those ribs and still leave you plenty of time to work on the tank.” I felt Panthro grudgingly follow along as we made our way to the lift that led to the lab.

“Is this really necessary,” the panther grumbled watching me pull strips of fabric and a roll of adhesive from the supply chest.

“Eat your breakfast,” I commanded taking care to keep my tone light. I removed the older bandages and pulled a full spectrum light from a drawer to get a better look at the bruising around his ribs. There was a full array of colors taking up residence in the coal gray fur of his chest. The swelling had not gotten any worse although I was disappointed that the improvement did not appear to be significant either.

“Am I going to live?” Panthro asked teasingly.

“For the time being,” I replied in the same teasing tone he had used and quickly immobilized the still healing bones with new bandages. “These fractured and bruised ribs shouldn’t kill you, only make you stronger as long as you let them heal and don’t put any excessive stress on them. I’ll

clear you for light duty, but no sparring, and definitely, no heavy lifting!"

"Yes, ma'am."

It appeared that Panthro couldn't get out of the lab fast enough. By the time I had turned around from putting away my supplies, I was alone. I shook my head; panthers were the worst patients perhaps because they were known mostly for their lack of patience. I couldn't help but grin at my pun as I turned back to the supply cabinet to organize and classify the materials that we had in abundance or not at all.

Several hours later, I looked at the list I had compiled and was disheartened. The lab was state of the art by most clinics' standards. There were computers designed for complicated comparison analyses, equipment maintained for life saving measures, and machines designated to run a spectrum of tests. But for all its mechanical wizardry, the lab was lacking herbal poultices, analgesics, and other medicines that were required for a well-stocked sickbay. Sure, there were basic medical supplies, most of which could be found in a completely stocked first aid kit.

It wasn't anyone's fault. Tygra had the analytical mind to prepare the machines, but he wasn't trained in supplements and herbal remedies. Only a healer had that knowledge. Suddenly, it dawned on me. What the ThunderCats lacked was a member skilled in healing practices both from ancient Thundera as well as in-field triage. And. although I hadn't completed my official training, I could be that member, the Healer. The full knowledge of my role hit me like a ton of thundrillium, and I'm sure I was a sight standing in the middle of the room for a full minute with my mouth hanging open.

"Pumyra?" a voice sounded from the threshold of the door to the sickbay followed by a hesitant tap on the doorframe. Snapping myself from my revelation, I looked up into the concerned face of Cheetara peering at me from the doorway. "Are you all right?" the cheetah continued looking at me worriedly.

"That's my line," I retorted playfully and motioned for her to enter the room. "What can I do for you?"

She was obviously anxious. She entered the room and completed a full pass of the perimeter before stopping at her starting point and crossing her arms across her chest in an unconscious but definitely defensive posture. I waited. One of the hardest lessons to learn as a healer is the art of turning silence to your advantage. Most times people seek a healer for physical reasons other times not so much.

Finally, Cheetara found a place to start. "Been doing a little rearranging?"

I knew that the conversation she wanted to have with me had nothing to do with the arrangement of materials in the room, but I went ahead and humored her anyway. "Just detailing a supply list so far. All of the equipment is in pristine condition. Doesn't look like it's been used much."

"No," Cheetara agreed softly a strange look crossing her face, "we've been lucky."

I figured there was a different story to be told here as well, but I didn't press. Of all of the ThunderCats, Cheetara had been the most aloof. I know she was pleased to have another female with whom to talk. Thundera knows, after being stranded with males for so long, I too craved female interaction. But, I was also under the impression that Cheetara might not be ready for such companionship.

Originally, I had thought her jealous of the split attention we were bound to cause among the males. But, later, I realized those suppositions were my own insecurities not something she was projecting. Now, I just gauged her to be guarded.

Pulling herself from a reverie I was not privy to nor invited, Cheetara changed tactics with me. "I just wanted to make sure that you were ready for tonight."

"I think so; I can't think of anything that I need. I'm just going to keep busy fulfilling the herbal wish list I made."

Cheetara nodded her head. "I imagine that we are lacking in a number of medicines. You might try the Keepers of the Unicorn Forest if you are looking for something in particular. They seem to know where the majority of the forest offerings are. Kit and Kat made the acquaintance of a creature called Cudi a while ago. She seems to have a vast knowledge of the herbs that grow naturally on Third Earth and may be able to lend some assistance as well."

