

Rexx sat at the dining table paging through the itinerary and checking messages on his phone.

Matu leaned over to peer at the schedule. "So, what's next?"

"Road trip...it looks like...North. There are some driving maps." He unfolded a few pages and pointed at a highlighted route.

"Any idea what the driving time will be?"

"Looks like about two to three days to the next demonstration point. There's a list of accommodations already scheduled for us. We just have to let them know when we are a few hours away from arriving."

"Well, that's convenient."

Rexx glanced at Sendi who was quietly staring into space. "Sendi? You OK?"

"Huh?" She looked up. "Oh, yeah, I guess..." She shook her head. "I'm just trying to get my head around a few thoughts."

"Such as...?" Matu asked.

"About life...in general...and this, here, in particular. When you're born and come into life, you start learning a language and culture and other stuff, but you don't really analyze it...the process, I mean. You just do it...to survive."

"Yeah, and...?"

"But, we already did that. And, we walked out of that life. And, turned around and walked back into..." She spread her hands. "...into, this life. OK, so we know the language, most of it, at least here, and some of the culture. And..." She shrugged and pointed to the itinerary book. "...it looks like we are going to be needing to learn a lot more language and culture and stuff in order just to survive."

"Uh huh, so...?"

"I mean...it's kind of overwhelming. All this stuff...just to sell mining equipment."

"Well, it's an adventure."

"You like that, don't you?" She glared at him. "Where's our life?"

"I think..." Rexx interjected. "...that he means, kind of, taking it one day at a time."

"Yeah, that works. See what happens and how events unfold...which is how life is anyhow. Yeah, we make plans...but, things don't always turn out the way we want them to. Some do; some don't."

"Yeah, I guess you're right." She conceded. "It's just that I'm feeling so lost. Like I don't know where I'm going."

"There!" Matu pointed to the map.

"Funny." She scowled at him.

"Lightened your mood a little bit, though. Didn't I?"

"Yes." She sighed.

Rexx leaned over and patted her hand. "Don't worry. At least we're all in this together. It's not like each one of us is going at it alone."

"I do get where you are coming from, though." Matu added. "Having all of our history behind us in our memories and having been out of time to a place I never thought existed has put life in an entirely new perspective. And, yes, it is scary. But, I'm not ready to just step out of time and be whatever the Time Police has in mind. I guess I'm too conditioned to this way of being."

"Yeah, me too." Rexx agreed.

Looking glum, Sendi just nodded her head in agreement.

Rexx watched her for a few moments. "Are you having regrets?"

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"Are you wishing that we had forgotten all of this and gone back to our old lives in the future?"

She thought for a minute, then slowly shook her head. "No. I don't think I would have been satisfied with that life. I was already feeling out of place in that world. I think that's part of why I went on the time tour...to get away, and find something new."

Matu looked down and went very quiet.

Rexx noticed. "Hey! What's with you?"

He sighed. "Just wondering where I'd be if you had gone back."

"Ouch! Oh, sorry...guess I wasn't thinking." Rexx apologized. "I'm really glad you're here with us." He paused a moment. "I'm really glad we're all together...here, or anywhere."

Sendi nodded and added quietly. "Yeah, I am, too." She paused. "Hey, I'm sorry, guys. I don't mean to be so down. It's just that sometimes it all just gets to me...like, what's it all about...what are we doing...and why? You know?"

"Yeah, I know." Matu said. "It gets to me, too. You'd have thought that being out of time would have given us a bunch of answers. But, it seems that it just added more questions."

"Hmm...the more you know...the more you don't." Rexx mumbled.

"A place for growth, I guess..." Sendi started.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, maybe this is a place to learn...questions looking for answers...that kind of thing."

"So, what are our questions? I mean, I know I have questions, though, I'm not necessarily sure what they are...but, what about us? Any specifics?" Matu just shook his head in despair.

"The only thing the Time Police has been saying is that everything is about advancement. But, how do we know we are advancing or if we are even on the right path is beyond me." Sendi added.

