

## Avatar Fan Fiction – Auld Lang Syne, by Jerathai

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Rain pattered down on the forest, making a pleasant drumming sound in the leafy canopy. A young Mo'at lounged on a limb high above the ground. *He is always surprised to find me in the jungle instead of somewhere in Hometree like the others*, she thought with amusement.

She loved the wild jungle. It was where she heard Eywa best. Oh, she could hear the All Mother well enough in the teeming anthill that was the Omaticaya Clan's ancestral home, but she could *feel* the presence of the goddess all around her here so easily.

It was that very trait – her need to spend time along in the jungle every now and then – that had intrigued the young warrior. Eytukan knew that she was *tsahik*. Everyone did. But he was convinced that there was some other secret that drew her there. One of the things that made him one of the best warriors of his generation was his curiosity. He was never content to let a mystery rest. *And so what better way to pique his interest than by being mysterious?* Mo'at chuckled to herself.

Though Mo'at was not a hunter, she was more skilled at moving unseen through the jungle than many, for both her parents *were* hunters and good ones at that. It was inevitable that some skills would rub off on their daughter. Anyone well practiced in the hunters'-gift would be able to find her easily, but those who were not practiced would have a harder time. Those not hunter-gifted would never see her, if she did not want to be seen. She found it a useful talent from time to time. Such as now.

Mo'at's eyes were closed; given the fog and rain, her sight would be all but useless in this soup. Her ears were at full extension, her mouth slightly open to improve her hearing that little extra bit, as her parents had taught her.

She soon caught a sound that was out of place amid the pattering raindrops. A soft scuffle. It was brief, but enough to catch and direct her attention. She waited. The sound came again, a foot cautiously placed, and she smiled. She had him. Eytukan was a warrior, first and foremost; though he was a decent hunter he would never be able to match the stealth that those with hunters-gift – or someone taught by those who did - could manage.

The tsahik waited patiently until he came into range, and then her hand flickered. A small pebble pulled from the lake next to Hometree flew through the air. She heard the *thwack* as it hit the target squarely – and then muffled oaths that would have made her mother grab the young man by the nearest ear and haul him off to his parents for chastisement if she had been there to hear it.

Mo'at couldn't help giggling. “You make enough noise for a whole herd of *angtsik*,” she called, and lounged indolently on the branch to exaggerate the insult.

Eytukan rubbed the top of his head where the stone had hit him. “That stung!” he complained.

“Serves you right, sneaking up on someone like that. What kind of warrior are you, to complain about a pebble on the head? Maybe you should be a child-tender, you could catch all the toy *ikran* that the little ones throw around. Or would that be too rough for you?”

He dropped his hand and muttered, “Warrior enough to catch one annoying apprentice tsahik!” and lunged.

Mo'at, of course, was nowhere near the spot he grabbed for. She'd had her exit route carefully planned from the start. Her deceptively indolent posture masked strategically placed hands and feet. As soon as the young man made his move she bailed off the tree limb. Eytukan came upon empty space and a teasing chuckle in his ears. Again.

“What are you doing out here?” he roared in frustration.

“Playing with an apprentice warrior's tiny mind. It's not hard,” came the taunting reply as Mo'at vanished into the fog.

Eytukan took his confusion where he usually did. “The girl is driving me mad, Sirtey!” he complained to his best friend. “I *know* she's doing something out there, but I can never catch her at it to find out what it is!

The young hunter was amused. He'd lost count of how many times the warrior had come to him with a similar litany. “So give it up,” he suggested. “It can't be that important, whatever it is. Forget about it.”

“I can't!” Eytukan repeated for what felt like the thousandth time. “It feels like she's doing it deliberately, just to taunt me! If I give up then she'll win! I can't let that happen.”

“Then change tactics,” his heart-brother suggested.

It caught the young man off guard. “Change tactics? What do you mean?”

“Every single time this happens you go tearing off into the jungle like an enraged *angtsik*, and every time you fail,” the hunter explained. “It's obvious that that tactic won't work. Try another.”

The warrior was baffled. “Another? What other? What do you mean?”

Sirtey muttered a Na'vi proverb under his breath about warriors having rocks for brains, and asked, “Eytukan, you're using the wrong weapon – and the wrong bait. Are you trying to kill her – or catch her?”

He watched the expression of confusion on his friend's face turn into thoughtfulness – and then brighten with inspiration. “Thanks, Sirtey, you're the best! I have to go get something!”

The hunter chuckled to himself as the warrior hared off into the woods. *I think Mo'at's hunting is going quite well*, he thought to himself.

A few days later, Eytukan saw the tsahik slip away into the jungle after the evening meal. He knew that she would be aware of him following her – in fact, this time he was counting on it.

He let her get a bit of a head start and then headed out after her, taking care to track her the way he usually did – clumsily.

Mo'at had seen him prowling around the base of Hometree, of course, and didn't attempt to hide her path for the first little bit. She didn't want him to give up *too* soon. She had a place in mind and headed for a small river that emptied into the lake. When she was far enough upstream she went up into the canopy and found a good hiding spot in which to sit comfortably and wait.

The tsahik listened as she had done many times before, focusing all her attention on her ears when she anticipated that Eytukan might be coming into range. There were a few long moments of silence.

Then the unmistakable music of a flute sounded nearby.

Her eyes and mouth opened wide in surprise.

Eytukan's eyes were closed, concentrating on playing the instrument he had crafted out of hollow-pole wood. When he finished every courting-song he knew, he opened his eyes – to see Mo'at standing in front of him. "You never told me you could play," she stated with wonder.

He smiled and rested his hands on his knees. "There are many things I have never told you," he said softly. "Perhaps we could speak of a few of them?"

"Perhaps," the tsahik replied, "After you play me another song."