

Avatar Fan Fiction – To Be Who You Are, by Jerathai

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Neytiri was enjoying a walk around the base of New Hometree. The birth of her first child was only a month or so away. She still made her rounds as *tsahik* every day though; it made her feel useful. Many Omatikaya greeted her as she passed, and she paused to chat with several of her fellow clansmen.

She was almost to the archery-ground when she came upon a familiar face. Natan, the boy whom she'd consoled over the loss of his parents, was sitting on a large rock with a bow and arrow in his hands. He was looking at the weapon as though he'd just discovered it to be a poisonous creature.

The expression roused Neytiri's curiosity enough that she hailed him, "*Kaltxi*, Natan!"

The boy jumped in startled surprise, then recognized his visitor. "Neytiri!" He hastily got up and gestured solicitously to the rock, "Please, sit down."

Jake's mate sighed internally. It seemed like everyone in the clan was anxious for her after the incident during the *tawtute* ship's visit. She was still embarrassed over the whole thing.

Today though, she was feeling a bit tired – and it made as good an excuse as any to sit with her young friend. "*Irayo*. I will be very happy when my child is born and I can carry it in my arms, or let Jake carry it!" The mother-to-be settled down comfortably on the sun-warmed stone with a sigh. "I noticed that you had an odd expression on your face a few moments ago. Is something wrong?"

The young man made himself comfortable on the ground at her feet. "Teekan took me out into the jungle yesterday. We practiced stalking. He brought me to a *yerik* herd in Seventh Area." Natan smiled, "There were several new young ones. They were constantly hopping, having fun just jumping around. It made me happy to watch them."

"And this makes you feel bad today?" the *tsahik* inquired.

The young man displayed the bow and arrow he held. "Until today, shooting my bow made me very happy too. Teekan says that I can shoot very well." Neytiri hid a smile as the boy's voice took on just a bit of a boasting tone. "I can hit the hand-target," he held his hand sideways to indicate the size of the object, "four times out of eight already. Sinta is the next best shooter in my group, and she has only hit it two times out of eight."

“That is very good indeed!” Jake’s mate said encouragingly.

Natan’s voice got even more animated, “Teekan says that when I can hit the hand-target seven out of eight times for eight days in a row he will speak to Ra’lai about having a new bow made just for me!”

Neytiri smiled at the youngster’s awed enthusiasm at the prospect of such a treasure. “That would be wonderful!”

He looked down at the weapon he held and his face fell. “This morning I went out to practice shooting as usual and I realized that the reason I am learning to shoot is so that I can kill the *yerik*.” He gave the bow the same kind of distasteful glance that had drawn Neytiri’s attention, then looked up at Jake’s mate with a plea in his face. “Tсахик, the *yerik* were so happy, how could I kill them? I do not *want* to kill them!” He dropped the bow in the grass.

Mo’at’s daughter surprised the fledgling hunter by saying, “That is a good thing.”

The boy was startled, “It is? How?”

Neytiri’s voice took on her ‘teaching’ tone. “What is Eywa’s most sacred rule?”

“Never to kill unless it is necessary to preserve life,” he answered promptly.

“Very good! So your head knows not to kill, and your heart does not want to kill. So no creature will die by your hand unless it is an accident,” she stated.

The boy nodded a bit warily, and the tsahik asked, “Now, what other creatures kill and eat *yerik* besides the Na’vi?”

Natan gave her a look as if she was asking a trick question. “*Toruk, palulukan, ikran, and nantang* will all eat *yerik* if they can catch it.”

“So it would seem to be Eywa’s will that one purpose of the *yerik* is for it to provide food for other creatures, yes?” she queried.

The boy was startled. “I never thought of it that way before.”

Neytiri commented in a reflective tone, “I have seen *palulukan* and *nantang* hunt *yerik*. They chase it down until they catch it. The *yerik* is always very frightened as it tries to run away. It usually takes *palulukan* and *nantang* a little bit of time to kill their prey. The *yerik* is often in great pain for a little while before it dies.”

The boy winced, but both of them knew that it was simply the way things happened.

The tsahik continued, "Now, think of this. The Na'vi are very grateful to the *yerik* for the food it provides. If you ask A'tey, she will tell you that she can feed forty or more Omatikaya with one *yerik*. And that does not include the leather that we get from it, or the bones and sinews that we use to make tools with."

Natan's eyes got a bit wider, "The *yerik* is more important than I had thought, isn't it?"

Neytiri smiled at her young friend. "Truly, it is. And to show that we respect it, that we are grateful for what it gives us, we do our best to make sure that it experiences as little pain and fear as possible when it is time for the *yerik* to fulfill the purpose that Eywa has given it. A Na'vi will not shoot a *yerik* unless he is sure that he can kill it instantly, with a single shot."

"So the reason we practice is not just to kill it, but to give it an easier, faster death than *palulkan* or *nantang* would," the boy mused.

"Yes," she affirmed, "that is how we thank it for the great gift that it gives us." Her eyes warmed as the young hunter looked at her in wonder, "It may well be that those young *yerik* knew that you were there, and they were happy because they know that when Eywa decides that it is time for them to give their gift to you, they know that they will not have to suffer pain and fear, because you would not permit it to be otherwise."

Natan's eyes went round with wonder and Neytiri concluded, "If your bow gives you joy, then follow it. Joy is Eywa's way of telling you that you are following the path that She has laid out for you. If you are unsure of what She wants of you, remember always to follow your happiness because that is what She intends for all her children. To do otherwise would make you become someone who you are not."

The young man reached down and slowly picked up his bow as if he was seeing it for the first time. A look of determination came over his face as he gripped the weapon properly. "I must go practice some more," he said as he got up. "I will not hunt until I can hit the target every single time. I will make sure that the *yerik* is right, that when Eywa calls it home it will have the easiest journey possible. Thank you, Neytiri."

"You are very welcome, my friend," was the tsahik's reply as she got up. "And I think that I shall journey to A'tey's cook-pit. All this talk of *yerik* has made me hungry!"