They pulled out of the petrol station and headed onto the highway with Matu at the wheel. Rexx was looking over the route map and Sendi settled into one of the reclining seats. "Wake me if I doze off and there's something interesting ahead." She said.

"Will do." Rexx replied.

Matu focused on his driving.

After a couple of hours, Matu suddenly swerved off to the side of the road and screeched to a halt. He jumped out of the cab and bounded off to the other side of the road.

Sendi woke with a jolt. "What?...what's up?" She started.

"Don't know." Rexx leaned out toward the driver's side window. "What is he doing?"

"What? I can't see from here. The back of his seat is in the way."

"He is...wait, let me find the words...squatting and...if I interpret this correctly...having a conversation with a baboon."

"What!?" She climbed forward into the cab. "Let me see!"

She looked and then sat back down and stared blankly at REXX. She repeated. "...a conversation...with a baboon..."

"Yep. That's what it is, alright. The baboon just pointed to the road ahead and jabbered something. Matu pointed in the same direction and said something, then nodded. Then he patted the baboon on its shoulder, nodded again, and stood up. Wait, now he's coming back to the van."

REXX and SENDI sat motionless staring at Matu as he climbed back into the driver's seat.

Matu glanced from one to the other. "What?"

REXX looked at him slightly askew. "Were you, uh, were you just having a conversation with a baboon?"

"Yeah, so?"

"What do you mean, 'yeah, so'? How do you have a conversation with a...I assume, a wild baboon?"

"How do I not? I talk with all kinds of creatures."

SENDI tapped REXX on the shoulder. "I think, you're forgetting that he's from a different world than us."

"OK...yeah, right. So, what did find out during this conversation?"

"Oh, I asked how far it was until we reached where the humans meet at their watering hole."

"And, what did he say?"

"About an afternoon's journey allowing for gathering berries along the way."

SENDI cocked her head and looked skyward while REXX continued. "And what is that in our terms?"

"Oh, I'd say in about an hour or so, if the road holds out."

"...the road?"

"Yes, apparently there was some damage...broken rocks, mud...I'm guessing maybe a water main broke or a flash flood overwhelmed a culvert. He waived me down to warn me of the damage...that's why I stopped."

SENDI just shook her head and remarked. "Matu, you are amazing."

"Huh?"

"What you take for granted is worlds beyond our imagination."

"Well, you have a lot of technology that is far beyond me."

"I guess, we each have our own talents to add to this adventure." REXX surmised.

"Then, it's good that we are together." Laughed Matu.

After a few minutes on the road, SENDI said. "Matu...how did you know the baboon was signaling you to stop?"

"Uh, I don't know. I just did."

"But, how did you know it was a signal. And, how did he know to signal you?"

"Well, he waved...so, I guess, I thought I should check it out. And, he thought he should alert a fellow traveler...maybe, that's what they do."

"But, you immediately struck up a conversation with him."

"Well, I don't know how much of a conversation it was...there was a lot of mumbling and pointing and such."

"But, you gave us an explanation of your conversation."

"Hmm, yeah, I guess I did. Maybe there was some telepathy involved...I don't know. I really didn't think about it. I just somehow understood what he was trying to tell me. And, he seemed to understand what I was saying."

They parked the van in the lot and hauled their suitcases up the stairs to the next apartment. Dropping the bags in the bedrooms, Rexx and Matu collapsed into chairs at the dining table while Sendi started investigating the kitchen cabinets. After a few minutes, she joined them at the table. She slumped into the chair with a disgruntled look.

"Something wrong?" Rexx asked.

"Well, yeah. There're only a few dishes. No cooking bowls, only one skillet, but, at least, it does have a lid. Nothing to measure with except a few odd sized glasses and some coffee cups. Oh, and a few spoons and forks. Only one cooking knife and it's not very sharp."

"So?" Matu asked.

"I can't measure...how do I cook?"

"Uh, like you used to...?" Rexx ventured.

"You don't understand...cooking is chemistry...there are balances...some of this...some of that...it's not just throwing ingredients together.

"In the mountain, it was a handful of this and a pinch of that to whatever meat was in the pot." Matu shrugged.

