

“Karri”

Chapter 1

It had been almost a year since Hawk had his dreamscape. He had become a trusted friend, and a great asset to the crew of the Searcher. Every planet that they'd explored showed no signs of any of Hawk's people. Hawk was beginning to believe he truly was the last of his kind.

Admiral Asimov had summoned Hawk and Buck to the bridge. “Hawk, Buck, we're receiving some strange signals from that planet on the screen,” the Admiral said. “What kind of signals?” Buck asked. “They're a little garbled to understand, but it almost sounds like a distress signal.” Asimov replied. “Could you and Hawk take a shuttle down and investigate? I don't want you to take any unnecessary chances,” said the Admiral.

Buck looked at Hawk. “We won't,” Buck replied. Buck and Hawk nodded to each other and then left the bridge. On their way to the hanger, “Hawk, are you ready for another adventure?” Buck asked.

Hawk looked at Buck with a smile on his face. “This one feels different,” Hawk replied. “What makes you say that?” Buck asked.

Hawk stopped in the middle of the corridor. “I don't know. I just feel something. Something I haven't felt in a long time,” Hawk said. Buck looked at his friend with a concerned look. All the way down to the planet, Hawk was very quiet, as if in deep thought.

They landed in a wooded area not far from the town that sent the signal. As Hawk and Buck arrived at the town. The people looked at Hawk and started to whisper among themselves. “Looks like I'm the main attraction,” Hawk said in a low voice.

As they were walking down the main part of town Buck noticed a place to eat. He tapped Hawk's arm and motioned a head movement in the direction of the cafe. Hawk nodded back to confirm the direction. As they entered the establishment the people inside stopped eating and stared at Hawk and Buck. Whispering to each other for a moment, then started eating again, still keeping a eye on the newcomers. They noticed an empty table, they made their way to it and seated themselves.

Hawk felt a little uneasy being surrounded by all these strange humans that kept watching him. “I think they're trying to figure out if I would taste better fried or BBQ,” Hawk said in a soft joking voice. Hawk soon noticed a young girl waiting on tables.

She looked up and saw that Hawk was gazing at her. As she turned to leave, she bumped into one of the customers, who had been walking up behind her. The man snarled at the young girl, “Why don't you watch where you're going?”

The girl looked at the man. “I'm so sorry, sir,” she said.

The man yelled even more loudly at the poor girl. “If you can't do your job right, you shouldn't be here.”

Hawk and Buck were sitting on the edge of their seats, waiting to intervene if they needed to. At that moment a woman came running out from the back and grabbed the girl as if to protect her.

The man looked at the woman. "This child made a mess of my shoes, I want her to clean them," the man said.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, please forgive my daughter. Sit down and I'll clean them myself," the woman begged. "NO, I want your daughter to clean them, she made the mess. So she should clean them," he said in an angry voice.

The woman lowered her head and agreed. The man gave the girl his shoes. "Here," he barked. Buck and Hawk sat quietly watching.

The woman noticed Hawk, and then quickly took her daughter into the back. A few minutes later she walked over to Hawk's and Buck's table. "May I help you?" she asked with a forced smile on her face.

"We're new to your town. What would you recommend?" Buck asked.

The woman looked at Hawk with a smile. "I knew you were not from around here," she said still gazing at Hawk. "Our special today is Pork casserole, it comes with potatoes and fresh garden vegetables," she answered. Buck looked at Hawk. Hawk nodded in agreement. "Sounds good, we'll have that," Buck said.

The woman nodded. "It'll be a few minutes," she said.

Buck and Hawk watched the people around them while they waited for their meal.

A few minutes later the young girl brought out the shoes to the man. "I'm sorry for being so clumsy. Here are your shoes sir," the girl said to the man. The man nodded and then smiled at the young waitress. "I'm sorry I yelled at you the way I did," the man said. He looked at the girl and reached out to touch her face.

Without thinking, Hawk started to stand up. Buck reached up and grabbed Hawk's arm. "We don't interfere unless something happens," Buck said. Hawk seated himself again.

The young girl took a step back, smiled at the men, then she walked away.

As she was about to enter the back, she turned around and looked at Hawk. At that time she did something that really caught Hawk's attention. She was stroking her hair in a manner that only his people would do.

Hawk turned to Buck. "Did you see how she was stroking her hair?" Hawk asked in excitement.

Buck looked at Hawk. "Yes, to me it looked like she was just fixing her hair a little," Buck replied.

"NO, my people stroke our head feathers like that to keep them in place," Hawk said.

A moment later the woman came out and placed their meal in front of them. "Would you like anything else?" she asked. "Not right now, thank you," Buck replied.

Chapter 2

“One thing, where can we find the magistrate of this town?” Buck asked.

The woman told Buck that the office was two doors down on the left. “I know it’s none of my business, but why do you want to see him?” she asked.

Buck looked at the woman. “We received a message which sounded like a distress call. So we’re here to investigate. We thought he might know what it’s about,” Buck said.

“I see,” the woman said. “Well, enjoy your meal gentlemen,” she said. The woman walked away. Buck noticed that she was walking faster than she was before.

Hawk looked at Buck. “She must be in a hurry for some reason,” Hawk said .

Hawk and Buck started to eat their meal. Buck seemed to be enjoying his, but when he looked over at Hawk, he noticed that his friend had barely eaten anything.

“What’s wrong Hawk?” Buck asked.

Hawk glanced at Buck, then returned his gaze to the door that led to the kitchen. “I don’t know? There’s something about that young girl,” Hawk replied in a puzzled tone.

Buck stopped eating. “What about her?” Buck asked in a concerned voice.

Hawk didn’t take his eyes off the door. “I’m not sure. “The way she moves, her smile, also the way she strokes her hair. It’s so similar to the way of my people,” Hawk explained.

Buck grinned. “My friend, I don’t know what you are talking about. To me she looks like a young girl who has a nice smile. She also likes keeping herself looking nice,” Buck replied.

Buck paused for a moment. “You said something about how your people use to stroke their head feathers?” Buck asked.

“My people used to stroke their head feathers to separate and dry them after we bathed. Or if they got out of place,” Hawk explained. Buck looked at Hawk with a confused expression on his face. Hawk turned and faced Buck. “It’s like you humans combing or brushing your hair,” Hawk said.

“Oh, I understand,” Buck said.

“Are you ready to go to that magistrate’s office?” Buck asked. Hawk nodded. Buck looked around for the woman who had waited on them. He saw her standing against the wall writing. Buck motioned for her.

“Can I get you anything else?” she asked.

“No, just the bill for our dinners,” Buck said.

"All right," she answered. She wrote something down on the slip of paper. She then placed it on the table in front of them. "You can pay the lady by the door," she said. As she started to walk away, the young girl came out from in the back. The young girl walked up to her mother. "Yes, it's been taken care of. Don't worry," the mother told her. They both walked into the back.

Hawk and Buck looked at each other. "What was that about?" Hawk asked.

Buck picked up the bill from the table. He noticed there was two pieces of paper. One was the bill for their meals, while the other was a note from the waitress. Buck started to read the note to himself. After he finished, he handed it to Hawk. "This might be the reason why they left in a hurry," Buck said. While Hawk was reading it, Buck was looking around for the woman and her daughter. Buck saw another woman was working other tables. He walked up to her. "Excuse me, can you tell me where that other waitress went?" Buck asked.

The lady smiled softly. "She's off duty now. Is there something I can get for you?" she asked.

"Oh, no, thank you," Buck said. Buck walked back to Hawk. "What do you think?" Buck asked.

Hawk glanced at the note again. The note read: "I need your help. I can explain the signal. White house, 1 mile north of town. In 1 hour. Lola."

Hawk looked at Buck. "Looks like we have a walk ahead of us." Hawk said. They both headed toward the lady by the door to pay their bill.

Outside they looked around. They saw that the sky was getting dark with gray clouds. "We're probably going to get wet," Buck said. They started to walk towards the north side of town.

At Lola's house, Lola and her husband Marc were talking. "I know it's a long shot. But, maybe they could help us. Marc, you should have seen them, one looks just like her," Lola said.

"Are you sure they won't do her any harm?" Marc asked.

"I'm pretty sure," Lola said.

"Where is she now?" Marc asked.

"She's in her room. I think she's a little worried," Lola said. Lola looked out the window, she noticed that it had started to rain. "They're going to be wet by the time they get here."

"I'm going to make some coffee, just in case," Lola added walking into the kitchen.

"If there's one little sign that they would harm her in any way, shape or form...!" Marc informed Lola.

Lola spoke from the kitchen. "Marc, we also have to think of her. If you'd only seen how the townspeople looked at him, and he's a grown man. Can you imagine what they could do to her, if they found out? Honey, I know we were good friends with her parents, and I love you

for doing the right thing and taking her into our home. But we have to think of her safety and needs, too," Lola said.

"I know," Marc replied.

Chapter 3

“Child, come out here please,” Marc said.

The girl entered the room. “Yes father?”

“I know you are probably a little frightened, but I want you to be brave for me. We’re not going to let them know about you till we feel they can be trusted. You do know that we are doing this for your safety, don’t you?” Marc asked.

“Yes, I do, father. But, I’m a little scared,” the girl replied.

“Your mother and I would never let anyone hurt you. We love you too much,” Marc said.

“I know.” She gave her father a hug. She then walked over to her mother and gave her a hug also. “I love you both very much. And I understand why you’re doing this. It’s so the people in town don’t find out,” the girl said.

“That’s right honey. But also since one of them is like you. Maybe he can help you find any relatives that you might have.” Marc replied

The girl nodded still holding on to her mother. Just then a knock came at the door. Lola let go of her hand and slowly moved towards the front door, as if not sure she wanted to go through with it. Finally she opened the door.

Hawk and Buck looked at Lola and smiled. “Did you want to talk to us?” Buck asked. Lola smiled back. “Yes, please, come in,” she said.

Buck and Hawk entered the house. Marc stood to greet their guest. Lola escorted them into the living room. “I’m sorry, I’m Lola. This is my husband, Marc. I’m sorry I had to have you walk all the way out here. But no-one else knows about the distress signal we sent,” Lola said.

Hawk looked around the house. “Why? Are you in trouble?” Buck asked.

Lola looked at Marc and then changed the subject. “How can I forget, I’m sorry. I made some coffee, would you like some?” Lola asked.

“No, Thank you,” Buck and Hawk replied.

“Lola, you sent a priority one distress signal. Is your planet under attack?” Buck asked.

Lola, a little ashamed hung her head. “No,” she replied.

Marc got up and stood by his wife’s side. “I’m really the one who sent the signal, please don’t blame her. We are in fear for our daughter’s life,” Marc said.

Buck looked over at Hawk.

“Why do you fear for your daughter?” Hawk asked.

Marc and Lola, motioned for them to be seated. While they sat down next to each other on the couch, Marc held Lola's hand.

Buck noticed that they were afraid of something.

"Please, tell us what you are afraid of. Is someone threatening your daughter?" Buck asked.

"Marc, tell them." Lola pleaded.

"Yes, and no," Marc said. Hawk glanced at Buck a little confused.

"What do you mean 'yes, and no'?" Buck asked.

"Let me try to explain," Marc said.

"Her real father and mother were good friends and neighbors of ours. When her parents were murdered, we took her in as our own. She was only four years old when she lost her real parents. We told her the whole story when she was old enough to understand. But now we're afraid if the killers find out about her, they will come back. Please don't get us wrong, we love her with all our heart and soul. It's just getting more dangerous for her everyday," Marc said.

"Where is your daughter?" Hawk asked.

"She was a little frightened, so she's probably in her room. I'll go get her," Lola said. Lola walked swiftly to a closed door. She knocked a few times and then entered. A moment later she rushed out of the room.

"SHE'S GONE!" Lola screamed. "It looks like she took some of her clothing with her. Oh Marc... What have we done?" Lola cried, burying her face in Marc's chest, weeping.

Hawk stood up. "I'll find her."

Marc continued to hold his wife close.

"Where do you think she might have gone?" Buck asked.

"She knows the woods really well. There are a lot of places she could hide if that's what she wants to do," Marc replied. "Your friend probably won't find her because he doesn't know these woods," Marc said.

"Hawk will find her. He's a very unique person," Buck replied.

Marc could only nod as he comforted Lola.

Hawk went to the back of the house and found a room where the shutters had been opened. He could only assume that it was the girl's room. He found tracks outside the window, that were made by a small person. As he followed them he noticed that they were long in stride. As if the person had been running.

Chapter 4

Hawk picked up his pace, hoping to catch up with the girl. After about an hour, Hawk had to give up. It was starting to get dark. He wouldn't be able to see the tracks. He made his way back to the house.

"Any luck?" Buck asked.

"No, it's getting too dark," Hawk said.

"Well, we'll get a fresh start in the morning. They offered us a place to sleep," Buck said.

Lola came outside. She looked at Hawk. "You didn't find her?" she sobbed.

"No. I'm sorry," Hawk replied.

"We're going out again first thing in the morning," Buck said.

Lola nodded. "I am so sorry, you've been here for a few hours now, plus you walked all that way. You must be hungry. I'm going to fix you something to eat," Lola said. Before Buck or Hawk could refuse or say Thank you, Lola was in the kitchen.

Hawk stood on the porch, looking out towards the mountains to the north. Buck stood next to his friend.

"What are you thinking about?" Buck asked.

"Those mountains. They remind me of home. They look like the west ridge of the soaring place," Hawk replied. When Hawk was looking at the mountains, a smile came to his face.

"What are you smiling about? If it's a joke let me in on it," Buck said.

Lola interrupted, "Dinner's ready."

As they turned to go into the house, Hawk turned to Buck. "I think I know where to start looking for the girl," Hawk said.

"Where's that?" Buck asked.

Hawk turned and pointed at the mountains. "When I was following her tracks, she was heading for the mountains," Hawk said.

"Good, we'll start looking there first thing in the morning," Buck said. They went inside.

Lola had fixed a very large meal. As they were starting to eat, Buck looked at Marc and Lola.

"You never told us your daughter's name?" Buck said.

Marc and Lola looked at each other. "We are so sorry. That's right, you didn't get to meet her. Her name is Karri," Lola said. Lola soon found herself softly weeping. "Excuse me," she said. She got up from the table and walked out of the room and into the bedroom.

Buck turned to Marc. "Is she going to be all right?" Buck asked.

"She'll be okay. This is the first time Karri has run away," Marc said.

"I think she may have been a little scared of us," Buck said.

"Maybe," Marc answered.

"We think we might know where she went," Hawk said. "Has she ever gone to the mountains before?" Hawk asked.

Marc sat there in silence for a few moments.

"Yes, she has been up there before. A long time ago, I think. Her real mother and father used to take her up there all the time," Marc said. "Please, don't say anything to Lola about Karri going to the mountains. She's so worried right now as it is. She'll be lucky to get any rest tonight," Marc said.

Hawk and Buck agreed.

"Well, if you'd excuse me. I want to check on Lola, then retire for the night. Feel free to stay in the house as long as you wish. In fact it gets pretty cold at night, so just stay in here tonight. Good Night," Marc said.

"Good Night Marc. We'll find Karri, I promise," Buck said.

All Marc could do was nod. "Thank you," Marc said.

As Marc was walking past a window on his way to their bedroom, he stopped and gazed out the window. "Be safe, my darling daughter," he whispered to himself, not knowing Hawk and Buck overheard him.

"Well, we better get some rest also. We'll have a lot of walking to do in the morning," Buck said.

"I can't rest, knowing that Karri is out there alone," Hawk said.

"I know how you feel, my friend. But we can't find her in the dark, and on a mountain we don't know," Buck said. "Hawk, first thing in the morning you head out looking for Karri. I'm going to go retrieve the shuttle. Then notify the Admiral of what we've found. Then I'll join you in the mountains," Buck said.

"All right," Hawk replied.

"In the mean time, try to get some rest. Try not to worry. I'm sure she's okay. Heck, she knows this place better than we do," Buck said.

Buck laid down on the floor close to the fireplace. After only a few minutes he drifted off to sleep.

Hawk was not as lucky, he couldn't stop thinking about Karri. Was she really okay? Was she hurt or in danger? He turned, looked at Buck who was sleeping not more than 6 feet from him. "I'm not going to be able to rest as long as she's out there alone," Hawk thought to himself.

Hawk kept looking out the window, hoping to see a sign. To give him some idea of where on that mountain she might be.

Chapter 5

Karri finally made her way to the cave where her mother and father use to take her when she was younger. She put her pack down and opened it. She retrieved some matches that she had wrapped up in plastic.

“I hope these still work?” Karri said.

As she entered the mouth of the cave, she reached to her right. She found the torch that’s been there for so many years. Karri struck the match against the wall of the cave. The match sparked then lit. She cupped her hand around the flame to protect it from the breeze. She knelt down to pick up the torch. She put the match to the torch, after a few sparks and crackles the torch came to life.

