

Avatar Fan Fiction – Passing the Torch, by Jerathai

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Mayri woke up one morning and realized that it was time. Her first impulse was to smile in relief and thankfulness; her second was to humbly thank Eywa for granting her the long-awaited rest. She had been the Omatikaya Tsa'ik for many hands of years, more than she cared to count. Her mate Rokuten, still sleeping beside her, had passed the chieftainship of the clan to young Eytukan three years ago.

It wouldn't have been a good idea for both she and Rokuten to retire at the same time. *Too much change at once*, Mayri mused. Now that the young man was well established in the position, Eywa was allowing her to pass her own burden on.

Mo'at will make the People a fine Tsa'ik, the elder thought with satisfaction. The two girls that the younger woman had birthed were fine and strong, old enough now that they were less needful of their mother's constant attentions. The older girl, Sylwanin, was already determined to be one of the Clan's hunters. *And she's already showing promise, too, young as she is.*

It was incredibly important for a woman who was going to be Clan Tsa'ik to be a mother herself. *Eywa is the Mother of All Things; how could one function as Tsa'ik without the experience of being a parent?* Mayri asked herself rhetorically. The knowledge and experience of being a mother *and especially all of the instincts that awaken*, she mused, were critical to being able to interpret Eywa's will for others.

Mo'at's girls were old enough now that they were becoming more and more involved in the daily activities of the clan. *Which means that my protégé's focus has also moved out towards the Omatikaya. Eywa is right, as always. Mo'at is ready, and I am tired. It is time to pass the responsibility on. Then I can be simply Mayri again, until She decides that it is time for me to come Home to Her.*

When Rokuten woke he realized the situation as soon as he looked into Mayri's eyes, and returned her smile. They had been mates for decades, had made *tsaheylu* uncounted times, seen every emotion a Na'vi could possibly experience in each others' gaze. He knew her as well as he knew himself, and what he saw was the anticipation of relief at laying down a heavy responsibility at the end of a long, successful journey. He embraced his mate with joy and without needing to say a word.

They walked down the center spiral of Hometree hand-in-hand, as they had done every morning for years. Rokuten fetched breakfast for them; she smiled when she saw that he had claimed some of her favorite sweet berries. A private celebration between just the two of them. She reached up and touched his cheek in a gesture of love and thanks as he squatted beside her.

When she had finished her meal she rose with the characteristic grace that had given her her personal-name and walked to the center of the gathering-circle. It took only moments for the crowd to quieten in respect, and she spoke to her clan mates in a warm voice.

“All things begin, live their time, and then end, according to the will of Eywa. Many years ago, in this very space, I accepted the joy and responsibility of becoming Tshahik to the Omatikaya. The All Mother has informed me that it is time for me to pass that duty to the next generation. At sundown I will fulfill my final responsibility as Tshahik and conduct the ceremony of transfer.”

The clan was immediately abuzz, though not in any alarmed way. Everyone had been anticipating her retirement since Rokuten had surrendered the chiefship; they'd known that Eywa was only waiting for the right time for Mayri to follow him. Eytukan took his daughters to the child-tenders; he needed to consult with Sir'tey and the chief cook to determine what must be hunted to provide food for the ceremony.

Mo'at quietly got up and left alone – she would spend the day in solitary contemplation, praying to the All Mother and preparing herself to assume the greatest responsibility of her life.

Mayri fondly watched her student leave, and then went back to her mate. She spent the day making her official rounds as Tshahik one last time. Her visits with her fellow clansmen were warm, relaxed, and unhurried. *No one has any doubts about the strength of Mo'at's connection to the All Mother, the elder thought with gratitude as she made her way around Hometree. They have all seen her work and they are content. They know she will need time to settle, but I do not think they will have to wait long, and I will be here to help her if it is needful.*

Mo'at walked along the shore of the lake in front of Hometree and followed the first tributary stream that she encountered into the jungle. She smiled to herself as she jumped lightly onto a fallen log to begin making her way up into the canopy. *How long ago was it that I led Eytukan along this very stream, intending to tease him yet again, only to have him surprise me with his flute music? So long ago, and yet not so long ago.* Her eyes softened at the memory.

