

Avatar Fan Fiction – Lesson, by Jerathai

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Mo'at was making her daily rounds around New Hometree. She'd looked in on the child-watchers and their charges, the weavers, and the leather-workers. The morning's hunter meeting allowed her to check in with Jake, Neytiri, the hunters, and the senior cooks all at once. She'd just finished speaking with the weapon-makers and was headed for the clay workers when she heard a snap followed by a cry of pain.

A quick investigation revealed a young girl working alone with an archery target. The child was holding her left forearm – she obviously hadn't been holding the bow correctly, and the released bowstring had raised a nasty weal along the improperly positioned arm. The offending weapon lay on the ground at the girl's feet, and an arrow that was nowhere near the target was sticking up in the ground pathetically. The youngster's tears seemed a bit out of proportion to a simple bad shot, though.

Mo'at's intuition told her strongly that something more than the obvious was going on. She walked up to the child and knelt, extending her hands for the wounded arm and speaking kindly. "Here, let me see. A bowstring-snap can be very painful." The girl nodded and let the Tshahik inspect the injury.

Mo'at frowned when she got a good look at the child's arm. Not because of the string injury that had just occurred, but because she could see the marks of many similar old healed welts. "Little one, who is your hunter-teacher? Why does he not have you wearing an arm guard? Have they not taught you how to hold a bow properly?"

Fresh tears poured down the youngster's face and she pulled her arm out of the Tshahik's grasp to hide it behind her back. She responded in a shamed voice, "They said that I do not have hunters'-gift, that I should find something else to do. But mother says I have no weaving-gift either. Irrey says that if I cannot hunt then I am useless to the clan and I should just walk away into the jungle and not be a burden to everyone." She burst into tears.

The Tshahik's eyes went flat and hard for a moment. She knew Irrey; a boastful and arrogant young man, overly impressed with himself. Every handful of years or so, one such as Irrey would provide her with the opportunity to teach a very important lesson. It appeared that the lesson had come due again, but she put that aside for the nonce. She closed her eyes for a moment, the better to listen for Eywa's voice – and then smiled. "What is your name, child?"

“Talli,” the girl almost whispered.

Mo’at stood and put an arm around the little one’s shoulders comfortingly. “That bowsnap must be very painful. I know something that can help, come with me.”

To Talli’s surprise the Tsahik led her into the jungle, not back to New Hometree. It made her very nervous. “Tsahik, I am not allowed to go far from the Tree.”

The elder woman patted her reassuringly. “It is all right, we are not going very far. We will stay inside the scout’s perimeter. In fact – there!” She pointed at something on the ground. “Come see this, but do not touch it yet.” Mo’at picked up a dead twig from the ground and used it to flip over a leaf attached to a small fuzzy shrub. “Do you see the purple spots on the underside of this leaf?”

Talli peered closely and then nodded. “They look like insect tracks.”

The Tsahik instructed “Smell the plant, but be very careful not to touch it with your nose.”

The girl did so; Mo’at smiled when the young one’s nose wrinkled in distaste. “It doesn’t smell very good,” the little one complained.

“But would you recognize the plant if you smelled it again?” the elder asked – and smiled again when Talli nodded vehemently. “Good. Now, take this.” She picked a smooth leaf off of a different plant after thanking it for the gift, and handed it to the girl. “Use this to protect your fingers. Thank the fuzzy plant for its gift to you, and pick a leaf off of it.”

The girl did so, and Mo’at had to stifle a grin; her young charge held the thing at arm’s length as if it were a venomous insect.

“Place the fuzzy leaf against the bow-snap on your arm,” she instructed.

Talli did so very gingerly – and in a moment her eyes went wide. “It stopped hurting!”

The Tsahik nodded, “Hold it for a few moments to each part of your arm that hurts.”

The girl did so, becoming more and more amazed as the anaesthetic took immediate effect. She looked up at the elder in awe as soon as the entire wound had been numbed.

“Now,” Mo’at said briskly, “It is time for you to make yourself useful to the Clan. Carefully put the leaf down where you will not accidentally touch it, and use your holding-leaf to gently pull the fuzzy plant from the ground.”

Talli did as instructed, being careful to thank the plant before she cautiously pulled it up, revealing a fat root.

The Tsahik stood and helped her young charge up. “Be careful not to let it touch you, and we will take it back to New Hometree.”

They walked back home carefully; Mo’at had Talli wash the root in the river as they passed. She led the girl straight to the healers’ enclave. Several injured Omaticaya rested there. When one of the healers saw them and would have come over, the Tsahik made a small hand gesture indicating that they were to be left alone.

Mo’at led the girl to one of several flat stones and had her lay the root down on it. She handed Talli a rounded rock. “Very carefully, press this rock against the root until the juice inside it is squeezed out. Don’t touch the juice.”

The child did so until the flat rock was wet with the root-juice.

“Now,” the Tsahik instructed, “Take this bandage.” She handed Talli a long strip of cloth that the girl recognized as a product of the young weaver-apprentices’ work. “Hold it by the ends, and soak up the juice with the middle part of the cloth.” She guided the girl until the center portion of the bandage was quite wet. “Good, now carefully bring it over here.”

The two of them walked over to one of the injured Omaticaya, who was clearly in a great deal of pain. Ugly raw burned flesh ran down the outside of his lower leg, clearly an injury taken in the war.

The older woman said, “Very gently, lay the wet part of the bandage on the burn.”

The girl timidly did as instructed – and was astonished when the warrior went nearly limp with relief. Tears came to his eyes, “Thank you, thank you little one!”

Talli’s eyes went big and round. “What happened?”