“There, that’s better,” Karri said with a smile on her face. The light from the torch danced on the walls and ceiling of the cave.

In the house, Hawk was still looking out the window, unable to sleep. He looked up, and on the side of the mountain saw a flicker of light. “There you are. Now just stay there,” Hawk thought to himself. It was several hours before daybreak. Hawk watched as the light on the mountain faded.

Karri walked further into the cave. She came to the end of it. In the corner was a small pile of wood. She started gathering them and placing them in a circle of rocks that was already formed. She lowered the torch to light the wood. As with the torch, the wood started to catch fire with crackling sound.

“Now, it’ll be nice and warm in here,” she said. As the fire grew she went to the back side of the cavern. There she saw her old sleeping place was nothing but a pile of brittle sticks and dried leaves. “That won’t do,” Karri said to herself. She went back to her pack and pulled out a small blanket.

“It’s too dark to go out and gather new bedding. I’ll get a few hours of rest first. They won’t find me up here. Mom and dad don’t even know where this cave is,” Karri said. She soon started thinking about her adoptive parents. “They must be worried about me. I’ll just stay up here for a day or so, till the strangers leave. I know mom and dad just wanted to protect me, but I can’t lose another family. I WONT LOSE THEM TOO!” Karri yelled. Her voice echoed through the cave. She giggled. “I forgot, that’s why my real parents wanted me to play outside all the time,” she said.

She curled up close to the fire with her small blanket draped over her shoulders. She reached her hand up to pull the cover off her head. “There, that’s so much better,” she said. Under her covering was her soft light gray plumage. The signs of adolescence. She started to groom her soft head feathers. After a half hour or so, she yawned. “I’ll rest for awhile,” she said softly to herself. She covered up her small body with the blanket. She laid down next to the fire and soon fell asleep.

Down below, Hawk was still trying to get some much needed rest. Still sitting in the chair that he placed by the window, Hawk finally drifted off to sleep.

A few hours had passed and Karri woke up to a new day. She sat up by what was left of the fire. The charred wood was still hot. "I better gather more wood for tonight," she said. She stood and stretched. "Mmmm, it feels good to be home again," she said. She slipped on her shoes and headed for the opening of the cave. Emerging from the dark cave into the bright sunlight, she cupped her hand over her eyes. The sunshine was too bright to see things clearly at first. As her eyes adjusted to the light, she could see some storm clouds coming in from the south.

"I better hurry and get that firewood and bedding I need. It won't be long before that storm gets here." She made her way down the narrow path. In a small clearing she found some pieces of firewood. As she gathered the wood, she also started gathering some medium and large green leafs. "I'll need these to make a more comfortable bed," Karri told herself. It soon seemed that her bird instincts started in. She had to look for leafs with green stems, for good flexibility. They had to be a dark green with large leafs. Soon it seemed that her instincts lead her to the right bush to find the bedding she was looking for. "These are just right." She examined each branch, looking for the right ones. Soon she had an arm full of leafs she needed for her bedding. She made her way back to the cave.

Chapter 6

Hawk was awakened by the sunlight on his face, and voices behind him. He turned to see Marc, Lola and Buck sitting at the table. Hawk stood and walked over to them. "How long was I asleep?" he asked.

Buck looked at him and smiled. "You were still awake when I went to sleep. That was about four hours ago." Buck replied. Hawk sat down in the chair next to Buck.

"Hawk, we'll start out after Karri in a few minutes." First, he looked at Marc and Lola. "I think you better tell us the whole story about Karri. Why do you fear for her life?" Buck asked.

Marc and Lola looked at one another, then lowered their heads. Marc looked at Lola, "They deserve to know the truth about Karri. I know we agreed not to tell them until we were sure that they would not do her any harm. But, I think that they're our only hope to find her and bring her home," Marc said.

Hawk looked at Lola, "What, that she looks like me?" Hawk said.

Lola and Marc looked at Hawk with a shocked expression on their face. "How did you know?" Marc asked.

"A few things." Hawk replied. "The first one was at the diner, the way she groomed her hair. My people used to groom our head feathers in the same manner. Second, her facial features. Then the final item that really gave her away, was part of her head feathers on her neck line was showing," Hawk said.

"We are sorry we did not tell you. But, we were just trying to protect her. We don't know who you are, where you came from, or anything about you," Marc said.

Hawk and Buck glanced at each other. "My name is Captain Buck Rogers, and this is Hawk. We're from the research vessel, Searcher. I'm from Earth and Hawk is from Throm," Buck said.

"Hawk, did he say you were from Throm?" Marc asked.

"Yes, why?" Hawk asked.

Marc and Lola smiled. "Tell us Hawk, How long ago did you leave Throm?" Marc asked.

"A little over a year ago. Why do you ask?" Hawk said.

"Karri's parent's told us they came from Throm. About twelve years ago. Karri was only four years old. Her father told us that humans were taking up most of Throm. He liked humans, never had any problems with them, but said it was getting a little crowded. So he talked to a pilot to see how much it would cost to take him and his family to another planet. He said the pilot was really nice, and just asked for one thing. His mate's bracelet. She told us that it was just made out of small chips of colored stones."

“That’s all the human wanted?” Hawk asked.

“Yes, he thought it was beautiful. The stones didn’t amount to anything of value. Well, the pilot brought them here. He even went into town for them, to check things out. While he was in town, they found that mountain, and a cave of some kind. CAVE! That’s where she might have gone,” Marc said.

“Hawk, you go ahead. I’ll go get the shuttle and inform the Admiral of what we’ve found. Then I’ll bring the shuttle up to the mountains, where I’ll join in on the search,” Buck said.

Hawk nodded and headed for the door.

“Hawk, Please find her and bring her home,” Lola cried out.

Hawk turned, looked at Lola. “I won’t come back without her,” Hawk replied.

After Hawk had left, Buck turned to Lola and Marc. “If anyone can find Karri, it’s Hawk,” Buck said in a caring voice. “I’ll be back as soon as I can,” Buck informed them as he walked out the door.

Hawk walked quickly to find the place where he last seen Karri’s tracks. About 30 minutes had passed. He finally came to the area where he’d last seen Karri’s foot prints and found one of her prints in the soft ground. She was still heading for the mountain. Hawk smiled, then thought of what he told Lola and Marc: “I won’t come back without her.” “I’m going to keep that promise,” he said to himself.

The ground was still wet from the rain the day before. “If I was a human, I’d probably would have got lost by now,” Hawk chuckled. “I wonder why she ran away? Was it because she was frightened of Buck? Or me?” Hawk’s mind kept filling with questions and answers as to why Karri really ran away. “She couldn’t be frightened of me. We’re from the same ancestors,” Hawk thought.

Before long he was standing at the base of the mountain.

Chapter 7

In the cave, Karri used the large leaves to make her bed. She soon realized that she had been so busy gathering bedding, she had forgotten to gather the firewood. She headed down the narrow path leading to the small clearing where she had started gathering the firewood and she found the bundle of branches and twigs she gathered earlier.

As she was gathering up the wood, Karri noticed a large bird circling above. "I wish I could fly like that," she said. As she watched the eagle soaring above, she noticed that it kept looking down toward the ground. "I wonder what it's looking at?" she thought to herself.

She laid the firewood down in a neat bundle and she walked over to where the eagle was circling. She noticed a small furry animal lying on its side. "Oh, you poor thing," she said sadly. As she got closer the animal raised its head.

"You're still alive?" she said excitedly. As Karri inched closer to the animal she noticed that its leg was caught in a steel trap. "I have to get you out of that, somehow."

She leaned closer to see the animal. Then she stopped and started to back up slowly, looking around. She hung her head. "I'm sorry little one, I can't take any chances. You're a wolf pup. So that means your pack is probably close by," she said in a soft voice.

As she backed away, Karri heard a noise behind her, then on both sides of her. She stopped, and turned her head ever so slowly to her left, then to her right. On both sides were two very large wolves. "I think I should have stayed home," she said to herself. Slowly turning around, she saw two more wolves behind her. "I won't hurt you or your pup," she said to the wolves in front of her.

"I only wanted to help it," she said, noticing that the wolves were not growling or baring their teeth. One of the wolves in front of her slowly walked past. Karri wasn't sure what to do. "Are they getting ready to attack me?" she thought. The wolf walked over to the pup, and sat down next to it. "You must be the mother," she said. Soon the large wolf that was standing with the female walked up to Karri. Her eyes grew large. "Please, I was only trying to help," she said softly. The male wolf opened his mouth and took hold of Karri's hand ever so gently. Karri closed her eyes in fear. Soon she felt a light pull from the wolf and she opened her eyes to see that the wolf was trying to pull her in the direction of the pup.

She slowly but cautiously walked beside the wolf. As they reached the pup, the wolf let go of her hand.

She looked and noticed that the wolves had gathered around her and the pup. "I see, you want me to free the pup. I'll try," she said. She looked around for a short, thick branch. As she reached for one, the wolves started to get nervous and pace around her and in front of the pup. "I would never harm you or your pup," she said softly. Gently Karri pried the branch into the partly open jaws of the trap. With one hand she pushed one side of the trap away from the pup's leg, with the branch she pulled the other side of the trap towards herself with all her might. The trap began to open, wider and wider. Within a few seconds the pup pulled its leg out of the trap. A moment after that the branch broke and the trap snapped shut, knocking Karri backwards. She sat up and looked at the pup, which was limping towards her.

“Oh, you poor little thing. I don’t know how to set a broken leg, but my mother does,” she said softly. “I can’t take you to her until those strangers are gone, even though one of them looks like me. Maybe tomorrow. In the mean time you and your family can stay in the cave with me. I’ll put your leg in a splint, that should hold it until then.”

Karri stood up, dusted herself off. “Now, I have to pick up your pup and carry him. He shouldn’t walk on that leg,” she said to the female wolf. Karri soon found herself smiling. “I just thought of something. You don’t understand me, but maybe you can sense that I’m not going to hurt any of you.” She picked up the pup, and started walking. The wolves walked besides her, the male on one side, the female on the other side.

Karri slowly walked back to the clearing where she had started to gather firewood. She soon found the small bundle of wood. “How am I going to carry the pup and the wood at the same time?” she asked herself looking at the sky. “It’s getting dark with clouds. I won’t have time to take you to the cave, then come back to gather the firewood. I’ll just have to carry as much as I can with one arm.” She put the wolf pup down and started to pick up as much wood as she could. She turned and looked at the wolves who were sitting next to the pup watching her.

“It’s too bad you don’t understand what I’m saying. I’d ask you if you could carry your baby or help me carry firewood,” She smiled. As she was picking up the rest of firewood. She started to reach for the pup. The female wolf gently picked up the pup in her mouth.

Karri stood up with a surprised look on her face. “You do understand me, don’t you?” She asked.

Karri smiled, and started to pick up all the wood she could carry. As she started to walk up the path leading to the opening of the cave, she noticed four more wolves had started to follow. Karri soon had a big smile on her face. She saw that three of the wolves were carrying pups in their mouths, the fourth was carrying a branch. She giggled.

“Thank you, that will help a lot,” she said. They finally got to the entrance of the cave. At first the wolves hesitated, not sure if they should enter. Karri came back out to coax them in. “There’s no need to be afraid.” With some encouragement from Karri, they finally entered the cave.

Chapter 8

Hawk was slowly making his way up the side of the mountain. "Karri, where are you? I know you're up here. You've got to be," Hawk said to himself. "There's got to be a print, or a broken branch somewhere," he said. After about a half hour, Hawk found a small imprint. There wasn't much left of it but he could tell he was still on the right track. He walked a little further and found the clearing where Karri had found the wolf pup. He noticed leaves missing from a couple of the bushes. "Very good," Hawk thought, as he held a piece of branch in his hand. Hawk began looking around to see if he could find any more tracks or footprints to tell him which way Karri might have gone. It didn't take long for him to find a complete print hidden under the bush. Just as he was about to start across the clearing, he heard the shuttle. Hawk looked up to see it just coming over the ridge.

Buck landed the shuttle in a clearing not far from Hawk.

"Have you found her yet?" Buck asked when he and Hawk met up.

"No, not yet. But the prints I found show that she went in that direction," Hawk said pointing in the direction in which Karri had gone. "What did the Admiral say?"

"I told him the entire story about Karri. He said we should remain on this planet till we find her. I think he was more excited for you," Buck chuckled.

Hawk smiled.

"Besides my friend. It shows that some of your people did survive. So why are we still standing here? Let's go find that young survivor," Buck said with a smile on his face.

"Let's go," Hawk replied.

The two started walking in the direction the footprint were going. After only a short time of following the prints, Hawk grabbed Buck by the arm. "She's not alone," he said pointing at the ground.

"Looks like some kind of animal is either following her or is walking with her," Buck said.

Hawk examined the prints closer. "They are walking with her. What kind of animal is it?"

"Looks like some dog tracks, maybe wolf," Buck said.

"Wolf? She could be in danger. We have to hurry," Hawk said in a worried voice.

Hawk and Buck quickened their pace, and soon found the narrow path leading up to the cave. They both drew their weapons. "Only fire if necessary," Buck said. Hawk nodded. As they reached the mouth of the cave two adult wolves emerged growling and baring their teeth. Hawk and Buck stopped in their tracks.

"Karri, are you in there? Karri, it's Hawk and Buck. Please come out. We need to talk to you," Hawk called out. A few moments later Karri emerged from the cave.

“How did you find me?” she asked. Both of the adult wolves standing next to Karri started growling.

“Please Karri, we just want to talk to you,” Buck said.

“Are my parents all right?” she asked.

“They’re fine. They’re very worried though. Why did you run away?” Hawk asked.

Karri hung her head. “Cause I’ve already lost my real parents. I don’t want to lose my adoptive parents too,” Karri replied.

“You’re not going to lose them. We’re only here to help. Can we come in and talk to you?” Hawk asked.

Karri looked at the two wolves. “It’s all right, they’re friends. You can go back into the cave,” Karri told them. The wolves turned and walked into the cave. “Come in,” she turned and walked into the cave behind the wolves.

Buck and Hawk put their weapons away and followed Karri inside. As soon as they entered they were surrounded by wolves. The wolves circled Hawk and Buck. Karri looked at the wolves and giggled softly. “They’re not sure about you. Maybe it’s because of your weapons,” Karri said.

Hawk looked around the cave. “I see you still hold our ancestors in your heart and soul,” he said.

“Yes, I was raised by humans, but they helped me learn my parents’ and ancestors’ ways,” she explained. Karri motioned for Hawk and Buck to sit down. Hawk looked on the wall behind Karri, and noticed a chalk drawing of Make-Make.

Chapter 9

“That’s a good drawing of Make-Make,” Hawk said.

“Thank you,” Karri replied, smiling.

Hawk looked around at the wolves, who in turn were watching him.

“How did you come to be with these wolves?” Buck asked.

Karri told them how she found the injured wolf pup, and how the adult wolves trusted her enough to free the pup from the steel trap.

“I’m not very good in medicine. I was going to take the pup to my mother after you left,” Karri said hanging her head.

“Karri, what made you think we were going to take you away from your parents?” Hawk asked.

“My mother and father were afraid of what the townspeople might do if they knew what I really looked like. So they asked me to wear this human hair when I was in town or if company came. They explained to me how some humans are. Mother began to get more frightened, so she asked father to send that distress signal. They sat me down, and told me what they did and why.” Karri started to weep. “I don’t want to leave my parents,” she cried covering her face with her hands. Hawk moved closer to her.

“Karri, we’re not going to take you from your parents, I promise,” Hawk assured her.

Karri looked deep into Hawk’s eyes. She saw his kind and truthful soul. Karri reached over and gently touched Hawk’s cheek, then she suddenly withdrew her hand. “Oh, I’m so sorry Hawk,” Karri said in a sympathetic voice. “You’ve lost your mate, haven’t you?” Karri asked.

“How did you know?” Hawk replied with a surprised look on his face.

“I see it in your eyes,” Karri said.

“Yes, I lost my mate about a year and a half ago. But how could you know I lost my mate just by looking into my eyes? There’s only a few of our people that could look into our souls through our eyes. My beloved mate was one of them. In fact, her whole family had that gift,” Hawk said.

“Hawk, it’s getting late. We should head back down the mountain,” Buck interrupted.

Karri looked at Buck. “It wouldn’t be safe to go down this mountain in the dark. It would be safer in the morning.”

Buck nodded. “I suppose your right Karri. After all, we don’t know this mountain as well as you do,” Buck said.

Karri looked at Hawk. “You’re more than welcome to stay here for the night,” Karri said.

Hawk looked at Buck, then at Karri.

“Thank you, we’d appreciate it. That way we can talk and try to come up with a plan on how to keep you safe,” Hawk said with a smile.

Karri looked at Hawk and Buck. “Where are my manners. You must be hungry after that walk up the mountain. I don’t have much, just some fruit and bread, but you’re more than welcome to it,” Karri said.