She kept going until she found a spot that spoke to her. A wide tree trunk offered a sturdy limb with an inviting view of the meandering stream below. She settled down with a sigh and closed her eyes. *So, it is time. Sylwanin's hunter-gift is*

strong, she spends most of the day with the hunter and warrior teachers already. Neytiri, my little Neytiri, the mother smiled in delight at the thought of her younger daughter. Already she asks me about the voices in the wind, and her queue barely opened! Eywa willing, she will become the strongest Tsa'ik the Clan has seen in generations, one day.

Mo'at opened her eyes and sighed. Those thoughts were for another day. Today it was time to prepare herself to assume the duty that Eywa had sent her to the Omatikaya for. Today was her time to offer her life in service to the All Mother and to the People. High on a tree branch above the sparkling stream, Mo'at closed her eyes and softly began to sing.

The clan gathered in the great space beneath Hometree as daylight died. Mayri stood in front of the great skull of Toruk, Mo'at at her side. Musicians waited nearby. The Tsa'ik watched the sun slip below the horizon; her last day of service was done. At her nod, the drummers took up a quiet heart-beat rhythm. The People immediately quieted and she stepped forward. "Omatikaya, I am honored to have been your Tsa'ik for so many years. It has given me great joy to be allowed to bring the blessings of the All Mother to all my brothers and sisters. I thank Eywa for permitting me to do so for these many years, and I thank you all for your kindness." Mayri made the greeting-gesture to the entire Clan, "*Oel ngati kameie, ma'tsmukan, ma'tsmuke.* Let the ceremony begin."

Rokuten was the first to come stand in front of her, "*Oel ngati kameie, Tsa'ik.*" He said softly but clearly into the hush. "Your guidance made my years of service as Olo'eyktan a gentle burden, and has kept the Clan strong in Eywa's grace. *Irayo.*" He made a formal gesture of thanks, then stepped behind and to one side of her.

Eytukan was next. "*Oel ngati kameie, Tsa'ik,*" he said as he returned the formal greeting-gesture as his predecessor had done. "I have learned well from your wisdom, and I promise to keep the clan always in the ways of Eywa. *Irayo.*" He stepped aside as other Omatikaya lined up.

Each member of the clan came forward to greet Mayri formally, to make some mention of how she had affected their lives, and to thank her for her service. She greeted each one warmly, often clasping their hands, and sometimes making a brief comment that brought smiles to the faces around her.

The receiving line took all night, giving as many Omatikaya as possible a chance to come forward. As the hours passed, Mo'at grew more and more aware of the enormity of the responsibility of being Tsa'ik – as was intended.

Mo'at had never really thought about how *large* the clan was. It was a clan much like any other, neither remarkably smaller nor larger. But as hours passed and there was no end to the line in sight, she got her first lesson on how great an

impact a Tсахик had on the lives of her clan-mates. *She greets every person individually, she Sees each person, she knows them all – and they know her! In Eywa's name, **how** can she know every single member of the Clan? So many! How can she have touched so many lives, so strongly? Will I? How can I serve so many, as well as Mayri has? Will the words I speak have so much meaning that they could affect someone's life as greatly as I am hearing from those who are speaking to her now?* The enormity of the influence the gentle Tсахик had on her clan became more and more apparent to her protégé as the night wore on. Mo'at instinctively saw both sides of this power; the gentle and motherly kindness that even a female *palulkan* displayed to its own young, and the avalanche that could be unleashed in an instant if the Tсахик were to point at an enemy and command, "Attack!" Awe kept her attentive and silent as the line progressed and the heart-beat of the drums continued through the night.

