

Avatar Fan Fiction – Turmoil, by Jerathai

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Neytiri was in agony, although she was untouched physically. Duty was the only thing enabling her to keep putting one foot in front of the other as the surviving Omatikaya walked from the destroyed Hometree towards the Tree of Souls. Her father's bow was heavy in her hand, underscoring her pain.

For the rest of her life she would never forget the expression on her mother's face when she had appeared to the elder out of the bitter smoke and choking dust carrying her father's bow and the neckpiece of the Omatikaya Olo'eyktan. Neytiri had thought her mother was going to pass out on the spot. She'd walked up to Mo'at and wordlessly placed a handful of Eytukan's ornaments in his mate's hands.

The Tsahik had closed her eyes and swayed dangerously on her feet. Her daughter wrapped her arms around the older woman as much to keep her from falling as for comfort. Both were badly needed.

Neither couldn't tell how long they stood together in their shared pain. All around them other Omatikaya were in similar states. The screams and wails of their clansmen eventually brought them out of their paralysis. Duty prodded them into action.

"We must take the People to the Tree of Souls," Mo'at said in a dull voice, "It is not safe here."

Neytiri wanted to weep at the dead tone in her mother's voice, but she had no tears left to shed.

Together they began to rally the survivors. Many were wounded; more were in shock. A number were near-catatonic at the loss of home, of mates, of family. Having something to do helped the two women to focus themselves.

Neytiri chivvied the able bodied into caring for the wounded, into getting the People moving. She looked back once at the Tree that had been the home of the Omatikaya since the First Songs. Hatred for those who had committed such an unspeakable atrocity filled her. Only Mo'at's hand on her shoulder brought her attention back to her duty, and she turned her back on her childhood home and left it to burn.

Once everyone was underway she could no longer avoid the turmoil in her mind. She wanted to draw her knife and kill those who had harmed her and her loved ones, but the ultimate target of her rage was also the center of her universe.

Jake betrayed the People! she thought in fury.

But he attacked the tree killing machine and stopped it, the inner voice reminded her.

He knew the Sky People were going to attack Hometree! she argued with it.

And he kept warning us all to leave it and run to the forest, it prompted.

He is a dreamwalker, a Sky Person! her anger countered.

Eywa herself bound us together as mates, the tsahik-sense stated.

Her father's dying request – "*Protect the People,*" was all that kept her going. As the Omatikaya walked on she took advantage of every opportunity to offer assistance or encouragement, but such things did not hold back her mental torment for long.

They killed my father! she wailed inside.

He refused to use his knife against Tsu'tey, prompted her conscience.

I trusted him and he betrayed me! her pain cried.

I made tsahaylu with him and Saw no evil in him, her heart reminded her.

They destroyed our home! a feeling of vengeance accused.

Father made him one of the Omatikaya, honesty stated.

The People knew what Eytukan's bow in her hand meant. A few murmured words of condolence as the hideous march continued, but the words did not interrupt her inner monologue.

They killed hundreds of Omatikaya!, her soul cried out.

The Sky People stole his spirit from his dreamwalker body to punish him for betraying them, justice reminded her.

I don't want him anywhere near me! her confusion screamed.

You are the one who chose him, her body compelled her to remember.

How could I have been so blind? she raged against herself.

He never lied to me, her conscience pointed out.

For a while Neytiri gave up the fight, her rage tired of being constantly countered, but her thoughts remained dark.

What about my own status among the People?

She had chosen Jake against the wishes of her parents, her people, willingly forfeiting her position as future Tsa'ik, only to see him denounced as a traitor. Only to denounce him as a traitor herself. *Where does that leave me?*

Neytiri looked at her arms in distaste at the spots on her body that marked her as Jake's mate, a symbol of joy that had become a brand of shame. She almost wished she could take her knife and scrape them off. *But Eywa herself put them there,* she thought in dismay. To do so would be to disrespect the gift of the body that Eywa had given her, on top of disrespecting Eywa's own action.

Her feet thudded dully, heavily on the ground, echoing her mood as she slogged over the rough terrain. Jake was alive, she could sense it. While he was alive, she could take no other mate.

*But even if he was dead, would anyone else want me? Would Tsu'tey want her, knowing that she had preferred Jake to him? Why should he? How **could** he? Who would want someone who had turned her back on her people to bond to a traitor?*

The hideous march continued. Not even the sight of her best friend Janni, helping to carry children too young or too tired to walk, penetrated her despair.