“Thank you Karri, that sounds good,” Hawk said with a smile.

Buck stood up and looked around the cave. He noticed some writing on one of the walls above what was left of a large bedding area. He walked over to the wall accompanied by a couple of the wolves. As he was reading what was on the wall the wolves started to growl and bare their teeth. Buck slowly backed away.

Karri walked over to Buck. “I’m sorry, they think you were going to do something to the wall. They consider this cave their home now,” Karri said.

Buck looked at the wolves. “I would never hurt you, Karri, or anything in this cave,” Buck said to the wolves.

Karri walked over to the wall, gently kissed her finger tips and placed them on the words.

“If you don’t mind me asking. What does it say?” Buck asked.

Karri looked at Buck and sighed. “It’s a prayer for my real parents. Hoping that Make -Make would free their souls so they can fly again,” Karri said. Karri’s eyes started to swell with tears. She closed her eyes as if trying to stop the tears from coming, but it was too late and she began to weep softly. Buck put his arms around Karri’s shoulders and she put her head against his chest. Within seconds all the wolves were circling Buck. Hawk jumped to his feet and pulled his weapon.

“No Hawk, they think I’m hurting Karri,” Buck said. Karri lifted her head, looked on both sides of Buck. She turned and looked at the wolves, then at Hawk.

Chapter 10

“Please, Hawk, put your weapon away,” Karri cried as she backed away from Buck. She looked at Buck’s face. “I am so sorry Buck,”

Soon the wolves turned and walked over to the four pups on the other side of the cave.

Hawk put his weapon back into the holster and walked over to Buck. “Are you all right?” he asked.

Buck looked at Hawk, “Yes, I’m all right, but I’m more worried about Karri. What can we do to help her?”

Hawk looked at Karri who was still trying to hide her tears.

“Karri, may I look at the wall?” Hawk asked. Karri walked up to Hawk and Buck. She took their hands in hers, then walked them over to the wall. This time the wolves just sat and watched. “May I read it?” Hawk asked. Karri nodded her head in approval.

As Hawk was reading the writing his expression changed. He turned to Karri and Buck.

“Karri, is this your mother’s and father’s true names?” Hawk asked.

“Yes,” she answered

Hawk walked away from the wall with Buck following close behind.

“Hawk, What is it? Are you okay? Looks like you’ve seen a ghost,” Buck said with concern.

Hawk turned and looked at Buck. “I don’t believe it,” Hawk replied.

Hawk turned to Karri. “Karri, how long ago did your mother and father leave Throm?”

“We left Throm about 12 years ago. Why?” Karri asked.

Soon Hawk’s expression turned to a smile.

“Okay, Hawk, tell me what’s going on ?” Buck asked.

Hawk walked over to Karri. “Your parents were Kala and Falcon, right?” Hawk asked.

“Yes Hawk,” she replied.

Hawk turned to look at Buck. Who was standing by the fire ring with a confused look on his face. He then turned to face Karri again.

“Karri, I think you better sit down. We need to talk,” Hawk said. Karri, Buck, and Hawk sat down next to the fire.

“What is it Hawk?” Buck asked.

“First I have to make sure,” Hawk replied.

“Karri, did your mother have any marks or scars on her face?” Hawk asked.

Karri thought for a few minutes. “It’s been a long time. But, yes, I think she had a small scar above her left eye. Also a small scar on the left side of her neck. Why?” Karri asked.

Hawk was getting more excited. “Now Karri, do you remember any of your mother’s family? It’s very important,” Hawk asked.

“I remember my mother talking about her little sister a lot. Does that help?” Karri replied.

Hawk stood up, walked back over to the wall. He pulled off his glove, then gently put his hand on the names. He then turned to face Karri and Buck.

“Karri, you better sit back down,” Hawk informed her. Karri still facing Hawk slowly sat back down by the fire.

“What’s wrong Hawk?” Karri asked.

“Nothing is wrong. In fact everything is great,” Hawk said walking over to Karri then sitting down next to her.

Buck sat across from Hawk confused, but waiting patiently.

Hawk gently took Karri’s hand in his. “Karri, let me tell you a little about my mate,” Hawk said.

Hawk started to tell Karri about Koori, but didn’t say Koori’s name. He talked about how they met, where they lived, also what happened on Throm. Karri’s eyes grew big when Hawk told her that humans had slaughtered all of their people. Karri looked across at Buck. “No, Karri, Buck had nothing to do with the killings,” Hawk informed her. “They were just men that didn’t care about others.”

Hawk continued to tell Karri about how he lost his mate. “After my mate crossed over, I wanted to die also. I tried everything to get Buck to kill me. But he wouldn’t do it. At first I was angry with him for not easing my pain. But when Buck stood up for me at the trial that would have sentenced me to death for what I’d done, I realized that not all humans are cruel,” Hawk looked over at Buck. “In fact Buck is one of a kind, I trust him with my life,” Hawk informed her.

Karri looked over at Buck, then turned back to Hawk. “If you can trust a human that much after what happened to our people, and your mate, he must be a true friend,” Karri said with a smile.

“He is,” Hawk replied.

Karri continued to study Hawk. The minute Hawk turned his head to look at her, she would drop her gaze to the fire ring. Hawk continued to tell Karri of their search for others of his kind.

Chapter 11

“Hawk, why did you want to know so much about my real parents? And why did you tell me about your mate?” Karri asked.

Hawk looked at Buck

“I’ll go out and find some more firewood,” Buck said, his eyes showing he understands.

Karri looked at Buck then turned her eyes back to Hawk. “Please, Hawk, if you know something about my family that I don’t, I need to know,” Karri cried.

Hawk’s eyes met hers. “Karri, my mate’s name was Koori. She was your mother’s little sister. Your father was my best friend on Throm. I’m sorry I didn’t tell you sooner. But I had to make sure. Karri, I’m your uncle,” Hawk revealed.

Karri’s expression went from fear to jubilation within seconds. “You’re my uncle?” she asked.

“Yes, I am,” Hawk replied.

“You mean, I still have family?” she cried.

“Yes,” Hawk said softly.

Karri jumped up, went over to Hawk, throwing her arms around his neck.

Hawk embraced a living relative for the first time since all his people were killed over a year ago.

Karri sobbed deeply, burying her face in Hawk’s chest. The wolves gathered around them and started to howl as if to rejoice in a family reunion. Their howling echoed in the cave.

Seconds later Buck ran into the cave with his weapon drawn. “Hawk, what’s going on?” As Buck got closer to Hawk, he could see Karri holding Hawk sobbing.

“I’m all right,” Hawk said.

Karri looked up. She released Hawk’s neck from the embrace. “Buck, I have family,” she cried.

Buck looked at Hawk with a confused expression on his face.

“Buck, remember I said I wanted to make sure first,” Hawk said.

“Yes,” Buck said softly.

“It turns out that Karri is Koori’s older sister’s daughter,” Hawk said with a smile.

“Really? That’s great. I’m so happy for you, my friend,” Buck said smiling.

A few minutes later, the wolf pup with the injured leg hobbled over to Karri. It started to bark at her as if trying to get her attention. Karri looked down at the pup. "Oh, I'm sorry little one. I didn't forget about you," She bent down to pick up the pup. "Now, let's put a new bandage on that leg," Karri told the pup.

Hawk looked at Karri. "You're just like your aunt. She could never turn away an injured animal," Hawk said jokingly.

Karri smiled. "Can you tell me more about Koori and the rest of our people? But mostly my parents?" Karri asked.

"Of course. But we'll talk about it the morning. You need to get some rest," Hawk said.

"Oh uncle, I'm too excited to sleep. Please tell me some more," Karri pleaded.

Hawk looked at Buck.

All Buck could do was smile and shrug his shoulders.

Hawk knew Karri was excited about finding out that she was not alone anymore. So was he, but he also knew that she must be exhausted.

"Karri, we'll fix the pup's leg, then you need to get some rest. Tomorrow we'll take you home. Then together we'll try to figure out a way for you to be safe," Hawk said.

Karri's smiling face turned to a frown. "You're not going to leave me, are you?" Karri asked.

"We'll talk tomorrow. Now get some rest," he said with a smile. "Good night, Karri."

"Good night," she said.

The injured wolf pup laid down beside her. Soon the rest of the pack followed. They encircled her, as they did to protect their own young. The Alpha male and female laid down to rest by Karri's head, and did not go to sleep till the rest of the pack and Karri did.

"We're going to have a problem in the morning," Buck said.

"Why's that?" Hawk asked.

"How do we tell Karri that the wolves cannot go home with her?" Buck asked.

"You're right, we do have a problem," Hawk said looking at Karri.

"If we try to take her, they might attack, thinking we are going to harm her," Buck explained.

"Yes, That's true. But we can't take them with us either," Hawk said.

"You said that Karri was like Koori. That she used to bring animals home all the time," Buck began.

“Yes, every time I came home from patrol on Throm. She would have an orphaned animal of some kind there with her,” Hawk chuckled. “Why did you ask about that, Buck?”

“Well, I was wondering, how did you get Koori to give up the animals?” Buck asked.

Hawk turned, looked at Buck then turned his eyes back on Karri. “I didn’t. She won every time,” Hawk said with a smile.

“Hawk, in the morning I’m going to take the shuttle and go get Karri’s parents. I’ll bring them up here and let them see that she’s all right. Maybe between all of us, we can figure out how to solve this problem,” Buck said.

“Good idea, Buck. In the meantime, I can tell Karri more about our family,” Hawk replied.

Chapter 12

As daylight approached, the sun started to reach inside the cave.

Karri opened her eyes and saw that all the wolves were still asleep around her. She slowly got up, trying not to wake them, then she stretched and looked around. She saw Hawk sitting by the opening of the cave.

“Good morning uncle,” Karri said with a smile.

“Good morning Karri . Did you sleep well?” Hawk asked.

“Oh yes,” she said. Karri looked around. “Where’s Buck?” she asked.

“He’s gone to get your parents,” Hawk replied.

“Oh, is he going to bring them up here to the cave?” she asked.

“Yes, we need to figure out what we can do to help, so you won’t need to wear that human hair anymore,” Hawk said.

“I already know what I want to do,” Karri said with a smile.

“What is that?” Hawk asked.

“I want to go with you, uncle,” she said.

“What about your parents?” Hawk asked, with a surprised look on his face.

“They can come with us,” Karri said.

Hawk smiled. “What would you do on a research vessel?” Hawk asked.

“I don’t know. But at least we’d be together,” Karri answered.

Hawk’s heart started to melt, as it did for Koori. “How can I leave her behind?” he thought to himself.

“Uncle Hawk, if I can’t go with you up to the Searcher, then you will stay here with me, right?” she asked.

Before Hawk could answer her he heard the shuttle’s engines. “Karri, your parents are here. Let’s go greet them,” Hawk said.

“They’re here already?” Karri asked in an excited voice.

Again, before Hawk could reply, Karri was running down the path. She stopped, turned around and yelled, “Come on, Uncle!”

Hawk just smiled. "I'm coming," he said. Hawk started down the path. He soon caught up with her. Karri looked at Hawk. She smiled and took his hand in hers. Hawk gazed into Karri's big brown eyes, smiled then gave her small hand a gentle squeeze. "Come on, your parents are waiting," he said. They walked down the path together, hand in hand. As they neared the field where the shuttle had landed, Karri saw her parents step off it. "Mom, Dad!" she yelled in delight, waving with her free hand. She released Hawk's hand and started running to greet her parents, running right into the arms of her mother and father.

"We've missed you so much," Lola said sobbing, while Marc was kissing Karri's forehead.

"Oh Father, I'm fine," Karri said. Then she looked at Buck. "Did you tell them?" Karri asked.

"No Karri, I thought you would like to tell them," Buck replied.

"Tell us what?" Lola asked.

Karri had a big smile on her face. She ran back to Hawk, who was standing back so Karri could be with her parents. Karri took Hawk's hand again. Then she walked Hawk over to Lola and Marc. They watched them approach with a puzzled look on their face.

Karri still held Hawk's hand. "Mom, Dad, I have some great news. Hawk told me something that will make us all happy," she said.

"What is it Karri?" Lola asked.

Karri stood there for a moment smiling.

"Mom, Dad. I found out that I still have a living relative. You won't believe who it is." She paused for a few seconds. "It's Hawk!" Karri cried. "His mate's name was Koori. Mom, Dad, that was my mother's sister's name," Karri squealed in excitement.

Lola and Marc looked at Hawk. "Is that true Hawk?" Marc asked.

Hawk was almost as excited as Karri. "Yes," Hawk replied with a smile on his face. "Karri's mother's name was Kala, which was my mate's sister's name. Her father's name was Falcon. He was my best friend on Throm. They left while I was away," Hawk said.

"We are so happy for you two, knowing that you are related. I guess one good thing did come out of all this though," Marc said.

"What is that Marc?" Hawk asked.

Marc turned his head, then smiled towards Karri.

Hawk followed Marc's gaze and understood. "I agree with you Marc. Something very special came out of us meeting. I found out that I still have family, and Karri found out she had a relative," Hawk said with a smile.

Soon Karri heard a small bark behind her. She turned and saw the injured pup limping towards her. She quickly walked over to it, picked it up, then walked over to her mother. "Mother, can you fix the pup's leg? I found it caught in a steel trap when I came up here. I did the best I could, but he needs more care than I could give him," Karri said.

Lola looked at Karri's pleading eyes. "You know I never could say no to that look," Lola giggled. "I'll see what I can do for it."

Marc looked at the pup. "Is that a wolf pup?" he asked.

Just as Karri was about to answer him, he grabbed her and pushed her behind him.

"Father!" Karri yelled.

"What's wrong?" Lola asked.

"Wolves!" he yelled, pointing to the rest of the pack that had silently approached while they were talking.

"Father, they won't hurt you. They're my friends," Karri said.

"It's true Marc," Hawk said. "I've seen those wolves protect her. When Buck and I first found her, they were ready to attack us, but when Karri came out and told them it was all right, they went back into the cave. They will do anything she asks."

Marc looked at Lola. "What do you think?" Marc asked.

"Oh Marc, look at this pup's cute face. If Karri said they wouldn't hurt us, I believe her. Besides, if they were going to attack us, they would have done it before I took the pup from Karri," Lola said. Lola looked closely at the pup's leg. "Karri, you did a very good job with the wrapping. I'm very proud of you. Its leg is broken, but you set it perfectly. Let's get back to the house so I can see what I have to make a cast with," Lola said.

Karri looked at Hawk and smiled. "Are you coming, Uncle?" she asked.

"Yes, I'll be down shortly," Hawk replied.

"Mother, Father, I'd better go let the mother wolf know that we're going to take the pup with us, so we can fix its leg," Karri said.

"By all means, yes. Tell them we are not going to hurt it. We just want to help," Lola said.

Karri walked over to the wolves, knelt down by the mother wolf and started to talk to her.

"It's amazing how the wolves have gathered around her, as if they are really listening to her," Marc said.

"They are listening to her. They also understand her," Hawk informed Marc.

Karri stood up and walked back to her mother. “They un derstand, mother. In fact, they’ll be coming with us,” she said.

“We’ll meet you down at the house. We’ll try to figure out a plan for Karri’s safety,” Hawk said.

Karri, Lola, Marc, and the wolves started down the mountain side heading for home.

Buck looked at Hawk. “Why are you letting them walk? We have enough room in the shuttle to take them and the wolves to the house,” Buck reminded his friend.

“They need to spend some time together, just in case,” Hawk replied.

“In case of what, Hawk? What are yo u thinking? You’re not thinking of taking her with us, are you?” Buck asked.

Hawk looked at Buck. “If it comes down to it, yes,” Hawk said.

“Hawk, she has a family,” Buck said.

“Yes, a human family. But that’s not the reason why,” Hawk said

“Then why?” Buck asked.

“Just in case the townspeople don’t accept her. I won’t leave my only living relative in danger. Come on, it is time to go to the house and try to figure something out,” Hawk said.

Chapter 13

On the way back to the house Hawk was very quiet.

“Hawk, what if the townspeople except her the way she is?” Buck asked.

Hawk didn't say a word, he just kept looking out the window.

As they approached the house, Hawk saw Karri waving from the far side of the field. Karri started to run across the field to meet the shuttle. The wolves stayed back with Lola because of the noise the shuttle made. Buck landed the shuttle close to the house. Hawk didn't hesitate opening the door. As Hawk stepped out he was greeted with open arms.

“Uncle,” she whispered.

“We all have to sit down and talk,” Hawk said.

They all walked into the house, including the wolves. Marc watched the wolves as they entered. “Do they have to come in?” Marc asked.

“Oh father, they just want to be with the pup, that's all,” Karri replied.