Healer Alai came forward at Mo’at’s surreptitious gesture. “What happened, little one, is that you gave a man who was in great pain one of the best painkillers that Eywa has given to the Na’vi,” she said with approval. “The juice from the ivoh root will keep his wound clean and help it to heal, as well as allow him to rest without pain for a long time. You have made a very big difference to him today.”

The girl looked at the warrior in astonishment and saw that the man’s eyes were already starting to close.

Alai smiled, "And the Tsahik has made a big difference to the clan as well, bringing us a new healer-apprentice."

Talli almost sat down in startlement. "Healer-apprentice? Me?!"

The Tsahik patted the girl's shoulder and smiled down at the amazed girl. "You. Alai and her healers know much about many more plants than just ivoh, and they will gladly teach you all they know – if you would like."

The girl looked with awe at the now-sleeping warrior, and said softly "Oh yes, yes please!"

Mo'at stood. "Then I will leave you to get acquainted with your new apprentice, Alai." Then her eyes went flinty for just a moment. "And I have a lesson to prepare."

At the evening meal that night, the Tsahik stood and walked out to the center of the gathering-circle. Into the silence, she spoke a single word, "Irrey."

A young man jumped up from the crowd and almost tripped in his haste to obey the summons.

Mo'at looked him straight in the eye when he stood before her. "I understand that you show promise in the hunters' gifts."

Irrey was relieved, and nodded.

She held out her hand. "Give me your bow."

He was puzzled, but handed it over as ordered.

The Tsahik inspected the weapon carefully. "This is fine work. Did you make it?"

Irrey shook his head, "No, one of the weapon-makers did."

To everyone's shock, Mo'at casually threw the bow backwards over her shoulder. It bounced as it fell, and a couple of Omaticaya hastily scrambled out of its way.

She held her hand out again. "Your knife."

Irrey covered his shock by hastily removing his knife-harness and handing it to her.

Mo'at again inspected the weapon. "Did you make this?"

Irrey answered, "No, Tsahik"

The knife followed the bow over Mo'at's shoulder.

Irrey's eyes bugged out when her hand came out again. He wasn't wearing anything else. *Unless.... She couldn't mean.... ?!*

Mo'at's hand curled and went flat again in an unmistakable gesture.

Irrey's face flushed in mortification, but his hands obediently went to his hip and he handed over the last thing he was wearing. Tittering arose from the crowd.

The Tsahik dropped the garment behind her and announced. "For the next three days, Irrey is to touch nothing that he has not made with his own hands, or that a fellow hunter has not given him. He will eat and drink what he catches himself, wear what he makes himself. No Omaticaya who is not a hunter is to assist him in any way."

Of course, no hunter was about to assist Irrey either. No one in their right mind got between the Tsahik and a Lesson.

Mo'at turned and left the young man standing in the middle of the gathering-circle, from which he hastily exited. *No doubt to go find weavers'-grass and some very large leaves*, she thought to herself with amusement.

Three days later, a very hangdog Irrey stood before her in the gathering-circle once again, trying very hard not to lose his leaves.

Mo'at had surreptitiously followed the youngster's misadventures very carefully. When he had tried to enter his family's sleeping space, his father (at her instigation) had asked whether Irrey had woven the family hammock all by himself. The boy had sighed and wound up spending three very uncomfortable nights sleeping on bare branches.

The young hunter had found game very hard to catch without knife or bow – and the other hunters all seemed to be mysteriously busy elsewhere. Mushrooms and teylu grubs were always available – but those were about the only things he could readily identify as edible. His one attempt at firemaking had resulted in the waste of nearly half a day, pounded and burned fingers, and mushrooms so badly burned that he'd had to gather more to start over – only to find that his fire had died while he'd been gone. Raw, live teylu grubs were definitely not one of his favorite meals.

So it was a very chastened young man who stood before the Tsahik. Mo'at gestured, and a man came forward. "I work leather for the Clan," he announced – and handed Irrey a loincloth-cord.

The man turned and left, and the Tsahik gestured again. A woman came forward with a simple length of plain cloth. "I weave cloth for the Clan," she said, handing him the loincloth-fabric.

Irrey mumbled a thanks as the woman turned and left, and couldn't get the loincloth on fast enough, to the titters of the audience. They were enjoying this immensely.

A woman walked forward at the Tsahik's direction. "I am a knife-maker for the Clan," she stated, and handed Irrey back his knife.

Ral'ai came forward and said in a stern voice, "I am a bow-maker for the Clan," and gave the young man's bow back to him before retreating to his place.

Mo'at gestured again, and three women came forward. "I gather food plants for the Clan," said the first. "I cook the food that the hunters and gatherers gift to the clan," said the second, who was holding a pot of stew. The third woman held a clay bowl before the other two; the first woman filled it from the pot. "I make things of clay for the Clan," she stated, and handed Irrey the filled bowl.

Irrey took the bowl in his hands and mumbled thanks, his face flushed with shame.

The Tsahik addressed the crowd. "Every Na'vi is gifted by Eywa with an ability that contributes to the well-being of the entire Clan. All Na'vi can hunt, at need, but allowing those whom Eywa has blessed with the hunters'-gift to do the hunting frees those who are not so gifted to perform their own special ability for the benefit of all of us. Gifts are gifts; all are sent by Eywa and all are of equal value. One gift cannot stand by itself alone; only when all gifts are combined together do we all prosper under Her care."

She looked sternly at the chagrined hunter. "The next time you are tempted to say that someone is of no use to the clan, I would suggest you reconsider those words very carefully." Mo'at looked deliberately to the side, drawing Irrey's attention to where a very happy Talli – proudly wearing an apprentice necklace - sat with the healers.

The Tsahik looked on with satisfaction as the realization that he had brought this entirely on himself crashed down over the young man's face. *Lesson learned.*