The only interruption of her inner monologue came when the *ikran macto* that had been able to make it out of Hometree found and joined the caravan. Tsu'tey saw Mo'at's red shawl and landed next to them. He and the Tsa'ik held a brief conversation; he approved of the decision to bring the People to the Tree of Souls until they could decide what further actions needed to be taken. Mo'at placed the neckpiece of the Omatikaya Olo'eyktan around Tsu'tey's neck without a word. He mounted his *ikran* and took off to go organize the hunters that still had mounts left. He never looked at Neytiri.

It took a long time to reach the Tree of Souls afoot. The Na'vi stopped when they encountered clean water, taking time to drink and to wash the ashes and dust of Hometree from their wounds. They picked what fruit and food they found growing along the way. Hunger did not respect grief.

Mo'at dropped back to hand her daughter a piece of fruit to eat as they marched. There was a long silence before the Tsahik murmured, "I went back. I cut Jake and Grace free of their bonds. He saved my life when Hometree fell."

Neytiri closed her eyes at the new piece of fodder for her inner torment. Her mother moved off when the young woman remained silent.

She was unable to resolve her turmoil by the time they finally reached *Vitraya Ramunong*. At that point she got some relief from the merciless arguments by helping to get everyone settled as best they could.

A council was held regarding what should be done next, consisting of the remaining elders. Mo'at had simply appeared and ordered her daughter to follow her to the meeting. Neytiri kept silent while the others discussed what to do.

"We can do nothing without Eywa's help," her mother told the others dully. "Many of our warriors are dead. Jake was right, the *tawtute* are too strong. We need the All Mother's assistance. We must gather the clan and pray for Her to aid us."

The other elders agreed and went to pass the word that all able bodied people remaining were to gather at the base of the Tree.

Neytiri was uneasy when the Tsahik indicated that she was to take her place on the dais with Tiri and Annai as though nothing had happened. Tsu'tey gave her one long, inscrutable look – and then ignored her.

The familiar prayer-song, long, slow, and repeated, blessedly pushed her inner torment to the back of her mind for a while. Neytiri made a personal plea of the song. *All Mother, I am lost! I don't know what to do! I don't know what to feel! I love him – and I hate him! Am I even one of the People anymore? Why did You bind me to someone who betrayed us? Have I offended You? Is this a punishment for me? Is that why you have taken my beloved Father from me? Please! All Mother! Whatever I have done to offend, I did not mean to do! Help me! I cannot See what You wish me to do! Only tell me what You wish and it will be done, I swear!*

In the midst of tsahik-trance and grief, Neytiri's concentration was interrupted by a brief flash of darkness that blotted out the light. She opened her eyes reflexively, scanned for the source of the interruption – and saw the shadow of Toruk coming out of the sky, diving right at her.

Neytiri jumped to her feet and screamed. *I **have** offended the All Mother! She has sent Toruk to kill me!* A brief flash of panic cleared all other thoughts from her head.

Then her hunter's experience saw a discrepancy. Toruk was not diving in attack, he was – landing?

The great beast backwinged as it dropped into the well containing the Tree of Souls. It descended below the caldera's rim, cutting off the backlit sun so that she could see clearly. Her mind went completely blank in shock and disbelief as reality registered.

Mo'at stepped forward in equal shock. "Toruk.... Macto?"

They watched dumbstruck as Jake dismounted from the great predator's back. They saw him slide his hand up Toruk's neck, clearly at ease with the beast. Neytiri's mind stuttered as Jake patted the raptor's head. *Jake is Toruk Macto... my mate is Toruk Macto....*

Eywa's plan unfolded in her mind like dawn breaking over the horizon. *Eywa made Jake Toruk Macto. She bonded us together. She knew that he is the only one who could save the People. She knows that he needs me as much... as much as I need him....*

The enormity of the situation left her stunned even as her feet carried her forward almost of their own accord. She saw Jake walk towards her, an invisible mantle parting the crowd around him as he approached. He stopped an arm's length away from her, waiting.

Neytiri barely had the wits left to whisper, "I See you."

The lopsided smile that had won her heart appeared, making that part of her want to leap and sing in joy and relief. *O Eywa, he loves me still! After all I have said and done to him....*

She had a desperate need to explain. "I was afraid, Jake, for my people." The wonder of what Eywa had wrought crept into her voice, "I'm not, anymore."

Jake took her face in his hands as she spoke, his thumbs caressing her cheeks. He gave a great sigh of relief at her words and smiled. Neytiri realized that things were going to be all right between them. Much needed to be said; more needed to be done, but things would be all right.

Eywa had more than answered her prayers.