“I hope there's something in the first aid kit we can use to fix this cute puppy's leg. Here Marc, hold the pup for a few minutes while I get some bandages from the kitchen,” Lola said, handing the pup to Marc. Lola went into the kitchen to get the first aid kit.

Marc took hold of the pup. “Well, hurry up, I don't like holding the pup while the adults are in here. They...”

Before he could finish his sentence, the pup started licking his face.

“Stop that, that tickles,” Marc said, laughing.

But the pup didn't listen. It kept licking his face repeatedly. Soon Marc was laughing so hard that he had to sit down.

Lola came out from the kitchen. She saw Marc sitting in the chair laughing so hard his face was turning red.

“All right you two,” Lola said, laughing. She reached down to take the pup from Marc. But before the pup left Marc's lap, it gave him one more good lick.

“Marc, come sit at the table, we need to figure something out to keep Karri safe,” Lola said.

“All right,” Marc said, still laughing.

Everyone seated themselves at the table.

“Our main concern is how are the townspeople going to react when they see Karri?” Hawk said.

“Karri and I saw how they reacted to you when you came into the restaurant, Hawk. That’s what frightens me,” Lola said.

“I agree, who’s to say what they would do to her, if you or Marc were not around,” Hawk said.

“Marc, do you have any ideas?” Lola asked, glancing over at Marc.

“I need to know something from Hawk first. Can you take Karri with you if things don’t turn out right?” Marc asked.

Hawk looked at Buck, then turned to Marc. “Yes, we can take her with us. If, and only if things don’t work out here,” Hawk replied.

“Okay then, I say we just go into town and see what happens,” Marc said.

Hawk looked at Karri. “Are you up to that?” Hawk asked.

Karri looked deep into Hawk’s eyes. “Yes uncle, I am,” she said.

“All right, tomorrow morning we’ll all go into town,” Hawk said.

Lola glanced over at Marc. “Honey, I’m still worried,” Lola said in a concerned voice.

“Don’t worry, Hawk is here, he won’t let anyone hurt Karri,” Marc replied.

During their talk, Lola had put a light cast on the pup’s leg.

“Oh my,” Lola said.

“What’s wrong mother?” Karri asked.

“You must be hungry, you haven’t eaten that much for a few days. I’m going to bring in dinner. I’ve prepared a nice meal. Hawk, Buck, you will stay for dinner, won’t you?” Lola asked.

Before Buck could answer, “We’d love to,” Hawk said smiling.

Buck looked at Hawk, then smiled. “That would be nice, thank you,” he said.

As they sat around the table, Karri noticed the wolves had gathered by the door. She got up from the table, and walked over to the wolves.

“Is it time for you to go? I understand,” She opened the door, then knelt down. All the wolves, one by one licked her face as they went out the door. The last to leave was the Alpha male and Alpha female with the pup with a cast on its leg. Karri picked up the pup, kissed it on the top of its head then she put it back down. “I will,” Karri replied. The last of the wolves walked out the door. She closed the door and returned to the table.

“What was that about?” Marc asked.

Karri looked at Hawk, then to Marc. “Oh, they told me it was time for them to return to the mountain. They told me to be careful, they also asked me to tell you thank you, for taking care of their baby,” Karri said.

Hawk smiled.

Lola entered the room carrying a large platter full of dishes. She started to set the table. “Karri, could you please bring in the glasses and silverware. Marc, please bring in the roast, potatoes and vegetables,” Lola asked.

Hawk stood up to go help Lola. “No Hawk, you’re our guest, sit down and relax,” Lola said with a smile.

Chapter 14

After everyone had eaten. Lola started to clear the table. "May I help you, mother?" Karri asked.

Lola smiled. "All right dear, you can finish clearing the table and I'll start washing the dishes," Lola said.

Karri proceeds to finish clearing the table. "Are you done uncle?" she asked.

"Yes Karri, thank you," Hawk replied.

Marc, Hawk and Buck got up from the table. "Let's go outside so we won't be in the women's way," Marc said.

Karri finished clearing the table, she went into the kitchen to help her mother with the dishes.

Lola noticed how cheerful Karri was. "I see you're happy again," Lola said.

"Oh yes, mother, now I have a complete family," Karri said joyfully.

"Well you know honey, Hawk might not stay here. And you might not be able to go with him," Lola said.

"I know mother. But, now I know I have a relative, like me," she said.

Lola smiled. "Are you ready for tomorrow?" she asked.

"Yes mother, I am. I'm tired of hiding and living like a human," Karri said. Karri soon realized what she had said.

She turned to face her mother. "Oh mother, I'm sorry. I didn't mean it that way. It's just that I want to be me. I'm proud of who and what I am," Karri looked at her mother. "Forgive me?"

Lola looked through her tear filled eyes at Karri. "Oh honey, there's nothing to forgive, I understand. There's nothing wrong with wanting to be who you really are. In fact, I'm all for it. It's about time we showed those townspeople who you really are," Lola replied.

Karri embraced her mother. "Mother, no matter what happens, remember I love you and father very much," Karri said while embracing her mother.

"You've grown up so fast," Lola said while she held Karri in her arms.

Marc walked into the kitchen. "Am I interrupting something?" he asked.

Lola and Karri wiping the tears from their eyes. "No dear, do you need something?" Lola asked.

"Hawk wants to talk to all of us. He has an idea for tomorrow," Marc said.

“All right dear, we’re coming,” Lola replied.

With Lola and Karri beside him, they walked into the living room. Buck and Hawk stood as they entered the room. Karri smiled, then walked over to Hawk. They all sat down at the table.

“We would like you to go to town early tomorrow morning. Talk to the magistrate, tell him everything about Karri. That way we’ll have some control over the people. With him being there they might listen to you. Buck and myself will be going up to the Searcher to retrieve my ship. I would like Karri to stay here while you’re in town. When I get back, I’ll pick her up and bring her myself. Just to be on the safe side,” Hawk said.

Lola looked at Hawk. “Do you think there will be any trouble?” she asked.

“I doubt it. This way Karri and I will come in together. Just in case we do need to get out fast,” Hawk replied.

Karri looked at Hawk with her big brown eyes. “How long will it take you uncle?” she asked.

“Not long, don’t worry,” Hawk said.

“Can I come with you to get your ship?” she asked.

Karri looked at Marc. Marc nodded. “It’s okay with me, if Hawk don’t mind,” Marc said.

Hawk looked over at Buck. “What do you think Buck?” Hawk asked.

“I don’t see why not. We can inform the Admiral on our way up to the Searcher that we are bringing a guest up,” Buck replied.

Karri looked at Buck. “Oh, thank you Buck,” she said excitedly.

“Now you better get some rest. Tomorrow is going to be a big day,” Hawk said.

“All right uncle. I’ll see you in the morning. Good night,” Karri said.

“Good night Karri,” Hawk said with a smile.

Karri got up, went over to Lola and Marc. “Good night mother, good night father,” as she gave them both a hug. She started to walk towards her bedroom. She stopped, turned around and ran back to Hawk. “I love you, uncle,” Karri said.

Hawk gazed at Karri. “I love you too, Karri,” Hawk replied.

Karri looked over at Buck. “Good night Buck,” she said with a smile.

“Good night Karri.” Buck said in return.

“Now young lady, you’ve said all your good nights. You go to bed and get your rest,” Lola told her.

“Yes mother,” Karri said as she went to her bedroom. She smiled and waved as she closed the door.

Lola and Marc turned to Hawk. “Thank you Hawk, for everything,” Marc said.

“Don’t thank me yet. Let’s see how tomorrow goes first,” Hawk replied.

“Well, we’re going to call it a night also. Feel free to sleep here tonight if you like. No doubt Karri will be up bright and early, and ready to go,” Marc said.

“Thank you Marc. We’ll talk in the morning on what time we’ll meet in town,” Buck said.

“Good idea. Well, good night,” Marc said.

“Good night Lola, good night Marc,” Hawk said.

Lola and Marc went into their bedroom and closed the door.

“Do you think Karri is ready for this?” Buck asked.

“I hope so. I’m hoping it’s not going to be hard for the townspeople to accept her. But, we should talk to the Admiral anyway, just to be on the safe side,” Hawk said with a concerned look on his face.

Chapter 15

Bright and early the next morning Karri came out of her room.

“Good morning uncle, good morning Buck,” she said in a cheerful voice.

“Good morning Karri,” Hawk and Buck replied.

“When are we going to leave?” she asked.

“In a little while. We have to talk to your parents first,” Hawk said.

“Are they up yet?” Karri asked.

The bedroom door opened. Marc walked out first followed by Lola.

“Good morning everyone,” Lola said.

“Good morning,” Buck replied.

“I’m going in to make some breakfast and coffee,” Lola said.

“I’ll help you, mother.”

“Good, come along. We’ll let the men discuss things,” Lola said.

Karri followed her mother into the kitchen.

Marc watched as they left. After they were in the kitchen, Marc turned to Hawk and Buck.

“Tell me the truth Hawk. Is this going to be dangerous? I refuse to put Karri in any kind of danger,” Marc said.

“Marc, I’m not going to lie to you. There could be some danger. Depends on how the townspeople react to Karri. Now, I need to ask you something. If things don’t work out with the humans, are you and Lola willing to let go of Karri, and allow her to come with me?” Hawk asked.

Marc lowered his head.

“Hawk, if it’s a choice between losing my daughter to the townspeople, or you, I wouldn’t hesitate a minute. I know Karri would be safe with you and Buck. So yes, we are willing to let Karri go with you, if it comes to that,” Marc said with tears in his eyes.

Hawk and Buck nodded.

“How do you think Lola would handle it?” Buck asked.

“It will tear her to pieces. But, she’ll feel a lot better knowing that Karri is safe. And with one of her own kind. Which happens to be a relative,” Marc said trying to smile.

The kitchen door opened. Karri came out carrying a large tray full of dishes, glasses, cups and silverware.

Hawk jumped up.

“Let me help,” Hawk said.

“No, thank you uncle. This is a woman’s job,” Karri said with a smile.

Hawk sat back down.

“Where did she learn that?” Hawk asked.

“I don’t know. I know she didn’t learn it from Lola. Lola is always telling her that a relationship is 50/50,” Marc replied.

“Huh, maybe it’s her instincts? With my people, the women did do most of the cleaning. But if they had mates, and her mate really cared for her, he would be willing to help,” Hawk said.

“Really? If some of us human males would help their mates, the women would be a lot happier,” Marc chuckled.

Hawk smiled. As he watched every move Karri made while she set the table.

“Hawk, what are you thinking about?” Marc asked.

“I was just thinking about how I felt when I lost my whole village and my mate. How alone I was. For almost two years I’ve been searching for others of my kind. Then to come here and find a lone survivor like myself. Now I’m more determined than ever to find more of my people,” Hawk said.

Karri came in carrying some large platters of food.

“Breakfast is ready,” she announced.

“We’ll talk more over breakfast,” Marc said.

Hawk nodded.

Everyone sat down at the table for the last time together.

“Everything looks great,” Buck said.

“Why, thank you Buck,” Lola replied.

Karri took her seat next to Hawk.

“Karri, after breakfast we’ll leave,” Buck said.

“All right uncle Buck,” she said with a giggle.

Buck looked at Karri and smiled.

“No one’s called me uncle Buck for a very long time,” Buck said.

“Is it okay if I call you uncle?” Karri asked.

“It would make me very happy, Karri,” Buck replied.

All Hawk could do was smile.

After they had eaten, Lola started to clear the table.

“It will take us about one hour to get to the Searcher, another hour to fuel, then an hour back. I think during that fueling time, if Karri would like, Hawk could take her on a quick tour of the Searcher,” Buck said.

“Oh, I’d like that very much. Please, uncle?” Karri begged.

Hawk gazed into Karri’s brown eyes.

“Of course, but only a short tour,” Hawk replied.

“Hawk, I think it would be wise to bring Wilma and a few security guards back with us. Just for security reasons,” Buck said.

“Good idea. That way Karri will be protected just in case,” Hawk replied.

“Who is Wilma?” Karri asked.

“She’s the head of security,” Buck said.

“A woman in charge of security. I would really like to meet her,” Karri said excitedly.

“You will. Now help your mother in the kitchen. Buck and I will get the shuttle ready,” Hawk said.

“All right uncle.”

After Karri had gone into the kitchen, “Is extra security necessary?” Marc asked.

“It’s only for extra security. There’s a lot of people in town. Hawk and I will not be able to watch behind us and in front us at the same time,” Buck replied.

“I understand,” Marc said.

The kitchen door opened. Karri and Lola entered the living room.

“Are we ready to go?” Karri asked.

“Yes, we’ll leave in a few minutes,” Buck said.

Buck stood up and went out the door. He entered the shuttle and started up the engines. He then did a complete engine check.

“What is uncle Buck doing?” Karri asked curiously.

“He’s running a check on the shuttle. We do it every time before we leave,” Hawk said.

“Karri, are you sure you want to do this?” Marc asked.

“Yes father, I really do. I don’t want to hide anymore,” Karri said.

Buck entered the house.

“Okay, we’re ready to go. Are you ready?” Buck asked.

Karri walked over to Lola and gave her a hug and a kiss. She then walked over to Marc and gave him a hug and kiss also.

“I’ll be back soon. Mother, father, I’ll be okay. Hawk won’t let anything happen to me, Right uncle?” Karri asked.

“You have my word,” Hawk replied.

Lola and Marc walked them to the door.

“We’ll see you in town in three hours. Remember, go to the magistrate’s office. Tell him everything,” Hawk said.

Lola and Marc nodded and waved.

Buck, Karri and Buck boarded the shuttle and the door closed.

Chapter 16

“Captain Rogers to Searcher.”

“Yes Buck, how are things going?”

“Fine Admiral, we’re on our way back to the Searcher to retrieve Hawk’s ship.”

“Understood. Is there a problem on the planet?” Admiral Asimov asked.

“No Sir, just a little precaution measure. Is Wilma there with you?”

“Yes Buck, I’m here,” Wilma answered.

“Wilma, could you and a few security guards return to the planet with us?” Buck asked.

The Admiral nodded his head.

“Yes Buck. What’s the problem?” Wilma asked.

“Hopefully none, just a safety matter. Oh Admiral, we’re bringing up a guest,” Buck said.

“Who is this guest, Buck?” Asimov asked.

“Her name is Karri. She’s the one we were looking for on the mountain,” Buck replied.

“The other bird person?” The Admiral asked.

“Yes, sir,” Buck said.

“I’ll meet you all in the hanger,” Asimov replied.

“Rogers out.”

On the rest of the way to the Searcher Karri, Hawk and Buck talked.

“How long have you been on the Searcher uncle Hawk?” Karri asked.

“It’s been almost two years,” Hawk replied.

“How about you, uncle Buck?”

“To tell you the truth, Karri, I’m not sure. I guess it’s been about four years,” Buck replied.

“How much further?” Karri asked anxiously.

Buck and Hawk laughed.

“We’re almost there,” Hawk said.

“Uncle? Are my mother and father going to be all right? I’m worried about them down there alone, having to talk to that Mr. Finney,” Karri said in a concerned voice.

“Your parents will be fine Karri. Who is this Mr. Finney?” Hawk asked.

“Mr. Finney is the town magistrate. Uncle Hawk, uncle Buck, you saw him at the restaurant. He’s the one I bumped into,” Karri said.

“The man that got upset at you for messing up his shoes?” Buck asked.

“Yes uncle, that’s the one,” Karri replied.

Hawk and Buck looked at each other.

“Karri, that was the man that tried to touch your face, right?” Hawk asked.

“Yes uncle.”

Hawk soon got a little irritated, thinking of what that human tried to do.

“Uncle Buck, are we there yet?” Karri asked again.

Buck chuckled.

“Yes Karri, look out in front of us,” Buck said.

Karri’s eyes grew big.

“Is that the Searcher? It’s so big,” she said.

“Now Karri, don’t be afraid of the Admiral or any of the crew, okay? Nobody on this ship will ever hurt you,” Hawk said.

“All right uncle,” Karri replied.

“Searcher to shuttle.”

“Approach at hang er bay 3, and welcome home.”

“Affirmative Searcher, and thanks,” Buck replied.

The shuttle approached the Searcher.

Karri was getting more and more excited.

The shuttle entered the Searcher, and landed.

Buck shut down the engines, and Hawk began to open the door.

Chapter 17

By this time Karri was so excited, she couldn't sit any longer. She unbuckled her safety harness and stood up.

Hawk opened the door and stepped out, followed by Buck.

Admiral Asimov walked over to greet them.

"Where is she?" Admiral Asimov asked.

"Come on Karri," Hawk said, holding his hand out to her.

Karri peeked out from around the inside of the shuttle. She stepped out into the open. She reached out to take Hawk's hand.

"Don't be afraid," Hawk said in a low soft voice.

Karri walked down the steps and went straight to Hawk's and Buck's side.

"Admiral Asimov, may I introduce Karri, my niece," Hawk said.

