The Songs of Distant Earth

By Song-of_Fete

Chapter 4

Author's Chapter Notes:
Sorry for the long delay on this...I'm getting handfasted (pagan wedding)in just under a fortnight and things have been a bit busy!

“What are those?”

Liana stared at the hoverboards uncertainly. There was no sign of either Panthro or the thundertank in the bay, and she could see that the kittens were eager to get going and unimpressed with her reaction. She couldn't help liking the young ones though, and somehow couldn't imagine many human children this keen to go and pick fruit. Even so, she couldn't quite bring herself to leave the safety of Cats lair just yet.

“Shouldn't we leave a note or something so the others know where we've gone?”

The kittens glanced at each other so briefly that Liana missed it.

“Its fine. Lion-O will call us if there's any trouble. Besides, you're with us!”

Liana wasn't entirely sure if she was meant to be watching over the kittens or the other way around, but she didn't press the matter.

“How old are you two?” she asked curiously as she accompanied them out of Cats' Lair, still feeling rather self-conscious dressed in someone else's clothes.

“Thirteen” said WilyKit at the precise moment her brother answered “Twelve.”

“I thought you guys were twins?”

“We are. It's our birthday next week, but Kit's so childish she gets excited and exaggerates” WilyKat explained in a teasing tone, ducking his sister's indignant swipe. “Anyway, we're out of the lair now. You ready to ride?”

“Me?” Liana gulped, having imagined she was going to walk alongside the kittens as they rode what she had assumed were little more than childrens' toys.

“Sure, you can ride with me. Kit's too unsteady” WilyKat said, ingoring his sister as she stuck her tongue out. Liana looked even more uncertain, something the kittens misinterpreted “It's fine, they'll hold a grown-up's weight easily. Panthro made them”

“It's not that...” she tried to sound less nervous than she felt “I've got no sense of balance though. I never even learned to ride a bicycle.”

“It's fine. I'll stay close to the ground until you get used to it. Seriously, its just about impossible to fall off one of these!”

“Do you think she's OK?” Two worried kittens landed their hoverboards on the outskirts of the Berbil village next to a thick patch of shrubbery.

“She did tell you she had no sense of balance -”

“yeah, but I thought she'd have a sense of how to hold on!”

Liana stirred, groaning. She was now in a very bad mood indeed. She knew she'd made a bad judgement call in agreeing to let a child be responsible for her safety in the first place and now she felt like she'd fallen down two flights of stairs...and landed in a thorn bush at the bottom. At least she hadn't fallen on her head, and prickles aside, the bushes had cushioned the worst of the fall. Nonetheless her face was like thunder as she rolled over and dragged herself into a sitting position, cringing and feeling distinctly queasy when she saw the scratches on her left forearm – though annoyed as she as, she couldn't help feel slightly amused at how similar they looked to cat scratches. As soon as she glared at the kittens her anger started to dissipate. Their worried little faces were punishment enough, and already Wilykit was at her side, trying to help her up and picking bits of leaf and twig from her borrowed clothes.

“We're really sorry. Are you ok?”

“I don't think anything's broken if that's what you mean” she muttered, wincing a little as she stood, not quite able to put her full weight on one ankle. Still, if that and a few abrasions were the worst she had to deal with...Liana imagined telling her friends about the terrible fall and how brave she had been, then quickly forced her thoughts away from that. Thinking of home was the last thing she needed now. Thankfully WilyKat spoke as well then.

“It's only a few minutes walk to the Berbil village. Do you think you can make it?”

Liana tested her ankle. It hurt, but not so much that she was willing to get back on the hoverboard just yet.

“If its a choice between walking and getting back on that thing, I'm going on foot even if I have to crawl” she snapped, jerking a thumb at the board, though she didn't sound particularly annoyed now, and both kittens giggled. Besides, Liana had quickly realised that alienating these two wouldn't do her any favours, not least because she had only the vaguest idea of how to get back to Cats' Lair. As peaceful as the woodland seemed, she didn't fancy spending the night here.

“So I can walk. Which way do we..?” she broke off abruptly with a high-pitched gasp, her gaze fized on a rounded robotlike creature that had appeared across from the three of them while they'd been talking. The thunderkittens followed her gaze, then bounded excitedly to the new arrival.

“Robear Bill!”

“Hel-lo Wil-y-Kit, Wil-y-Kat. Who is your friend?” it asked in a strange, metallic voice. Liana put her fears aside. Evidently she had met her first Berbil, and with that thought a smile spread across her face. Their speech really did sound like they were burbling!

“This is Liana. She's uh, staying with us” WilyKat explained. Conscious of how she must look she brushed the remaining leaves off her borrowed clothes (noting with dismay a rip in the sleeve of one arm) before stepping forward, slightly favouring her injured ankle and wondering whether there was some sort of etiquette that needed to be observed here.

“H-hello Robear Bill. Pleased to meet you” she said, feeling distinctly awkward and wishing she knew the correct kind of greeting. She had a feeling that robotic bear-like things didn't shake hands.

“Hel-lo Liaaana” it – he – responded, drawing her name out into something metallically exotic.

And as easily as that, she'd met another new species. The village turned out to be even closer than WilyKat had implied, and soon she was surrounded by the friendly Berbils. Evidently the thundercats were held in some esteem here, for the assumption seemed to be that Liana was an honoured guest of some kind. She felt rather uncomfortable about this, as if she was being dishonest, but nobody had actually asked her where she was from. They just seemed to assume she belonged with the thundercats.

A couple of hours later and, each hoverboard loaded with a heavy basket of various fruits, they were preparing to head back to Cats' Lair. Liana rubbed the side of her neck. Weirdly it felt like she had sunburn there, though they sky was fairly clouded and that was the only place that stung.

“This time you can share MY board” WilyKit announced as they waved goodbye to the Berbils. “Lowest speed setting, and I won't go higher than three feet off the ground, I promise.”

Before Liana could answer a rumbling sound was heard. Both kittens froze instantly.

“What's wrong?”

Liana missed the glance that passed between the pair.

“It's the thundertank, but we wanted to give them a surprise with the candyfruit. Now its ruined!” WilyKat wailed.

“Oh, Well...how about we hide in the bushes until they've gone by?” Liana suggested, pleased at how readily the kittens agreed to her suggestion. They might have gone entirely unnoticed but for the blur of gold that streaked past a few seconds later. It was there and gone so fast that Liana blinked uncertainly, rubbing her eyes and asking “Did you see...?”

Confused, thinking she must have imagined it, or else seen some exotic bird in her peripheral vision Liana started to follow the young ones, only to stop dead in her tracks. Standing right in front of her was a woman, her own height but with an undeniably more attractive figure, dressed in a style that was immediately horribly familiar. Liana felt the colour rise to her cheeks while she herself wanted to sink into the ground and hide, even though the other female hadn't been glaring at her but at two very sheepish kittens.

“Uh...hi” she managed, rubbing her neck again “I guess you must be Cheetara. I, uh...I borrowed your clothes...”

Chapter End Notes:
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