When the sun rose over the horizon the next morning, Mayri held up one hand in signal. The drumming immediately stopped; what remained of the line melted away. The vast cavern seemed to echo in the silence. She spoke into that void, "Mo'at te Rehah Jiral'ite."

Her protégé came forward and stood in front of her. Mayri approved of the firm and unafraid expression in Mo'at's eyes. The young woman had clearly come to terms with herself during the long night. "The care of the All Mother for Her children is like the wings of Toruk, which shelters his young from wind and storm," she began, lifting the red-beaded drape of the Clan Tсахик from her shoulders. "Red is the color of blood, the color of life, shed at life's beginning and at its end, the color most sacred to Eywa. Wearing this garment, remember that She has entrusted you with the guardianship of the spirit-life of the Clan." Mo'at bowed her head as the drape was settled on her shoulders.

Mayri then lifted her hands towards her headpiece. "All mothers are gentle with their children, and they are fiercest and most terrible when their children are threatened." She partially withdrew the long thorn connected to the headpiece from its sheath, displaying it to the young woman. "So it is with Eywa. All Na'vi are Her children, and to her children she is compassionate and nurturing. Let any danger threaten them, and Her terrible fangs will rend the enemy as surely as *palulkan* defending its young. Wear then the Fang of Eywa as a reminder that though your primary duty is to nurture, you may one day be called upon to defend Her children as well." She sheathed the thorn-spike and then lifted the headpiece off and placed it on Mo'at. The burden of a lifetime seemed to vanish into the morning mist as she released the diadem.

Finally, she looked her former student directly and said, "The queue of a Na'vi is their connection to the All Mother. With one exception, Na'vi wear their queue behind them, because one's personal connection to Eywa is the most sacred relationship in their lives, not to be shared with others. The only exception to this custom is the Tсахик, because that sacred relationship between you and the All

Mother is exactly what is offered to the service of the People. Now, Mo'at te Rehah Jiral'ite, let your service as Tsahik to the Omatikaya begin."

Mayri gently reached around Mo'at's neck and drew the young woman's queue forward. She began singing a sacred chant full of joy and thanksgiving as she brought her protégé's hair forward and began braiding it to intertwine with the queue-hair, securing it in its new place. When the braid was complete, Mo'at took up the chant in her turn. Mayri let her arms fall to her sides as the young mother reached for the elder's queue with slightly trembling fingers. Mo'at undid the braid that had held Mayri's queue in front for so long and then gently moved the neural whip over the woman's shoulder.

Mo'at let the chant end. Mayri sighed with relief and smiled, receiving a tremulous one in return. The elder, Tsahik no more, took the new Tsahik by the shoulders and turned her to face their clan-mates and announced, "Omatikaya, Eywa has blessed us greatly, for this day she has given the clan a new Tsahik."

As one the entire Clan came forward. Rokuten put his hands on Mo'at and smiled warmly. Eytukan was quick to put his hands on her other side and was proudly beaming. Everyone reached out gladly, touching someone who was touching someone who was touching their new Tsahik in turn until all Omatikaya were connected.

Everyone stood that way for a long moment, long enough to ensure that they were all together, symbolizing their unbroken and continuing connection to the Mother of All Things. Then the hands dropped, smiles appeared on all the hundreds of faces, and everyone converged to warmly congratulate the new Tsahik.

Mayri gladly faded into the shadows with Rokuten as the spotlight shifted fully onto Mo'at, and left entirely once the daylight strengthened and the celebration got into full swing.

Her mate wrapped an arm around her shoulders and hugged her warmly, "Tired?" he asked thoughtfully.

The former Tsahik smiled and rested her head on the former Olo'eyktan's shoulder gratefully. "Mmm. Happy. Mo'at will be a good Tsahik for the People."

Rokuten kissed his mate gently on the forehead. "So she will. She's had a good teacher. But now it's time for the fledgling to fly on her own, and time for you to rest."

"What a wonderful idea," was Mayri's response as the two elderly Na'vi walked into the jungle together and disappeared.