"Your niece?" Asimov said, in a surprised voice.

"Yes sir, she's the daughter of Koori's sister," Hawk replied.

"Well, a very special welcome Karri," Asimov said.

"Thank you sir," Karri replied in a soft voice.

A moment later, Col. Deering approached.

"Karri, This is Col. Deering. Col. Deering this is Karri. She is Hawk's niece," the Admiral said.

"Hello Karri," Wilma said.

Karri looked at Hawk and Buck.

"Karri, this lady is Wilma," Buck replied.

Karri smiled. "You're head of security, right?"

"Why, yes, I am," Wilma replied looking over at Hawk and Buck.

"I've been wanting to meet you," Karri said.

"Hawk, why don't you show Karri some of the Searcher while we refuel," Buck said.

"Could Wilma come with us, uncle? I'd like to ask her some questions," Karri said.

Hawk glanced over at Wilma then the Admiral.

“Of course, I’ll come with you,” Wilma said.

Karri smiled.

“Hawk, one hour,” Buck said.

“Right,” Hawk replied.

Hawk, Karri and Col. Deering left the hanger.

“Buck, what’s going on?” Asimov asked.

Buck explained everything, from how they met Karri’s adoptive human parent’s to what was going on right now down on the planet.

“I see. That’s why you asked for extra security,” Asimov said.

“Yes sir, strictly for Karri’s safety,” Buck replied.

“All right, you could have Wilma and four security guards,” the Admiral said.

“Thank you sir,” Buck said.

Hawk and Wilma started off showing Karri the recreation room, then they moved on to the cafeteria. Karri showed interest in all the areas, asking questions and even talking to some of the crew members.

“Uncle, where do you live?” Karri asked.

“We’re going there now,” Hawk replied.

“If you don’t mind Karri, I have some business to take care of. I’ll leave you in your uncle’s care,” Wilma said.

“All right Wilma, I’ll see you later,” Karri said with a smile.

Hawk nodded to Wilma. “Hawk, I’ll meet you and Karri in the hanger in about thirty minutes,” Wilma said.

“Right,” Hawk replied.

“Bye Wilma,” Karri said waving at Wilma.

Wilma turned, smiled and waved back.

“I like her, uncle,” Karri said with a smile.

“So do I. This is where I live,” Hawk said. Hawk opened the door to his quarters and entered.

Karri just stood there. Hawk turned, looked at her and smiled. “You may enter,” he said.

Karri entered the room.

“You remember, don’t you Karri?” Hawk asked.

Karri smiled. “For some reason, my mind told me to stay there till I was invited,” she said.

“That’s the way of our people. We never enter another’s home until we are invited in,” Hawk said.

“I did it right, didn’t I, uncle?” Karri asked.

“Yes, you did. I’m very proud of you,” Hawk replied with a smile on his face.

Karri smiled back.

“This is where you live?” she asked.

“Yes, this is my home, for now,” Hawk said.

“For now, uncle?”

“Yes, maybe one day soon, I’ll be able to return to Throm,” Hawk said gazing out the portal.

A moment later there was a crackling noise that came from the intercom. “Hawk...Please report to hanger bay 3.”

“Well, I guess it’s time to leave. Are you ready?” Hawk asked.

“Yes uncle, I’m ready,”

“Let’s go,” Hawk said holding his hand out to Karri.

Karri smiled. She took Hawk’s hand, together they walked out the door and down the corridor. As they entered the hanger bay, Karri noticed four armed men standing by Buck’s shuttle.

“Uncle, where are those men going?” she asked.

Hawk looked over towards the shuttle. “They’re going to the planet with us. They’re going to protect you, Lola and Marc,” Hawk replied.

“Oh. Where’s your ship?” she asked.

“Right over there,” Hawk said pointing in the direction of the War Hawk.

Karri’s eyes locked onto the War Hawk. “Oh uncle, it’s beautiful!” Karri cried out with

excitement.

Hawk smiled. "Well, I never thought of it that way," Hawk said with a chuckle.

"I get to go with you, right?" Karri asked not taking her eyes off the War Hawk.

"Yes, you're coming with me," Hawk said with a smile.

"Hawk, we have the co-ordinance for the town. Now we can land right in the center of it if we have to," Buck said.

Buck turned to the security guards. "You are to protect Karri at all cost," Buck informed them. The security guards nodded.

Buck and Hawk nodded at each other. "Let's go," Hawk said.

Chapter 18

Hawk helped Karri into the War Hawk, then he climbed in.

“Buckle up,” Hawk said.

Karri buckled her harness. “All right uncle,” she replied.

“Now Karri, stay buckled in your seat,” Hawk said.

“I will,” she said.

Karri looked out the window just in time to see Buck’s shuttle leave.

“Hang on,” Hawk said.

Before she knew it they were outside of the Searcher. Karri looked out the window and saw four fighters along side of them.

“Is Wilma in one of those?” she asked.

“Yes, she’s in the one right next to us on your right.”

Karri leaned over to get a better look out the window.

“Hi Wilma,” she yelled and waved.

Hawk laughed. “She can’t hear you Karri,” Hawk then switched on the radio. “Now, try it again,” he said.

Karri tried again. “Hello Wilma,” Karri said.

“Hello Karri, are you enjoying the flight?” Wilma asked.

“Oh yes, it’s wonderful. I didn’t know these things could go so fast,” Karri said.

Wilma laughed. You could also hear the other pilots chuckle.

“Uncle, I thought the admiral said only Wilma and four other guards?” she asked.

“He did, why?” Hawk asked.

“Well, uncle, I counted four guards in the shuttle with uncle Buck. And there’s four fighters with us,” Karri said.

“Are you sure?” Hawk asked with a puzzled look on his face. “Yes uncle,” Karri said.

Hawk looked on both sides of his ship. Wilma and one fighter was on one side and two more fighters were on the other side.

“Hawk to Wilma.”

“Yes Hawk.”

“Wilma, where did these extra fighters come from? I thought the admiral only approved four guards and you?” Hawk asked.

“Well, he did at first. But then after I talked to him he decided you might need more security. After all Hawk, she is your niece,” Wilma said.

“Thank you Wilma.”

“Your welcome Hawk. You’re part of the family on the Searcher. Karri is your niece, so that makes her part of the family also,” Wilma said.

Another voice came over the radio. “Besides Hawk, you might need all the help you can get if those townspeople decide to rush Buck and the security guards, right?”

Hawk looked over at Wilma with a puzzled look of his face.

“Who is this?” Hawk asked.

“It’s McGregor.”

Hawk laughed. “I should have known, thanks McGregor,” Hawk said.

“Uncle, who’s McGregor?” Karri asked.

“McGregor is one of the best pilots I know, besides Buck. He’s almost as good as I am. Plus he’s Wilma’s second in command of security,” Hawk said.

Karri smiled. “Thank you McGregor,” Karri said.

“You’re welcome little lady,” McGregor replied.

Karri giggled. “He called me little lady,”

Hawk chuckled.

“Karri, we’re almost there. Now when we land, you wait in the War Hawk. When I think it’s safe enough, I’ll come get you,” Hawk said.

“All right uncle,” Karri said.

Meanwhile down on the planet. Lola and Marc had finished telling the magistrate everything. He sat back in his chair with a surprised look on his face.

“You mean we have one of the bird people living with us all this time and we didn’t even know it?”

“Yes sir. After those humans murdered her parents. We were afraid of what they might do to her. So we hide her as a human,” Marc said.

“That’s wonderful,” Mr. Finney replied.

Marc and Lola smiled. “Do you mean you’ll help us?” Lola asked.

“Of course I’ll help you, I think what those humans did to her parents was a terrible thing. I promise you, no harm will come to that child,” Mr. Finney replied.

“Oh thank you Mr. Finney,” Lola said.

“Where is she now?”

“She’s coming in with some people from the Galactic Council. She’s up touring their ship right now,” Lola said.

“Can you trust those people?” Mr. Finney asked.

“Oh yes, one of them is her uncle. They should be here any time now. So, you will help us, right?” Lola asked again.

“I will do everything in my power to keep that child safe,” Mr. Finney said with a evil grin on his face. “Thank you sir,” Marc said.

As they were about to get up from the table. Lola heard the shuttle.

“Here they come now,” she said. Mr. Finney, Marc and Lola got up and went outside.

Buck landed the shuttle right on the edge of town. The door opened and out came the security guards, then Buck.

Lola, Marc and Mr. Finney walked over to greet them.

“Mr. Finney, This is Capt. Buck Rogers from the Searcher. Buck, this is Mr. Finney, the town magistrate.”

“It’s an honor to meet you, Captain,” Mr. Finney said reaching out to shake Buck’s hand.

“Mr. Finney,” Buck said shaking his hand. “Have they told you everything about Karri?”

“Yes they have. At first I was a little surprised, but then after they told me what happened to her family. Well, now all I can say is that I’m honored to have her living here among us,” Mr. Finney replied.

“Do you think the townspeople will give us any problems?” Buck asked.

“No, I don’t think so. They might be a little curious, but I don’t think they will do her any harm. Do you really need so many security people?” Mr. Finney asked.

“Don’t take it personally Mr. Finney, it’s for the safety of Karri and her family,” Buck said.

“Oh, I understand Captain. Her safety comes first,” Mr. Finney said.

Buck got on the radio. “Buck to Hawk.”

“Go ahead Buck.”

“Come on in, Buck out.”

“They should be here in about a couple of minutes,” Buck said.

“Oh Marc, I know it’s only been a few hours, but I miss her so much,” Lola said.

“I know honey, so do I,” Marc said.

“Here they come,” Lola yelled pointing towards the War Hawk coming over the hill.

The War Hawk and the four fighters landed on the outside of town next to Buck’s shuttle.

“I thought you and these four men were the only security that was required,” Mr. Finney said.

“I thought so to,” Buck replied with a surprised look on his face.

Buck walked over the War Hawk. “Hawk, where did this extra security come from?” Buck asked.

“It was my idea,” Wilma said walking out from behind the Hawk’s ship.

Lola and Marc ran up to Hawk. “Where is she?” Lola asked.

“She’s safe. I want to make sure nothing goes wrong, before I get her out of the ship,” Hawk said.

“Mr. Finney here is the magistrate of the town. He promises that no harm will come to Karri. Right, Mr. Finney?” Buck said.

“That’s right, I don’t want any harm to come to that young lady,” Finney said.

“Buck, I need to talk to you for a minute,” Hawk said.

“Excuse us.” Hawk and Buck walked off a short distance.

“Hawk, what’s wrong?” Buck asked with a concerned look on his face.

“I don’t know, it just doesn’t feel right,” Hawk replied.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that this person is not worried about how the townspeople will handle it. Has he said

anything at all to the townspeople about Karri?" Hawk asked.

"I don't know," Buck replied.

"Lola, Marc, can we speak to you for a moment, please?" Buck asked.

Lola and Marc walked over to Hawk and Buck. "What's wrong?" Marc asked.

"Has Mr. Finney talked to the townspeople at all?" Hawk asked .

"Well, no, but he promises nobody will hurt Karri," Marc said.

"Where is she?" Lola asked looking around the ships for Karri.

"Buck, I don't know about this," Hawk said with concern.

"We'll stay and watch how people react to her. If one person tries to hurt her. We'll get her out of here fast. That's why we have security," Buck said.

"All right. I'll get her," Hawk said.

Hawk walked back to the War Hawk and opened the hatch. "Come on Karri," he said.

"What's wrong uncle?" she asked.

"Nothing is wrong. Your parents are waiting for you," Hawk said.

Hawk helped Karri out of the ship. She saw her parents and started running towards them.

"Mother, Father," she yelled.

Mr. Finney looked at Karri and smiled.

Lola and Marc walked Karri over to Mr. Finney. "Mr. Finney, This is Karri," Lola said.

Finney took Karri's hand and raised it to his lips, then gently kissed her hand. "It's a honor to meet you Karri," Finney said not taking his eyes off her.

"Hello, Mr. Finney," Karri said smiling.

"You are a beautiful young woman," Finney said.

Karri just smiled. "Mom, dad, can we go home now?" Karri asked.

"No honey, not yet. We have to see how the townspeople are going to react," Marc replied.

"Come on, I bet the townspeople are going to love you," Finney said with a smile.

Hawk was standing next to Buck. "I don't like the way he is looking at her," Hawk said in a angry voice.

‘Easy my friend, lets see how things go,’ Buck said.

Buck waved the security into two different directions.

Karri, Lola and Marc walked into town next to Mr. Finney.

Chapter 19

Mr. Finney stayed very close to Karri, still holding her hand as they got closer into the heart of town. Alongside of Karri were Lola and Marc. Walking a few paces back and off to the side were Buck, Hawk, and Wilma. As they were approached town, some townspeople came out to greet them.

“See Karri, no one is going to hurt you. They just want to meet you,” Finney said.

Karri, still frightened and not sure of how the people are going to react, called for Hawk. Hawk was by her side within seconds. Hawk then pulled her hand away from Mr. Finney’s grip. Karri put her arms around Hawk’s waist as they walked.

“I’m here little one,” Hawk said in a soothing voice.

“I’m frightened Uncle,” Karri said in a scared voice.

“Nobody is going to harm you, we won’t let them,” Hawk said in a reassuring voice.

Soon a young girl walked up to Hawk and Karri. “Hello, My name is Saleena. What’s your name?”

Karri looked up at her uncle. “Go ahead, tell her your name,” Hawk said in a soft voice.

Karri looked back at the young girl. “My name is Karri,”

Saleena walked closer. “Are those real feathers on your head?” Saleena asked.

Saleena’s mother walked up alongside of her. “Saleena, where are your manners. You don’t ask people questions like that. I’m sorry, my daughter didn’t mean to be rude. It’s just that she’s never seen a bird person before.”

“It’s all right,” Karri said.

“You work at the restaurant, don’t you?” Saleena’s mother asked.

“Yes,” Karri replied.

“Why is it you never showed yourself before?” Saleena’s mother asked.

“I was too scared. When I was very young, some humans murdered my real parents. So I hid as a human, until a few days ago. Then I found out that I wasn’t the only one. I found my uncle, or should I say, he found me,” Karri said smiling up at Hawk.

“Well Karri, welcome,” Saleena’s mother said.

“Thank you,” Karri replied.

Karri looked over at Lola and Marc and smiled.

“I’m so proud of you,” Lola said.

Mr. Finney walked up to Karri and Saleena. “See, I told you no one was going to hurt you,” he said smiling.

Hawk looked over at Finney. “Let’s see how the rest of the townspeople feel, before you say nobody is going to hurt her,” Hawk replied.

Mr. Finney looked at Hawk, then turned to Karri. “Let’s go further into town. I’ll show you nothing is going happen to you,” Finney said.

Hawk looked at Buck. “I still don’t trust him,” Hawk said to Buck.

“I’m starting to have second thoughts also, my friend. Stay close to Karri. I’ll notify the security that we are heading further into town,” Buck said.

“I will,” Hawk replied. He moved closer to Karri and took her hand. “We have to go, Karri,” Hawk said.

Karri looked into Hawk’s eyes. “Uncle, she won’t hurt me, and either will her mother,” Karri said smiling.

“I know Karri, we are going further into town. I want you to stay close to me and Buck or Wilma. I just don’t trust this Mr. Finney,” Hawk said in a concerned voice.

“All right uncle. Can Saleena walk with us?” she asked.

“Of course, if it’s all right with her mother,” Hawk said.

“Oh mother, may I walk into town with Karri? I have a new friend and I don’t want anything to happen to her,” Saleena said to her mother.

“All right, as long as it’s okay with Hawk. But you do what Hawk tells you to do.”

“All right mother,” Saleena said.

Saleena walked over to Hawk and Karri. She then took Karri’s other hand. “I could show you a lot of the town,” she said in a cheerful voice.

“I think it would be better if I showed her the town,” Mr. Finney said as he pulled Saleena’s hand away. “After all she is my guest. I’m going to be the one that makes sure no harm comes to this pretty little girl,” Mr. Finney said reaching out to touch Karri’s face.

Hawk grabbed Finney’s arm. “Don’t touch her,” Hawk said in anger.

“Hawk, take it easy,” Buck said.

“I don’t ever want you to touch her again,” Hawk said.

Mr. Finney backed away from Karri, with Hawk still holding his arm.

“If this is the thanks I get for protecting this girl, then you can do it. But I’ll warn you , there’s a lot of people here that don’t like your kind,” Finney said in a threatening voice.

Lola and Marc walked up to Hawk. “Hawk, please, we know you want to protect Karri. But what happens when you leave? She’ll need some kind of protection,” Lola said in a pleading voice.

“I’m sorry. I just don’t like the way he’s always trying to touch her. First in the restaurant and now here,” Hawk replied.

“We know, but he doesn’t mean any harm. He’s just trying to be friendly,” Lola said.

