The Songs of Distant Earth

By Song-of_Fete

Chapter 3

It was hours later. Liana had stepped into the lookout and been silenced once again. The Sun was just starting to set over Cats' Lair, bathing the landscape in a pink and orange glow. The landscape held no surprises and yet it wasn't quite familiar. Trees were larger than she had expected to see, the colours were subtly different and the only thing that was truly familiar was the dazzling rays of the evening Sun. Tygra contemplated leaving her where she was, staring out from the lookout, but refused to be a poor host. His work could wait until after dinner.

That in itself was an interesting affair. Liana sampled almost everything that was on offer, though she refused to eat any meat, and the fact that she asked what almost everything was provided yet more proof that she was no native to these parts. Wilykit and Kat sat on either side of her, bombarding her with endless questions. By the time Snarf served dessert, Wilykit was wearing her long brown velvet gloves despite the fact that they almost reached her shoulders, and Liana was beginning to tire of being asked where she had come from. The names of towns and landmarks she mentioned were met with blank stares so she'd taken to describing things in broad terms instead, explaining that she came form a place where thousands of people lived in each town, but not necessarily in harmony. Many were lonely despite seeing hundreds of others every day, some simply took what they wanted with no regard for anyone else while others were so desperate they begged on the streets and relied on the goodwill of others. Despite everyone being the same species there was no universal code.

Liana missed the confused glances that passed between the thundercats. They could certainly imagine such a place, but it wasn't anywhere that decent people flourished. The kittens were fascinated though, and were still talking about it when Snarf finally packed them off to bed, though Liana looked worried when the friendly creature offered to show her to her room. Even when she protested she wasn't tired, he insisted that she must be, making a show of folding down her sheets and pulling the curtains closed. Liana removed the heavy boots she'd been wearing all day but just as Snarf was leaving, she called out.

“Er...Snarf? Do you think it would be alright if I went for a walk? Just down the corridors, I mean. I'm really not tired yet and the exercise would help me sleep later.”

“Hmm...snarf, snarf...don't get lost, will you” he said, a little uncertainly

“Thank you.” She smiled, and wandered to the doorway in her bare feet, trying to remember the routes she had taken earlier in the day.

Heart pounding, she made her way down the long, winding corridors, passing doorways that were closed and entirely unmarked, wondering why the thundercats needed such long passageways and what all the rooms were used for. So much of it looked the same to her, and she

wondered if they'd ever got lost themselves. Eventually she found the place she was looking for, but then hesitated a few feet from the door, wondering if she'd be welcome. The indecision lasted only a few seconds though; her alternative was heading back the way she'd come, something she wasn't sure she could manage without getting lost, and then there was solitary sleep to look forward to.

“Uhm...hi. I couldn't sleep. Sorry.”

Tygra spun around, obviously not having expected to be disturbed. He was in the middle of working on an auxilliary power source for Cats' Lair should their thundrillium resources run short, and generally he preferred to work alone. This was his area of expertise, and he found it easier not to explain what he was doing every step of the way. He didn't have the heart to turn this woman away though, not when she clearly didn't want to be alone, so he told her what he was working on and how it was progressing, not really expecting her to understand.

In truth, she didn't. The lab environment was familiar to her though, and while she didn't grasp the nuances of what he was working on she managed to assist anyway, questioning the parts he wasn't sure of himself and suggesting modifications that wouldn't necessarily work but nonetheless in their turn led to better alternatives. She'd heard of the concept of solar panels at least, and knew the power they collected could be stored, and she took readily to the control panels, keying in his instructions as he made adjustments to the model on the lab table. It was the first time Tygra had worked with an assistant since Thundera (unless one counted the kittens) and it wasn't until well after midnight that he finally realised the time

“By Jaga, I hadn't realised it was that late”

“Don't worry, I'm fine”

“You must be exhausted after everything that's happened today. I'll walk you to your room”

She looked uncertain, but there was no denying how late it was. The corridors were quiet, and it seemed that the other thundercats had gone to sleep some time before. It wasn't until they reached the doorway of her room that she hesitated.

“I can't go to sleep.” There was no emphasis on any of the words, just a statement of what she believed to be the truth.

“Why not?”

Liana looked embarrassed “I daren't. If I go to sleep here, how do I know I won't wake up back there again?”