"OK, I get it." She shook her head. "It's a challenge. I'll figure it out. It's just part of this new life. But, now, I need something to cook with...you know, food?"

"Shopping?" Rexx asked.

"Yeah..." She looked really unhappy.

"What?"

"Have you seen the signs as we drove into this country? I have no idea how to use this alphabet."

"Yeah, but, most of them are bilingual...so?"

"I'm hoping the markets are. OK, I know what meat and vegetables look like and I can deal with that...but, if it's in a package...hmm, I don't know."

"You want help?"

"Yes, please." She added with a hopeful look.

"We'll all go." Matu volunteered. "At least the phones seem to have some kind of translators."

Well, that didn't go too badly." Matu said as he set the bags on the dining table.

Sendi held up a package of dark colored meat. "I wonder what this is."

"Does it matter? Just cook it and we will eat it."

She smiled. "Sometimes you're just too easy."

He laughed. "Just desert training, I guess."

"Well, there's a bag of salt in the cupboard and that's about all that's there. I picked up a couple of packages at the store of some kind of seasoning..at least, I think it's seasoning. The picture on the label sort of looked like some sort of spice I vaguely recognize. At least, the vegetables and herbs in the green grocery were more or less recognizable...a few I've never seen, though. And, rice is always recognizable."

"So, that means...you can cook?"

She glared at him. "Yes, I can cook."

"So, all is well and we can eat." He laughed.

"Yeah." She grumped as she sat down at the table.

"What's up?" Asked Rexx.

"Well, I don't remember having to learn things this way when I was a child. New foods came along and I learned them, actually with a kind of enthusiasm. But, now, it's kind of yet another chore...something to have to learn just to get by. The fun, the adventure, the newness...it's kind of gone out of it."

"Because, we went 'away'?"

"Yeah...I guess that's it. It doesn't have the same meaning."

"I guess that's why the Time Police was talking about reincarnation...starting a brand new life without any previous knowledge...learning all over from the beginning. He's really given us a unique challenge...to get past this 'way too much knowledge' about life with little knowledge of this current life."

She looked at him intently. "Yeah...a challenge. Is he still testing us, do you think?"

"Don't know...but, I kind of think so."

She shrugged and sighed. "Well, I guess I'd better see what I can do for dinner."

"What's the issue?" Rexx asked.

"Well, these apartments we've been staying at are less than well stocked for real cooking. There hasn't been much in the line of pots and pans...and never any mixing bowls. There's been some serving dishes and a few utensils and that's about all. I think they expect their tenants to either eat out or get a lot of take-out food."

"So, it's hard?" Matu asked.

"Yes, it's hard." She acknowledged. "Here, I've got a skillet with a lid and nothing else. Not easy to do a three course meal with that...well, here goes. And bread...well, that's a real challenge as well...not even a clean flat surface to knead it on."

"Is the controlled fire OK?"

"You mean, this gas ring run off of a canister? OK, I'll say it's acceptable. But, I can only cook one thing at a time. So, that's why I've been doing a lot of casseroles...you know, one-pot meals."

"Guess I didn't realize...it been good, though."

"Thanks...I'll try to make things more interesting as I learn how to get by with fewer things."

"But, you seem to be doing OK, though."

"Thanks, you're helping me to build up my courage."

"I didn't think you lacked any courage. You've been the leader through a lot of our ventures."

"Thanks, again. I guess I've gotten good at hiding my insecurities."

"I didn't think you had any."

"Well, I guess it's like the Time Police said...we all have our deep dark secrets."

He thought for a moment. "You're right...we all have things we never want to bring to light."

Rexx snickered. "Yeah, I know I've done a lot of stupid things that I'd never want to share."

"Intentional stupid?" Asked Matu.

"No." He reflected. "More like bad judgment of what seemed the best choice at the time."

“I think we’ve all done that more often than we’d like.” Added Sendi.

“So, how do we learn to make better choices?”

“Matu, I wish I knew.” She shook her head. “But, I hope we learn soon.”