Hawk released Finney’s arm. “If any harm comes to this child, you and this town will have to deal with me,” Hawk said.

“Uncle, It’s all right, I’ll be okay,” Karri said.

Saleena’s mother looked at Hawk. “Hawk, I’ll be with her all the time. I’ll make sure nothing happens,” she said.

Hawk looked into Saleena’s mother’s eyes. “I believe you. But I need to make sure that she’ll be all right after I leave,” Hawk said

“Hawk, may I talk to you for a moment, in private?” Saleena’s mother asked.

Hawk looked over at Buck. “Go ahead, I’ll stay with Karri and Saleena,” Buck said.

Hawk nodded.

Hawk and Saleena’s mother walked off a distance. She turned to Hawk. “Hawk, I have to tell you something. I can’t keep this a secret any longer. And since you’re like Karri, maybe you can help me,” she said.

“What is it?” Hawk asked.

“Hawk, Karri is not the only one of your kind here. I know where there is another.”

Hawk looked at her with a knowing look. “It’s Saleena, isn’t it?”

She gazed at Hawk and nodded. “Yes, I’ve had her for about two years now. Like Karri, her parents were killed also. I don’t know who killed them. I found her wandering about 3 miles from here. She knows I’m not her mother, but she calls me that for safety. Hawk, could you please help us?” she pleaded.

Hawk smiled. “Of course, Let’s go. We have some showing to do,” Hawk said with a understanding smile.

They walked back together.

“Saleena, could you and Karri come here, please,” Hawk said.

Saleena and Karri walked back to Hawk and her mother. "Yes Hawk?" Saleena said.

"Saleena, I know who you are. Your mother told me. Would you like to be free again like Karri?" he asked.

Saleena looked at her mother. "Go ahead honey, It'll be all right," her mother said.

Saleena looked back at Hawk. "Yes, I would really like that," she said with a trace of fear in her voice.

"Go ahead, take it off," Hawk said.

Karri was standing next to her new friend. "Take what off uncle?" Karri asked.

"You'll see."

Saleena looked around at all the people that had started to gather around them, including Mr. Finney.

"Don't be afraid," Hawk said in an soothing reassuring voice.

Saleena slowly reached her hand up to her head. She gently pulled off the wig. There underneath was her light grey plumage.

"Saleena! You're one of us?" Karri said in excitement.

Saleena lowered her head and nodded. Hawk walked over to her and gently put his finger tips under her chin and lifted her head up.

"You are one of us, never lower your head," Hawk said.

Karri turned and looked at Hawk. "How did you know uncle?" she asked.

"I didn't know for sure. Till her mother confirmed it."

Mr. Finney looked at both of them. "Oh my God..... There's two of them," he said.

Hawk looked at Finney. "Now what are you going to do to protect both of these girls?" Hawk asked.

Finney looked around at all the people that were standing there, waiting for him to answer.

"Well, I'm going to do my very best to protect both of them," he replied.

"You better," Hawk said in a stern voice.

Lola walked over to Saleena and Karri. "I have an idea, but I have to talk to your mother first," Lola said.

Lola walked back over to Marc. "Honey, I..."

But before Lola could finish what she was going to say. Marc looked at Saleena's mother. "How about if Saleena came and lived with us? We have plenty of room," Marc said.

Saleena turned to her mother. "Oh mother, please?"

"Well, I think that would be a good idea. But really it's up to Karri's parents. But you still have to go to school and work."

Saleena looked at Lola and Marc. "We'll make sure she does," Lola replied.

Finney stood there with a shocked look on his face.

Buck walked up to Hawk. "Well my friend, It looks like you found another," Buck said with his arm draped across one of Hawk's shoulder.

"Yes, but they are both orphaned. Why can't humans just leave us alone and let us live in peace?" Hawk asked looking at Buck.

"I don't know, my friend. But now we have two to watch over," Buck said with a smile.

Hawk watched as Karri and Saleena walked towards Saleena's house. "Wait for us," Hawk said.

Mr. Finney hung back and started to talk to some men that were standing close by. Little did they know that two of the security guards were right beside them, listening. They quickly walked over to Hawk and Buck.

"Capt. Rogers, Hawk, We overheard Finney talking to a couple of men about Karri and Saleena," McGregor said.

"What did they say?" Hawk asked.

"They were talking about going out to the house tonight and doing something. Sorry sir, we didn't hear all of it."

"That's all right. Thank you for keeping an ear out," Buck said.

"So what do you think we should do? Maybe stay out at the house for a few more nights?" Buck asked with a grin on his face.

Hawk soon caught on to what Buck was talking about. "That sounds like a great idea. Besides, I need a rest after all that climbing," Hawk said with a smile.

"McGregor, inform the Admiral that we will be staying down here for a few more days. Inform him of what you've overheard," Buck said.

"Okay Buck, do you think you might need some help?" McGregor asked.

“Yes, I think we will,” Buck replied.

“Yes, sir,” McGregor said smiling.

“We better go talk to Lola and Marc. Tell them what’s going on, and why we will be staying at the house for a few more days,” Buck said.

“I’ll talk to them. Could you stay with Karri and Saleena?” Hawk asked.

“You got it. I’ll talk to Saleena’s mother as well,” Buck replied.

Karri and Saleena were just about to the house when Buck and Wilma rushed up with two of the guards.

“Karri, you and Saleena go in and gather her belongings. Wilma will help you, but don’t take to long, all right?” Buck said.

“All right uncle,” Karri said.

Saleena looked at Karri. “He’s your uncle?” she asked.

“It’s a long story. I’ll tell you tonight,” Karri said.

The girls started to gather Saleena’s things. Wilma was helping them pack.

“Is she your aunt?” Saleena asked.

Karri giggled. “No, she our guard, and a good friend,” Karri said smiling, looking at Wilma.

“Is Hawk really your uncle? Or is he just someone that you call uncle?” Saleena asked.

“No, he’s my real uncle. His mate was my mother’s sister.”

“Are you girls ready?” Wilma asked.

“Yes Wilma, we’re ready,” Karri replied.

“We better go, it’s almost dark,” Wilma said.

They all left the house along with Saleena’s mother. “Oh honey, please take care of yourself,” she said with tears in her eyes.

“She’ll be fine, we’ll be there to make sure,” Wilma said.

Buck and Hawk took the girls, Lola and Marc to the shuttle.

Buck turned to Saleena’s mother. “Are you sure you don’t want to come?” Buck asked.

“I’m sure, besides I’ll see her everyday, right?”

Buck looked at her. "Yes, you will, I promise."

Saleena ran back to her mother and gave her a hug. "Don't cry mother, I'll see you soon."

"I know, you take care," she said weeping.

Saleena climbed into the shuttle with Karri. Buck told the security guards to follow.

The door closed and the shuttle took off with Saleena waving to her mother from the window of the shuttle. She could see that her mother was weeping. But she knew it was for the best.

Hawk followed in the War Hawk.

Chapter 20

As the shuttle was nearing the house, Karri got more excited. "There's your new home," Karri said with an excited voice, pointing to the house.

"Oh, it's beautiful. Look at all those fields," Saleena said with excitement in her voice as well.

Lola and Marc smiled. "Well, it's not beautiful, but it is home," Marc said smiling.

"I have an idea Karri," Hawk said.

"What is it, uncle?" Karri replied.

"Why don't you show Saleena around. Maybe take her up to the cave," Hawk said.

"Oh Hawk, do you think that's such a good idea?" Lola asked.

Marc turned his head and looked at Lola. "I think that would be a great idea," Marc said.

"What do you think Buck?" Hawk asked.

"It sounds great to me. That way you two ladies can get to know each other better. After all, you two are going to be living together," Buck said.

"Maybe pack some food, and stay the night. Saleena, do you know of our ancestors?" Hawk asked.

"Oh yes, My mother and father taught me everything about them," Saleena said.

"That's wonderful. Karri has some great pictures on the wall of the cave. There's also a prayer to Make-Make. Would you like to go see them?" Hawk asked.

"Oh yes, I would love to see them. May we go...Please?" Saleena pleaded.

Karri smiled. "Sure, as long as mom and dad say it's all right," Karri said.

"Marc is it really a good idea to have the girls wandering around on that mountain at night?" Lola asked with a concerned voice.

"Karri knows that mountain better than anyone. I think her and Saleena will be just fine," Marc replied.

"Oh mother, we'll be fine. Remember I have my friends up there. They'll watch over us. Please, mother, may we go?" Karri begged with a smile on her face.

"Oh, all right. But I want Buck or Hawk to fly you up there. I don't want either of you girls getting hurt on the way up. Hawk, Buck, could one of you please fly the girls up the mountain?" Lola asked.

"Sure Lola, that's what we were planning on doing," Hawk replied.

A minute later Buck landed the shuttle.

“Okay girls, go pack up some warm clothes and some food. I want to talk to Lola and Marc a minute,” Hawk said.

“All right uncle,” Karri said as her and Saleena got off the shuttle.

They watched as the girls as they entered the house. Then they exited the shuttle.

“I think it’s a good idea to let the girls go up there for the night. One of our guards overheard Mr. Finney talking to some men about coming up here tonight. We don’t know what they have in mind, but it would be safer for the girls. No one will be able to find them up in the cave,” Hawk said.

“Do you mean that Mr. Finney wants to hurt our girls?” Lola asked with fear in her voice.

“We don’t know for sure, but it’s better to be on the safe side,” Buck said.

“We better not say anything to the girls. We don’t want them to worry or get scared. We’ll act like nothing is going on. That we are just staying for another night to make arrangements,” Hawk said.

“Good idea Hawk,” Marc replied.

Lola had a worried look on her face. “Honey, you’ll need to get that worried look off your face. The girls will think something is wrong and they will not want to leave,” Marc said.

“I’m sorry honey, but I’m scared the girls will get hurt. Being up there all alone, with only those wolves as protection,” Lola said starting to weep.

“Lola, those wolves will not let anyone near those girls. Remember how they treated Hawk and myself. If anyone poses a threat, I have a funny feeling that they will get the worst end of the deal,” Buck said.

“I know you’re right, but I can’t help but worry. Do you think Mr. Finney will really try to hurt the girls?” Lola asked wiping her eyes.

“That’s why we are sending them up to the cave. They’ll be safe up there,” Hawk said.

Karri and Saleena came out of the house. “We’re ready, uncle,” Karri said.

“Do you have your food packed? Your warm clothing? And probably a blanket won’t hurt,” Hawk asked.

“Oh uncle, we’re not going to be away that long. Just overnight. But yes, we packed everything. Food, clothing, and yes, even a couple of blankets,” Karri giggled.

“Okay then, lets go,” Hawk said.

Karri went over to her mother and father. “Mother, father, we’ll be okay. We’ll be home

tomorrow. So please, don't worry."

Saleena stood there waiting for Karri. Karri looked over at her."Well, are you going to give your adopted mother and father a hug?" Karri asked.

Saleena ran over to them with a smile on her face. "We'll be all right. If what you say is true, we don't have anything to worry about. Karri knows this mountain, Right? But I am a little frightened of the wolves though," Saleena said.

"There's no need to be Saleena. Those wolves are friends of Karri's. They will not let any one harm either one of you," Hawk replied.

Saleena and Karri gave Lola and Marc a hug and a kiss on the cheek.

"We'll see you tomorrow," they said together.

"Come on uncle, time to go," Karri said.

"All right ladies, lets go," Hawk said.

"Be careful girls," Marc called out.

"We will... Bye."

Chapter 21

The girls climbed into the shuttle, followed by Hawk. "Buckle up girls," Hawk said.

Karri and Saleena looked out the window of the shuttle as it lifted off. They could see Lola, Marc and Buck waving at them. They waved back with smiles on their faces.

"Uncle, what's wrong with my mother?" Karri asked.

"Nothing, she's just worried about you girls going up to the cave by yourselves, that's all," Hawk replied.

"Uncle, you know I have nothing to fear up there, right?"

"I know Karri, but that's what mothers do best, worry," Hawk said with a smile.

"We are going to have lots of fun up there. Wait till you meet my friends," Karri said.

"Hawk, Does Karri really have a pack of wolves for friends?" Saleena asked.

"Yes, she does. But like I told you before, they will not harm you. In fact they will probably come right up to you. You and Karri are of the same ancestors. They will be able to sense that. So don't worry, okay?" Hawk said.

"Okay."

"We're almost there. I'll land in the field where we landed before, Karri. Either Buck or I will pick you two up in the morning," Hawk said.

"All right uncle, and we'll be careful also," Karri said.

"Good."

"Okay ladies, we're getting ready to land. Don't forget your packs. Saleena, don't be afraid, okay?" Hawk said in a reassuring voice.

"I won't forget, uncle. Oops, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to say that," Saleena said with her face turning red.

Hawk chuckled. "It's all right, we're family now. You, Karri and myself. I know you are not related to me by blood or marriage. But we are family," Hawk said.

Saleena smiled and Karri giggled.

"You girls behave yourselves now. I'll see you in the morning. Karri, If you girls need anything, send one of the wolves down to the house. That way I'll know something is wrong," Hawk said.

"All right uncle, Bye... We'll see to in the morning," Karri said. Both girls exited the shuttle. As Hawk lifted off, Hawk looked out the window to see both girls waving. He waved back

and then left.

“We’re on our own now. Come on, I’ll show you the cave,” Karri said.

Saleena nodded.

As the girls walked up the narrow path to the mouth of the cave, Saleena stopped. “What was that noise?” she asked as she looked around.

“It might be the wolves, they might be coming back from a hunt,” Karri replied.

As the girls were about to enter the cave two adult wolves emerged.

“Oh my,”... Saleena said grabbing Karri’s arm.

“It’s okay, they won’t hurt you,” Karri said.

“Hello my friends, don’t you remember me?” The wolves walked cautiously up to Karri and Saleena. They sniffed at their bodies and feet. Soon one of the wolves started to lick Karri’s hand. The other wolf started to lick Saleena’s hand.

“Stop that... it tickles,” Saleena said giggling.

“They just had to get our scent, that’s all. Come on in,” Karri said.

“Are you sure it’s safe?” Saleena asked.

“We’re safer in there with the wolves, than we would be down at the house tonight,” Karri said.

“What do you mean?” Saleena asked.

“Remember at the house, how everyone was so anxious for us come up here,” Karri said.

“Yes, what about it?”

“I remembered my real mother and father told me the same thing. When they knew something was going to happen, they didn’t want me there, so they took me to Lola and Marc. I have a feeling that something is going to happen tonight at the house. And they wanted us up here where it’s safe,” Karri said.

“Oh... How did you know about this cave?” Saleena asked.

“My parents brought me up here a lot. They told me it was our safe house. No one knows where it is, except you, Marc and Lola, Hawk and Buck,” Karri said.

Both the girls stood by the opening of the cave and looked down in the direction of the house.

“Karri, What will happen to us if, ...”

“Don’t say it... Hawk and Buck are down there with Lola and Marc. They also have all those security people with them. They’ll be fine,” Karri said with a concerned voice.

“Let’s go inside, we have to get things ready for tonight,” Karri said.

Saleena and Karri entered the cave. Inside the wolves circled them. The injured pup made his way to Karri. Barking at her.

“Hello my little friend. How is your leg doing?” Karri asked.

Karri picked up the pup and they walked further into the cave. Saleena started to look around.

“Is that the picture of Make -Make that Hawk was talking about?” Saleena asked.

“Yes, It is. I drew it when I first came up to this cave about 3 years ago. It’s not too good of a drawing. I was only 14 when I drew it,” Karri said.

“Come on, we have to gather some firewood and bedding for the night. I know just where to get it,” Karri said.

The girls left the cave and headed down the path to the clearing where Karri had found the bedding leaves before. Karri walked right to it. She and Saleena started picking the leaves.

“We’ll take these back then we’ll go gather some firewood. I know just the spot to,” Karri said.

Saleena and Karri carried the bedding back to the cave. They stood each leaf up against the wall of the cavern.

“Let’s go get the firewood. It gets kinda cold up here at night,” Karri said.

The girls were heading out of the cave when one of the wolves started to growl and bare its teeth.

“What’s wrong?” Karri asked.

Karri slowly walked up to the opening of the cave and looked out. “I don’t see anything,” Karri said softly to the wolf.

She turned and looked at the wolf. “Do you hear something?” Soon another wolf started to growl and bare its teeth.

“Karri... I’m getting a little scared. What’s out there?” Saleena said in a concerned voice.

“I don’t know, I don’t see anything,” Karri replied.

The girls went to the back of the cave. They tried to hide beneath the leaves. By then all the wolves were pacing, growling and baring their teeth. All the wolves then got between the girls and the intruder. “Karri....What is it?” Saleena whispered.

“I don’t know,” Karri whisper ed back.

Just outside the cave entrance the scrubs started to move. The wolves started to pace back and forth faster, still growling and baring their teeth.

The bush opened up....