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In the end, neither of them got much sleep that night. Realising that the fear was very real to her, Tygra didn't leave the young woman's room at all and they ended up talking for hours, mostly

comparing their two worlds. As hard as it was to believe, the most likely explanation seemed to be that Liana had somehow been dragged from her home to Mumm-Ra's pyramid by dark magic. Her insistence that he was from her world, but had been ancient even then was stranger still; after a time, she admitted that the pyramid and rotting bandages hadn't frightened her half so much as the unknown mutants surrounding her.

“We've made a map of as much of Third Earth as we've explored so far” he told her at one point. “When Cheetara gets back she can show you. See if you recognise any landmarks.”

Liana had nodded, but a little uncertainly, for she didn't expect there would be anything left to recognise. Then she backtracked a little.

“You said as much of Earth...Third Earth...as you've explored so far. Are there still areas that are uninhabited, then?”

Tygra smiled, but it was a bittersweet expression, and there was sadness in his eyes. Truly Liana wasn't from anywhere around here.

“This isn't the thundercats' home planet. Our world was called Thundera, but we left when...” he paused, his voice changing in tone “it was destroyed. I was on the flagship to protect Lion-O – he was just a boy then – and most of the fleet was destroyed by mutants. Our ship was damaged, but Jaga sacrificed himself to get us safely here. Some of the other ships might have made it to other planets, but we haven't found them yet.”

He spoke quite calmly, almost as if describing something that had happened to someone else, though really it was easier to simply relate the facts than think about what had happened.

Carelessly, Liana asked “Did you have family on the other ships?”

There was no reply, just the sadness reflected in those deep, orange eyes. This time, when Liana reached for his hand, she held it, feeling not bare skin but sleek fur beneath her palm, fur so soft she had to resist the urge to stroke it.

“I'm sorry.”

Suddenly her own fears seemed unimportant. If, as it seemed, she had been dragged out of her own time, her family and friends would grieve for her, but at least they'd be alive to do it. Had Tygra had a wife and children on one of the other ships that had been damaged? Had he seen the ship carrying his parents blown to oblivion and been unable to do anything about it? A new thought came to her, one she wouldn't dare to voice aloud. All the thundercats were subtly different – certainly different clans if not actually different species. She'd studied genetics – been fascinated by it in fact – and she knew that while lions and tigers had been bred together in zoos, their offspring were infertile. She felt her cheeks start to burn even as the thought slipped through her mind, not least because she felt immediately uncomfortable comparing the noble race she'd met today with mere animals. It would be like comparing herself to a monkey...and then her mind slipped back to the mutants, and she shuddered.

“Go to sleep” Tygra's voice startled her out of her thoughts “I'll stay here and make sure nothing happens to you.

Exhausted, Liana was asleep in moments, still holding the tiger's hand.

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When Liana next opened her eyes, sunlight was streaming through the long window at one end of the massive room, and for a moment she couldn't recall where she was or why she'd slept in her dress. Abruptly the memories flooded back and she knew where she was. Instantly a rush of emotion threatened to overwhelm her as first came fear, then panic, and then a desperate grief for the world she had no idea how to return to.

In the past Liana had given in to self-pity easily, clinging to whatever shred of comfort she could find at the first sign of difficulty, often playing the poor-me card to the extent she managed to make her family feel guilty if they didn't fuss around her. As a teenager she had often rushed to her room sobbing, knowing that her mother or sister would soon be along to comfort her and she only had to wait for them to make her feel better.

Old habits are hard to break, and already she could feel the tears start to well up in her eyes, even before she noticed the figure standing just to one side of the window.

He lost his whole world and still made sure I was safe last night a small voice in her mind hissed fiercely *don't you dare demand any more*

Swiping the back of her hand roughly across her face she forced a weak smile just as the tiger turned to face her.

“Sleep well?”

“Yeah, I guess so” she stretched experimentally as she sat up, thinking as she did so that a shower would be welcome “are you going to sleep now?”

“Later perhaps. I'm needed in the control room right after breakfast” he hesitated for a couple of seconds before adding “will you be alright on your own for a while?

Don't leave me! her old self howled, but she tried to ignore it, though her heart was pounding as she tried to fight the rising panic. “Sure. I'll be fine. Though if I'm not down to breakfast in half an hour you might want to send out a search party...”

Tygra laughed, a sound that went some way towards calming the negativity that coursed through her.