"I'll make sure to try both of those suggestions. I also have alerted Nayda of the Warrior Maidens. Tygra thought she would be a good guide as well."

"Yes, she will. She'll know what places in particular to avoid." Cheetara still looked as if she wanted to speak to me.

"Is there something else?" I prompted gently trying to coax her confidence.

It looked as if the cheetah were gathering her courage, but at the last moment, her eyes traveled to the shell I wore around my neck and obviously derailed her original purpose. "That is beautiful," she commented.

Of it's own accord, my hand traveled to touch the chain of the necklace and unclasp it from behind my neck. "Bengali helped me make it when we were on the island," I explained holding it out to her for a better look. "We found some shells in the discard pile of the local Berbil fishers. They called the creature abalone. Bengali found some coral and hollowed it out, and then we cut the shell to fit inside it. We fashioned this chain from copper wires left from the mechanical matrix of Robear Bob's ship."

Cheetara looked at the craftsmanship carefully and ran her hand over the smooth surface of the shell. "Bengali is indeed a talented artisan," she agreed and tried to give it back to me.

"Keep it," I said and waved off her protest before she could verbalize it. "They say that abalone

is associated with healing, serenity, calmness, nobility, and honesty. I can't think of a better description for a fellow ThunderCat."

"But," Cheetara started before I stopped her. "No buts allowed. It's settled." I looked at the chronometer on the wall and stood up. If I were going to accomplish my tasks before the ceremony, I needed to be going. "I've got to meet Nayda at the Treetop Kingdom." Before heading off, I gave the cheetah one last chance. "You're welcome to come along," I invited.

"Um, no. Maybe another time."

Nodding my head in acceptance of the rain check, I walked away leaving Cheetara in the room with my gift. On my way to the HoverCat platform, I thought about the other things I knew about abalone and coral. Abalone was credited with the mystical properties of calming emotional situations and bringing life into harmony. Coupling the paua shell with white coral stimulated clairaudience while dissipating energy blocks of the physical body, thus promoting general physical and mental well-being. Bengali and I had added copper to the mystical mix as well. Copper was believed to enhance and transmit thoughts. While I was not clairvoyant or skilled in ancient mystical healing arts, I did believe that healing energies were all around me. Sometimes they came in the form of herbs that could be ingested or physically applied; other times the energies were more psychic in nature.

I was running late. While foraging in the Forest of Silence for valerian root, I had come across a species of what I thought was Guaiacum. I had scaled the tree for an appropriate place to take a sample for testing and using if indeed it were guaiacum. But, I hadn't realized the time passing until Nayda had pointed to angle of the sun. We arrived back at the Lair with barely enough time for me to catalog the specimens and get changed for the ceremony.

A sharp rap on my door caused me to finish arranging my clothing quickly. "Bengali," I welcomed as I opened the door. "I'm just about ready. In fact, I could use your help with this." I handed him a large gold-banded necklace and moved the hair off my neck so that he could secure the large clasp.

"This is new," he observed looking at the necklace before settling it on my neck.

"Yes, Cheetara gave it to me."

"Cheetara?" I could hear the surprise in his voice. Apparently, he too had found her reserve hard to interpret.

"Yes," I replied leading the way down to the festivities. "I found it in the lab when I returned from looking for herbs with Nayda. Cheetara made the necklace herself from some material that she called gold. I did some research and found out that on Third Earth, gold was used not only in

jewelry and decoration of artifacts and weapons, but it also can be a source of mystical powers. It symbolizes inner power and strength and promotes prosperity and positive thinking."

Bengali made a sound that resembled a snort of disbelief. "I know that you aren't a believer of the healing properties of crystals and metals," I continued acknowledging his utterance. "But, materials often harbor more than their physical structures. Plants can heal physical ailments. Why can't crystals heal emotional ones?"

My dear white tiger knew better than to engage me on the topic of holistic and metaphysical healing. We'd been debating the topic ever since we met back on Thundera. "We're here," he supplied instead and walked me to the raised dais where Lynx-O was already waiting.

Standing on the platform with the multitude of allied onlookers was one of the most terrifying and exhilarating things I had ever done. I had never seen an appointment ritual much less taken part in one before this day. The anointment would be one of those life-altering events to be relived and cherished the rest of my days. We clinked glasses through a toast that Lord Lion-O bestowed upon us and then prepared for the main rite, the conferring of the title of ThunderCat.