Chapter 22

The wolves started to growl even more as the bush started to part. Saleena and Karri were getting more and more frightened. A few seconds later the wolves started to whimper as if they were trying to get the girls to come out from hiding. Karri noticed the change in their voices. She came out of hiding. She started to slowly walk towards the opening of the cave. She walked up next to the wolves and looked down at the bush.

There it was a young bear cub.

Karri started to laugh. "Saleena, come on out, it's safe," Karri said laughing.

"What is it?" Saleena asked as she came towards the front of the cave.

"Look...it's just a bear cub," Karri giggled.

"Why were the wolves so mad then? And why did they start growling?" Saleena asked.

"I think they thought it was something that could hurt us," Karri replied.

Saleena and Karri started to walk towards the cub. Then all of a sudden the Alpha male and female wolf pushed Saleena and Karri back by jumping up on them. Soon all the wolves started to growl again. Only this time they drove Karri and Saleena to the back of the cave.

"What is it? Why are they still growling?" Saleena asked.

"I think there's something else out there. Something that can hurt us," Karri replied.

The wolves took their position at the opening of the cave. The bushes started to move again. Only this time it wasn't the cub, it was the bear cub's mother. She stood up on her hind legs and started to roar at the wolves. The wolves attacked the bear by biting at her legs, growling and barking. The girls started to yell at the bear, throwing rocks and branches, but it didn't phase the bear. All of a sudden the girls heard a "YIPE". Karri came running towards the front of the cave to find one of the wolves had been badly injured.

Saleena called to Karri, but Karri didn't hear her. She started to drag the injured wolf further into the cave, but she didn't get far. She looked up and saw the bear heading right towards her. The other wolves were trying desperately to keep the bear away from Karri. Without any sign the injured wolf staggered to its feet and lunged at the bear. Its powerful jaws found its target, the bear's throat. The bear tried everything to get the wolf off, but to no prevail. The other wolves sensed that the bear was badly injured, so they started to attack the bear fiercely, harder and faster than before. A few minutes later the bear laid on the floor of the cave within only a few feet from Karri... Dead.

Saleena slowly stood up and walked over to Karri. They held each other and cried. They cautiously walked over to the bear. The cub came running over to its mother. The wolves then started to attack the cub.

"NO!" Karri yelled. She picked up the cub. "I'm sorry little one," she said.

Karri knew that she couldn't turn the cub away. She also knew it would die without its mother.

Saleena walked over to Karri and the cub. "What are we going to do with it?" she asked.

"We can't turn it away. So I guess we'll have to keep it," Karri said.

Soon Karri heard a whining behind her. She handed the cub to Saleena and went to the wolves that were behind her with the injured one. She noticed that the wolf had claw and teeth marks all over its body. He also had broken his back from when the bear threw him against the wall during the last attack. He died shortly after the fight was over.

It was the Alpha male, he gave his life to protect Karri and Saleena.

"Saleena, it's the Alpha male, the pup's dad," Karri said weeping.

The other wolves gathered around the male and started to howl a mournful cry. Even the pup started to howl. It seemed to know that one of its own had died.

"Karri, what are we going to do?" Saleena said sobbing.

"We have to send one of the wolves down the mountain. I have to get them to bring my uncle back up here," Karri said weeping.

"But Karri, it's going to get dark soon. What if they can't come, because of the trouble," Saleena said.

"I forgot, I guess we'll have to bury him ourselves," Karri said.

The wolves seemed to know what Karri and Saleena were planning on doing. They all laid down next to the male, as if to protect him.

"Why are they doing that?" Saleena asked.

"They are going to stay by his side till we are done digging the grave," Karri replied.

Karri and Saleena left the cave in search of a beautiful place to lay their friend to rest.

"I know just the place," Karri said.

They walked down the path to a small opening in the bushes. They pushed their way through it and on the other side they found the perfect place. A small green hill covered by trees and a small brook flowing past it.

"This is the perfect spot," Karri said.

"I agree," Saleena said.

The girls began to dig the grave with their bare hands. After about an hour, they finally finished. They made their way back up to the cave. Inside the wolves were still gathered

around the male.

“All right my friends, it’s time.”

The wolves got up one by one. And moved to the opening of the cave. Karri and Saleena ever so gently picked up the wolf and carried him out of the cave. The wolves followed, first the Alpha female and her pup. Then the others followed by rank. They followed them down to the grave. The girls gently put the wolf down next to the grave. They then went and gathered some large leaves. They placed some of them in the bottom of grave. They picked up the wolf and placed him gently into the grave on top of the leaves. They then covered him with the remaining leaves and started to cover him up with the dirt. The wolves sat there watching every move they made. After they finished Karri and Saleena started singing. The wolves joined in. After the song Karri started to gathered rocks to put on top of the grave.

“Why are you doing that?” Saleena asked in tears.

“So the other animals don’t dig up his body. We’ll give him a proper tomorrow when we know it’s safe,” Karri said.

All of the wolves laid down next to the grave.

“Why are they doing that?” Saleena asked.

“They want to lay next to their leader for a while longer. They’ll be back up to the cave later. Let’s get back to the cave. We still need to get that bear out of there,” Karri said.

Karri and Saleena returned to the cave and pulled the bear’s body outside and down the path.

“We’ll have my uncle help us with her in the morning. It’s getting to dark to see. And it will take us to long to dig another grave by hand,” Karri said.

The girls went back into the cave finding the bear cub was still there.

“Poor little thing. We need to find some food for it. If we don’t, it’ll die for sure,” Karri said.

Karri held the cub for a long time trying to feed it berries and roots. But it just wouldn’t eat. “I’m a fraid it’s going to die,” Karri said with tears forming in her eyes.

The wolves started to enter the cave. The Alpha female walked over to Karri and licked her face as if to say Thank you. She then did something that shocked Karri and Saleena. She took the cub gently by the scruff of the neck, walked over and laid down next to her pup and pulled the cub close to her body. Karri and Saleena watched as she started to nurse her pup and the bear cub. They smiled.

“It might just make it after all,” Karri said in a joyful voice.

Chapter 23

Meanwhile down the mountain, Hawk, Buck and Wilma were getting ready for their unwanted visitors.

“McGregor, I want you and team one over on the north side of the house. Stay by the trees, use them for cover. Wilma, you and team two on the south side of the house. Again use the trees and bushes for cover,” Hawk said.

McGregor and Wilma nodded their heads and signaled the security guards to follow.

“Hawk, I think it would be best if you and I stayed in the house. Just in case they have more men than we think,” Buck said.

“I agree,” Hawk said as he gazed at the mountain. “I wonder how the girls are doing?” he asked.

“I’m sure they’re okay. What kind of trouble can they get into up there? The wolves are there to protect them. They will not let anything happen to them,” Buck said.

“I know, but I can’t stop thinking about them, wondering if they’re okay. Plus I’m getting a feeling that they are in some kind of danger,” Hawk said with a worried look on his face.

“Hawk, Karri and Saleena will be fine. We’re safer up there than they would be down here. Besides, there’s probably nothing up there that could really hurt them. I feel sorry for anyone who tries to harm those girls. We need to concentrate on what’s going on down here right now. Karri doesn’t know what’s about to happen. If she did, she’d want to be here with Lola and Marc,” Buck said.

Wilma came walking over. “What’s wrong with Hawk?” she asked.

“He’s worried about Karri and Saleena. I told him that there was nothing to worry about. That those wolves would not let anyone or anything near those girls. But I don’t think he believes me,” Buck replied.

“Hawk, you need to think about Lola and Marc. How would Karri feel when she comes back and finds her parents dead? You need to think of them to,” Wilma said.

Hawk’s head turned to Wilma with a blank look on his face.

“What? Did you say something Wilma?” Hawk asked.

“Buck, I don’t think it’s a good idea to have Hawk involved right now. He can’t even think straight right now,” Wilma said.

“Hawk, why don’t you go check on the girls? It might make you feel more at ease about them,” Buck said.

Hawk looked at Buck. “I’m fine. I know the girls are okay. I have work to do down here,” Hawk said in a calm voice. “Let’s get ready for our visitors,” Hawk said with a smile.

“Buck, try to keep an eye on Hawk. He just doesn’t seem right. I know he’s worried. But he’s letting his feelings for his niece and Saleena impair his judgement,” Wilma said with a worried look on her face.

“I will, and Wilma...Be careful,” Buck said with a smile.

Wilma smiled back. “I will. You too, Buck.”

A few seconds later the radio on Buck’s belt went off. “Captain Rogers... We have eight men approaching from town. They are about 1/2 mile out from the house,” the security guard said.

“Thanks. Now get to your post. We’re going to need all the man power we have,” Buck replied.

“Hawk, they’re on their way. They’re about 1/2 mile from the house,” Buck said.

Hawk turned to Buck. “All right, let’s get to our places everyone. Security get to the trees and bushes, stay out of sight. Let’s see what they’re going to do first,” Hawk said.

Buck turned to Hawk. “Welcome back. Now that sounds like the Hawk I know,” Buck said grinning.

“Lola, Marc, go into the house, and stay hidden,” Hawk said.

Marc and Lola went inside and shut the door. Marc opened the door again and came back out, this time carrying a weapon.

“I want to help, no-one is going to hurt my daughters,” he said in an angry voice.

“Marc, I know how you feel. But you need to get back inside and protect Lola. She needs you in there with her,” Hawk said in an understanding voice.

“I know you want to help us, but you’ll help us more if you go inside,” Buck said.

“Here they come,” Wilma said loudly.

“Marc, go inside, please,” Hawk said.

Marc lowered his weapon and nodded his head. “I suppose you’re right,” Marc said as he turned to go back in to the house.

“Ready?” Buck asked.

“Oh yes. Nobody is going to harm my niece and her family,” Hawk said in an angry voice.

“Let’s go,” Buck said.

Hawk nodded. They both went onto the house and closed the door.

Within minutes after they had gone in, the eight men walked up to the house.

“Marc, we need to talk to you,” one of them yelled out. “Marc, we know you’re in there. Why don’t you come out so we can talk. We don’t want to hurt you or your pretty little wife. We just don’t like those kind of people here. You know your bird daughter, and her friend. Come on Marc, come out.”

The door started to open slowly. The eight men opened up their coats and pulled out their weapons. “Come on Marc,” one of them said.

The door opened all the way and Buck walked out. “Can I help you gentlemen? Marc is a little busy right now. Maybe I can help you, or my friend here can,” Buck said.

Hawk walked out of the house. “I hear you are looking for the bird women? Maybe I can point you in the right direction. Like back to town. You can tell Mr. Finney that as long as I’m alive, nobody is going to hurt those girls, nobody,” Hawk said in an angry voice.

The eight men drew their weapons. But before any of them could fire a shot, a shot hit one of the weapons out of one of the men’s hand, causing him to grip his hand in pain.

The other men started shooting at Buck and Hawk. They soon realized they were outnumbered when the security guards and Wilma came out from behind the trees and bushes firing their weapons. The seven other intruders dropped their weapons quickly and raised their hands in an surrender gesture.

Hawk, Buck and Wilma walked over to retrieve the weapons. The security guards circled the intruders.

“We were just doing what we were told to do,” one of the men said.

Hawk walked over to the one that spoke. He then grabbed him by the shoulders and lifted him off the ground. “You go tell that boss of yours, if he tries to hurt any of these people in any way, shape or form, he is going to have to deal with me. And that’s one thing he doesn’t want to do,” Hawk said as he was putting the man down.

By this time the other men were telling Wilma and Buck what Mr. Finney wanted done with Karri and Saleena. “All he told us was he wanted the two girls alive. And he didn’t care what happened to Lola and Marc,” one of the men told Buck.

Hawk’s face turned red with anger.

“Hawk, take it easy,” Buck said.

“I would like to ask these men something,” Wilma said.

Hawk and Buck backed up.

“I’d really like to know what these people and those two innocent young girls ever did to you? What, because their different? Let’s see, they lived in your town for who knows how many years. They work just like any human does. They went to school with your children, just like

any human would. I don't get it. Oh, I know, it's because they have feathers instead of hair, right?"

Wilma walked up closer to the men. "You have two very special people living here with you. And you want to harm them." Wilma turned away for a second then turned back to face the men again. "I guess I better introduce myself. My name is Colonel Deering. I'm head of security and you gentlemen, are under arrest," Wilma said with a smile.

"You can't do that. On what grounds?" one of the men asked.

"You fired on representatives of the Galactic Council. Security, arrest these men," Wilma said.

As security was placing the men under arrest, Hawk turned to Buck and Wilma.

"I need to find out if the girls are all right. I kept having this feeling of fear earlier," Hawk said.

"Go ahead Hawk, we know how you feel about those girls. We can handle the rest of it down here. Go," Buck said.

Hawk nodded and headed for the shuttle.

Hawk started up the shuttle and headed for the mountain. He landed in the spot where he told the girls he or Buck would meet them. There was no sign of Karri or Saleena anywhere. As Hawk was running towards the mouth of the cave, he saw the body of the bear lying outside the mouth of the cave. He drew his weapon.

"Karri, Saleena, where are you? It's Hawk," he shouted.

Hawk walked slowly towards the opening of the cave.

Chapter 24

Hawk slowly started to enter the cave. The Alpha female and two other wolves met him at the opening growling and showing their teeth.

“Don’t you remember me?” Hawk asked.

The wolves started to sniff Hawk’s clothing. Hawk lowered his hand so the wolf could smell his scent better. Soon the wolf’s tail started to wag.

“That’s a good girl, now where are they?” Hawk asked.

The wolves turned to go into the cave with Hawk walking beside them. The fire was going strong so he didn’t have any trouble seeing the girls curled up next to the fire asleep. He quietly walked over to them and knelt down next to Karri.

“Karri, wake up. It’s Hawk,” he said softly. He gently stroked her arm. “Karri, wake up.”

Saleena was the first to open her eyes then Karri. “Uncle, what are you doing here?” Karri asked in a sleepy mutter.

“I’ve come to take you girls home,” Hawk said in a soft voice.

“But uncle, it’s in the middle of the night. Can’t we wait till morning,” Karri said yawning.

Hawk looked over towards Saleena who had already fallen back to sleep. “All right, go back to sleep. We’ll leave in the morning,” Hawk said.

Hawk walked back over to the fire and sat down. The female wolf came over to Hawk carrying the bear cub by the scruff of her neck.

“What do you have here?” he asked as he reached for the cub.

“Oh, I see what happened. The bear came after her cub, and you protected Karri and Saleena. Now they have taken in the cub. She’s just like her aunt,” Hawk said chuckling.

Hawk looked around. “Where’s your mate?” he asked.

Hawk heard someone behind him. He turned, and seen Karri walking up behind him.

“Karri, what happened here tonight?” he asked.

Karri started to cry. “Oh uncle, he gave his life to save Saleena and myself. The wolves started acting strange. So we hid in the back of the cave. When they started to whine, we came out of hiding and found this bear cub. We were just standing there when the mother came running out of the bushes. She stood on her hind legs and started to roar at the wolves. The male and female pushed me and Saleena towards the back while the others started to attack the bear. The male got hurt, so I was trying to pull him in the back of the cave. The bear kept coming, the wolves couldn’t keep her away from us. The male somehow got to his feet and lunged at the bear, grabbing her by the throat. Then it went silent. When we came out the

mother bear was dead. Oh uncle, he gave his life to save us.” Karri started to cry harder.

“Come here child,” Hawk said holding out his arms.

Karri sat closer to Hawk and put her arms around his neck and cried. A moment later Saleena came over and got on the other side of Hawk. She too started to cry. Hawk put his arms around both of the girls.

Hawk looked at the female wolf. “Thank you, for protecting them. I’m sorry you lost your mate,” Hawk said with sorrow in his voice.

Hawk sat there for the longest time holding and comforting Karri and Saleena. Before long he noticed that they had fallen asleep in his arms. He didn’t want to wake them, so he sat there the rest of the night with the girls curled up next to him, with their heads against his chest.

When morning came Karri and Saleena woke up still with their heads on Hawk’s chest. They slowly sat up.

“Good morning uncle,” Karri said with a smile.

“Good morning Hawk,” Saleena said with a smile on her face also.

“Good morning girls. Are you ready to go home?” Hawk asked.

“Uncle, we have to do something first. We couldn’t do it last night because of the trouble at the house. Could you please help us build a Ring Of Freedom? We need to send the male wolf’s spirit to their heaven,” Karri said.

“How did you know about the trouble?” Hawk asked.

“My real mother and father did the same thing when they knew danger was coming. They brought me up to this cave or took me to Marc and Lola. This was our safe house. No humans knew where it was,” Karri said.

“Oh, I see. Lets get started building the Ring Of Freedom,” Hawk said with a smile.

“Thank you uncle,” Karri said.

Hawk smiled.

“Uncle? What about the mother bear?”