“I'll see you later, then” and with that Liana was left alone for the first time since her appearance on Third Earth. Once the footsteps had died away, she put her head in her hands and wept.

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She didn't manage to sustain the crying for long. There was something about knowing that she needed to rely on herself that dried her tears after only a few minutes. Now she felt resigned to her fate, but almost as if the worst was over. She got off the bed and started a lethargic exploration of her room. Aside from the bed which was placed centrally there was a closet, empty apart from an extra pillow which she added to her bed, a chair and a mirror hanging on the wall. A door she hadn't noticed the night before slid quietly open as she approached, and Liana leapt back with a startled cry before realising she'd found the bathroom.

Liana wasted no time in taking advantage of the shower, discarding her dress and enjoying the feel of the hot water, and then afterwards wrapping herself in the thick towels. Feeling a lot more like herself, and even a little hungry she was humming quietly as she stepped out of the bathroom – though almost immediately she let out a small shriek when she realised she was no longer alone.

“I'm sorry! I didn't mean to scare you!” WilyKit jumped off the bed with her hands held up in front of her “I just...Tygra said I should come and check you were OK, and I brought you some clothes. And...” she added with just a touch of reluctance “I brought your gloves back.”

“Whose are these?” Liana asked, holding up the close-fitting yellow garments curiously

“Cheetara's You're about her size, I think, and Snarf wants to wash your dress. He was fussing about the dirt on it last night, but Lion-O told him not to say anything to you about it till this morning.”

For the first time Liana felt the urge to laugh. “Tell him I'm sorry. If I'd known I was going to be crawling around on pyramid floors I'd have worn something more practical” she said as the thunderkitten giggled “But won't uh, Cheetara mind if she comes back to find me wearing her clothes?”

WilyKit looked surprised “Oh no. I borrowed your gloves already, so that makes us even.”

Either the thundercats have some very weird ideas about sharing or that's the most twisted logic I've ever heard Liana though. She wasn't entirely sure about wearing something so close-fitting either, but she had to admit it would be nice to have her dress clean. *Don't want them thinking you don't care what you look like * she thought, but on the word 'they' there was only a single striped face appeared in her mind.

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“OK, so how do I look?” Liana stood uncertainly in leggings and tunic, holding her stomach in as she stood in front of the mirror

“Fine, Do you want breakfast now?”

“In a minute. Have you got a hairbrush I can borrow?” having fingercombed her hair after the shower most of the tangles were gone, but it still looked wild and unkempt, even with her hairclips holding most of it off her face.

“Sure, there's one in my room. Come on!” WilyKit led the way out of the room as if the matter was settled, and after a moment's hesitation Liana followed. She wasn't sure she wanted anyone to see her like this, but reminded herself that she actually blended in with the thundercats now. She followed the thunderkitten past several more doors until they reached a room that looked rather as if it had been ransacked by several dozen bored, angry ravens. WilyKit immediately cast herself down next to a pile of discarded clothes and started rummaging. Liana tried to look in a direction that wasn't untidy, opting for the window until a triumphant shout made her turn back.

“Got it!” WilyKit leapt to her feet, proudly bringing Liana a brush that looked as though it hadn't been cleaned since the day it was purchased. Resisting the urge to remove half a pound of kitten mane she ran it through her own long hair, glad that hers was dyed a shade of red that wasn't immediately distinguishable from the matt on the brush.

“Now can we go eat?” came a plaintive voice as she fixed her clips again, more neatly than before.

To Liana's disappointment the adult cats weren't at breakfast, though the strange Snarf creature was bustling around, offering her enough food to satisfy a small army. He was particularly keen for her to try something called candy fruit which Liana sampled and then rather wished she hadn't. Her idea of breakfast wasn't something that tasted like a toffee apple coated with cotton candy, though once it was washed down with milk she felt better, ready to face the day though she had no idea of what it might hold.

The thunderkittens did, though.

“Hey Liana, do you want to visit the Berbil village?” WilyKat's eyes were eager as he asked the question the moment Snarf had left the dining room. The woman wasn't immediately certain.

“What's the Berbil village?”

“Berbils” You know – Robear Berbils” he continued unhelpfully “They grow the candyfruit. Breadfruit, too. We can bring some more back to the lair.”

That weird stuff grew on trees? Liana decided that would be something worth seeing, but not without one final question.

There won't be any mutants, will there?”

Chapter End Notes:

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