After pledging ourselves to Lord Lion-O and the Code of Thundera, we received our insignias through the Sword of Omens. I felt the power course through my body as the great black cougar head etched the ThunderCat emblem on the red disk I wore above my breastbone. The jolt was life giving and breath taking. I know that I fell back a step. Bengali's quick tightening of his grip around my hand that I hadn't even realized he was holding held me from any further back stepping. Squeezing back a quick thanks and acknowledgement that I was indeed all right, I joined my voice with Bengali's and Lynx-O's as we responded with a resounding, "Ho!"

"Well, now that the formalities are over, let's get this party started," Lion-O announced his voice sounding with pride.

As the Berbil symphony began to play, I was surprised to hear the young lion ask me, "Pumyra, may I have this dance?"

I felt my face warm but curtsied my formal acceptance. As he led me to the cordoned area designated for dancing, I couldn't help but notice how tiny my hand looked in his.

Lion-O was indeed a beautiful specimen of the Leo Clan. On my first day in the Lair, I had acquainted myself with the medical files of all of the ThunderCat members. I knew how the malfunction of the cryogenic space capsule had influenced the changes in his body. But for all the science fiction consequences, he had developed phenomenally into an adult Leo and learned, no doubt from his companions and friends, how to be a great leader.

"Having fun?"

I had been so wrapped up in my scientific meandering that I hadn't realized that I had not said a word to Lion-O since beginning the dance. "Indeed," I smiled warmly at him. "I don't know what I expected," I continued looking at the beautiful decorations and friendly faces that swept

by us as we swirled around the dance area. “But this was definitely more than I could have imagined.”

“Our lives have been busy fighting the mutants, MummRa and whatever other enemies come our way. It is nice to be able to take the time and reflect on new friends and Thundera as well.”

We danced two more songs in companionable silence until Lion-O suggested, “How about some refreshment?”

I followed the young lord and caught site of Bengali and Lynx-O standing with Tygra, Panthro, Nayda, and another Warrior Maiden I assumed was Queen Willa.

“Cheetara,” Lion-O called, “come join us.”

I watched the cheetah look anxiously around before complying with his request. “I was just telling Pumyra how nice it is to focus our attention on the good things in life instead of the constant vigil we’ve had for danger.”

“Danger is never very far,” Cheetara admonished accepting the fluted glass of fermented candyfruit juice from him.

“True,” Lion-O agreed. “But at least, we have allies.” Lion-O held up his glass, and both Cheetara and I followed suit. “To family. May our bond of brotherhood and sisterhood never…”

“She is not and never will be my sister!” Cheetara snarled cutting Lion-O’s toast off mid-sentence. She slammed her glass down on the table. The fragile stemware cracked under the force of her motion causing the red liquid to pool on the white tablecloth. In a second, she was gone while Lion-O and I stood dumbfounded in the center of a now silent celebration.

Both Lion-O and I stood rooted to the spot. I’m not sure either one of us really knew what had transpired. I felt a warmth surround my shoulders, and I leaned into it accepting the comfort given. In an unconscious gesture to summon inner strength, my hand caressed the gold band of the necklace the cheetah had given me.

I watched Lion-O’s resolve spur him to action although I wouldn’t characterize the recovery as positive. Tygra attempted to sway him, but in the end, both males headed in the same direction Cheetara had chosen as her egress.

The next voice I heard was Panthro’s. “All right, guys and ma’am, how about something festive?” As the music resumed, I was once again asked to dance.

“Pumyra, I do believe they are playing our song.” We moved to the dance area followed quickly by Bengali and Nayda and Willa and Lynx-O.

“Are you all right?” the panther quizzed looking at me for a truthful answer.

I looked at him head on. “You shouldn’t worry for me, Panthro, but for Cheetara.”

“Why do you say that?”

“It isn’t for me to say,” I answered even more vaguely. I knew that response would not help ease the panther’s mind, but I could be no more forthcoming.

Bengali’s rough voice etched even gruffer with concern for me interrupted our exchange. “May I cut in?”

Panthro acquiesced with no hesitation smoothly exchanging partners with Bengali. As Bengali pulled me close, I could feel the bristling anger beneath his protective embrace. “Please,” I whispered softly, “don’t. I’m not hurt nor am I upset.”

Bengali only growled softly in his throat. I pulled away and looked directly into his cool blue eyes. “Bengali.” I warned.

Sighing, the white tiger closed his eyes briefly before opening them and peering back at me. “As you wish,” he agreed and once again pulled me close.