“We’ll build one for her too. She was only trying to protect her baby. All creatures deserve the Ring Of Freedom,” Hawk said.

Hawk, Karri and Saleena left the cave followed by the wolves to find the perfect spot for the fire ring.

“Uncle, what about where we buried the male wolf? It’s a beautiful place.” Karri said.

“Where is it?”

Karri and Saleena showed Hawk where they had buried the wolf.

“I agree, it is the perfect place. Let’s get started so I can get you girls back home,” Hawk said.

They gathered the stones and wood they would need. They went to retrieve the body of Karri’s and Saleena’s protector. Around the grave that Karri and Saleena made for the wolf the night before were all of the wolves.

“It’s time my friends, to lay your leader to rest the proper way,” Karri said.

Hawk, Saleena and Karri dug up the male wolf that gave his life for them. They removed his body ever so gently and carried it to the Ring Of Freedom. Hawk lit the torch and handed it to Karri. She lowered the torch to the wood. It soon started to burn. Karri and Saleena started to sing. Hawk stood there for a moment then he too started to sing. After they finished their song, they threw flowers into the flame.

“Now girls, we have to do the same for the mother bear,” Hawk said.

Again they gathered all the wood and stones they would need. And as with the Alpha wolf they proceeded to repeat the song and the flowers being thrown into the flame for the mother bear.

“Uncle? Do you think they know what we did?” Karri asked with tears in her eyes.

“Yes, they know. Come, time to go home,” Hawk said in a soft voice.

They turned around and seen that all the wolves were standing behind them, the female still carrying the bear cub in her mouth.

“What are we going to do about the cub? You know your mother and father will not let you keep it. And it’s to young to be on its own,” Hawk said.

“I don’t know?” Karri said with concern in her voice.

“Maybe you should ask the wolves if they can take care of it. For a while anyway,” Hawk suggested.

“I’ll try,” Karri replied. She knelt down next to the wolves. She stood up right away.

“They said that the female already claimed it as her baby. We don’t have to worry. She will feed it and the others will protect it,” Karri said with a smile on her face.

“Good. Now I better get you girls home, before Buck and Wilma come hunting for us. Get your things together,” Hawk said.

“We’re going home,” Karri yelled with delight.

They pack up their belongings and got into the shuttle. Karri stuck her head back out the door.

“I’ll come visit you real soon. Thank you,” Karri said.

The shuttle took flight. Karri and Saleena looked out the window at the wolves that were gathering around the Ring Of Freedom.

Chapter 25

As they were getting closer to the house, Hawk turned to Karri and Saleena. "We have one more thing to take care of," Hawk said.

"Whats that, uncle?"

"Don't worry about it. Buck and I will take care of it," Hawk said.

The girls looked out the window of the shuttle and noticed Lola and Marc waving at them. "There's Mot her and Father," Karri squealed with delight.

Hawk started to laugh.

Hawk landed the shuttle in the field next to the house. He opened the door of the shuttle and out the door they ran.

"Mother, Father!" Karri yelled running.

"Oh, my baby!" Lola said loudly. Lola and Marc waited with open arms.

Buck walked over to Hawk. "What took you so long? We were about ready to come looking for you," Buck said.

"We had to take care of a few things first," Hawk replied.

"Was it important?" Buck asked.

"Yes, very important," Hawk said.

Hawk started to tell Buck what happened on the mountain. About the bear cub coming to the cave. The mother bear coming after it. The wolves protecting Saleena and Karri. How the Alpha male gave his life to protect them. All the time watching Karri and Saleena with Lola and Marc.

Hawk looked back at Buck. "We have one more thing to take care of, 'Mr. Finney'. Then we'll be done here. I have to make sure the girls will be safe after we leave," Hawk said.

"I understand," Buck replied.

Hawk and Buck walked over to Karri and her family. "We have to go to town to talk to Finney. We'll be back as soon as we can," Hawk said.

"Please, be careful Hawk. After what happened last night, he can't be trusted," Marc said.

"Uncle, please be careful," Karri said as she embraced Hawk.

"I'll be back soon, I promise," Hawk said with a smile, putting his hand under Karri's chin.

Buck entered the shuttle, and Hawk seated himself in the War Hawk.

The engines started up and they took off. Wilma and the other pilots followed the shuttle in their fighters.

“Buck to Hawk.”

“Go ahead Buck.”

“What do you think he’ll say about last night? That he didn’t know anything about it?” Buck asked.

“I wouldn’t doubt it. That man would lie through his teeth if he thought it would save his worthless hide,” Hawk said with anger in his voice.

“Easy my friend, I know how you feel,” Buck replied.

Hawk was quiet the rest of the way to town.

They landed on the outside of town. Wilma and the others landed not too far from them.

Hawk and Buck walked into town. Only this time people didn’t gawk or stare at Hawk. Some of the townspeople even said Good Morning to him.

“Well, it looks like some of them expected us,” Hawk said.

Buck and Hawk found the magistrate’s office, they went inside. Mr. Finney stood up to greet his guest.

“Hawk, Buck, what can I do for you? I didn’t know you were still here. I thought you left yesterday,” Finney said with a surprised look on his face.

“We were planning on leaving, but Lola and Marc invited us to stay another night. This time for a quiet night of relaxation and a nice dinner,” Buck said.

“But it wasn’t a quiet dinner,” Hawk interrupted.

“What do you mean? What happened?” Finney asked.

“You know darn well what I mean. You had your friends or lynch men come over to Lola’s and Marc’s house last night. I know all about it,” Hawk said slamming his fist onto Finney’s desk.

Finney jumped back. “I didn’t know anything about it, I swear,” Finney said.

“You knew all about it. The guards overheard you tell some of your people to go out to Marc’s house last night to do harm to my niece and Saleena,” Hawk shouted with anger.

“I didn’t,”... Finney said in a fearful voice.

“Easy Hawk, Mr. Finney wouldn’t lie to us now, would you Mr. Finney?” Buck said. “Let me tell you a little story Finney. It happened almost two years ago. I met this man, he killed a lot

of humans for murdering his whole village. He didn't know who did it or why. He was so angry that he started to attack all humans that crossed his path. And I will tell you this, I know nothing, but nothing will stop him if anything happens to his only living family member," Buck said.

Finney looked at Buck and Hawk. "Is that a threat, Captain Rogers?"

"No, consider it a warning," Hawk said.

"If anything happens to Karri, Saleena, Lola or Marc after we leave, I promise.. I will be back. And if I found out that you were behind any of it, you will be a dead man," Hawk said with fire in his eyes.

Mr. Finney's face turned pale. "I swear Hawk, nothing will happen to any of your family, I promise," Finney said, with fear in his voice.

"I'm glad we understand each other. Good day," Hawk said as he and Buck turned and walked out of the office.

Wilma and the security guards were waiting by the fighters. "How did it go?" Wilma asked.

"I don't think old Finney will be doing any harm to Karri or any of her family. I think Hawk scared the hell out of him," Buck said with a chuckle.

Hawk smiled.

"Buck pulled a good one. He told him how we met," Hawk smiled.

"So we're all set. We can return to the Searcher?" Wilma asked.

"I have one more thing to take care of first," Hawk said. "Buck, you go ahead and go back up the Searcher. I need to go talk to Karri and Saleena," Hawk said in a low voice.

"All right my friend, I understand. I'll see you on board the Searcher," Buck said.

Hawk nodded then headed toward the War Hawk.

Chapter 26

On his way back to Karri's house, Hawk was thinking of how much he was going to miss Karri, and when would he be able to see her again. His eyes started to swell with tears. As he came over the last hill he could see the house and how peaceful and beautiful it was.

"Koori would have liked it here. How can I tell her how much she means to me, knowing that I might not see her again for a very long time. Always wondering if she and Saleena are all right," he thought to himself. "I have to be strong, for all of us. I have to spend as much time with her and Saleena as I possibly can before I leave," he said wiping the tears from his eyes.

Hawk got on the radio and contacted the Searcher.

"Hawk to Searcher."

"Go ahead Hawk."

"Admiral, I'd like to request some time off. Twenty -four hours."

The radio was silent for a moment, then "Request for leave granted. You need some quality time with your niece. We'll see you back on the Searcher in twenty -four hours," the Admiral replied.

"Thank you, Admiral. Hawk out."

Hawk landed the War Hawk close to the house. Before he knew it Karri and Saleena came running out of the house.

"Uncle," Karri yelled with delight.

"What are you two up to?" Hawk asked jokingly.

"We were waiting for you. How did it go with Mr. Finney? Where's Buck and Wilma? Uncle...Are you getting ready to leave us?" Karri asked with a sad expression on her face.

"It went fine with Finney. Buck and Wilma and the rest of the security guards went back to the Searcher. And yes, I'm afraid I am getting ready to leave. But I wanted to spend as much time as I can with you two," Hawk said.

"Let's go into the house. Lola made a great dinner for us," Karri said, smiling.

"All right, but after dinner I want to go for a walk with you two girls. We need to talk," Hawk said with sorrow in his voice.

Karri, Saleena, and Hawk walked into the house. Lola and Marc were setting the table for dinner.

"Hello Hawk," Marc said reaching his hand out to shake Hawk's hand. Hawk removed his glove and shook Marc's hand. "Hello Marc."

Marc could tell something was on Hawk's mind. "Hawk, are you all right? You have a distant look in your eyes," Marc said with concern.

"We'll talk later, after dinner," Hawk said. Marc nodded.

They all sat down at the table for the last time together. Lola stood up and looked at Hawk with a loving smile. "Here's to one very special man, May he find what he's looking for and return home to us safely," Lola said.

"To Hawk," Karri, Saleena, Lola, and Marc said together.

All Hawk could do was smile and lower his head.

"Uncle, you told me never to lower my head. To hold my head up and to be proud of who and what I am. But now you are lowering your head. Why?" Karri asked.

"I am very proud of who and what I am, Karri. It's just that now I have to leave two pieces of my heart behind. You and Saleena are those pieces," Hawk said in a sincere voice.

"But uncle, why do you have to leave?" Karri asked starting to sob.

"I have to, Karri. I need to find more of our people. If you and Saleena survived, there's a good chance more of our people did to. So I have to try to find them. Just like I found you, and Saleena," Hawk said.

"I understand, uncle, but you will come back, won't you?" Karri asked.

"Nothing could keep me away from you two, nothing at all. You are my family. One by blood and another by chance. But we are a family," Hawk said with a smile.

"Why don't you three go for a walk together," Marc said.

"Father, we need to help mother with the dishes and cleaning the table," Karri said.

"You two go ahead. Your father can help me in the kitchen. You need your time together," Lola said.

Karri, and Saleena got up from the table followed by Hawk.

"I know just where to walk to," Hawk said.

"Where's that?" Karri asked.

Saleena smiled. "I know where you're talking about," Saleena said with a smile.

"The cave?" Saleena asked.

"Yes, the cave. I requested permission to stay one more night and the Admiral approved it. So if it's all right with your parents, we can go up together one last time. We can stay the night too, if it's all right?" Hawk said looking over to Marc and Lola for approval.

"I think that's a wonderful idea. But this time you won't go up there without enough food. I've made something special for you three," Lola said as she headed for the kitchen. A few minutes later Lola came out of the kitchen carrying a bag full of cheese, breads, and fruits.

Hawk, Karri, and Saleena looked at each other with surprised looks on their faces.

"How did you know, mother?" Karri asked.

"A mother knows these things. Besides I made the bread last night, and the cheese and fruit I just put in," Lola said with a smile on her face.

"It's been a long time since I've made it. I used to make it for Karri all the time when she was young."

Karri looked at Lola. "Is it seed bread?" she asked in excitement.

Lola smiled.

"Seed bread, I haven't had that for a very long time," Hawk said with a smile.

"I'm afraid it might not taste like the bread you used to have, Hawk. I got the recipe from Karri's mother shortly after we met them. But there's enough in there for the three of you. Don't forget to take some warm clothing and your blankets. It's going to get cold tonight," Lola said with a smile.

The girls giggled. "Oh mother, don't forget we have the wolves to keep us warm, we also have Hawk," Karri said glancing over at Hawk.

Saleena looked at Hawk. "Did you mean what you said about us being family?" Saleena asked.

Hawk gazed at Saleena. "Yes, I meant every word of it," Hawk said.

"Then would it be all right if I called you uncle, also? I know I called you that before. But at that time it kinda slipped out," Saleena said lowering her head.

"I would be honored if you called me uncle. And remember to hold your head up," Hawk said with a sincere look on his face.

Saleena raised her head up and looked straight at Hawk. "I remember. I was a little embarrassed to ask you that, that's all," she replied.

Hawk smiled.

"All right, you three better get going. It's getting late," Lola said.

"It's all right Lola, we'll be taking the War Hawk up," Hawk said with a smile on his face as he turned back around to look at Saleena and Karri.

“We going up in your fighter?” they both said together.

Karri and Saleena started gathering up their belongings and supplies and out the door they went.

“I’ve never seen that girl move so fast,” Marc said, laughing.

Hawk chuckled.

“We’ll be back early in the morning. The Searcher will be leaving shortly after I get back on board,” Hawk said.

The front door opened. “Uncle, are you coming?” Karri shouted.

“I’m coming,” Hawk said laughing.

Hawk followed Karri out the door. Marc and Lola walked out behind him, and stood on the porch.

Hawk noticed that Saleena was having a little trouble getting up into the War Hawk. “Here Saleena, let me help you,” Hawk said.

Saleena turned and looked at Hawk as he approached her.

“I’m sorry uncle, I’ve never been in a fighter before. I don’t know where to step. I don’t want to step on something and break it,” Saleena said.

“It’s all right Saleena, it won’t break,” Hawk said chuckling.

Hawk showed Saleena how to get into the War Hawk. “Thank you uncle,” she said with a smile.

“You’re welcome,” Hawk replied smiling as he was climbing in.

The engines started. Hawk turned and looked at the girls. “Okay, put your harnesses on.”

Both girls strapped themselves in. “All right uncle, we’re ready,” Karri said.

The War Hawk lifted off. Hawk steered towards the mountains. It only took a few minutes for them to reach the clearing by the cave. Hawk landed the fighter with a light thump of the landing gear touching the ground.

Hawk then opened the hatch for the girls. “Okay, we’re here,”

Hawk, Saleena, and Karri unloaded the supplies and carried them up to the cave.

As soon as they got to the opening of the cave, they were met by two of the wolves. “Hello my friends,” Karri said.

The wolves soon started to wag their tails and jump up onto Karri and Saleena. Hawk stood

there and watched with a smile. A moment later the Alpha female came out. She went directly to Hawk and licked his hand. "I'm happy to see you too," Hawk said laughing.

The rest of the night they sat around the fire ring. Hawk was telling them the story of Throm. How he came to the Searcher, and how he met Buck. Karri and Saleena in return were telling their stories of how they came to this planet and what happened to their parents. During their stories they laughed and they cried.

It was getting late. "All right girls, you should get some sleep. We have to go back early in the morning," Hawk said.

"Uncle, are you really leaving us?" Karri asked.

"Only for a short time," Hawk replied.

Karri and Saleena nodded. They curled up next to Hawk, and laid their heads on his lap. Hawk smiled, and stroked their head feathers. They soon fell asleep. It wasn't long before Hawk was having troubles staying awake. He tried to lay over to one of the sides, but one of the girls were there and he didn't want to wake her. It seemed like only a few seconds when Hawk felt a nudge from behind. It was the female wolf. She laid down directly behind Hawk. "Thank you, my friend," he said with a yawn. The wolf had laid down in back of Hawk so he could use her as a pillow. Hawk laid back and rested his head on her side. It wasn't long before he too drifted off to sleep.

A few hours later Karri and Saleena woke up. But Hawk was not there. They stood up and started to walk towards the opening of the cave. The closer they got the more they could hear growling and barking. They ran to the cave entrance and peered outside. Down at the foot of the path, Hawk and the female wolf were playing. Karri and Saleena stood there and laughed so loud that Hawk heard them. He looked up towards them. He then whispered something into the wolf's ear. The female wolf ran up the path and jumped on the girls knocking them down. She then started to lick their faces. The girls started laughing. Hawk ran up the path and grabbed the girls and started to tickle them. Soon all the wolves were in on the playing including the all the pups.

Hawk stood up. "Karri, Saleena, it's about time to go," Hawk said.

"Uncle, do you think mother and father will let us come up here on ce in a while?" Karri asked.

"I'm sure they will, now they know you'd be safe up here with our friends. Come on, time to go home," Hawk said.

Chapter 27

They gathered up their belongings and headed for the War Hawk.

Hawk helped the girls inside, then he climbed in. He sat there for a few minutes looking out over the field. "It truly is a beautiful place," Hawk said. He then started the engines and lifted off. As they were climbing higher, Karri and Saleena looked out the window. They saw all the wolves running. It looked like they were trying to stay with the fighter. But soon they faded out of sight. It was a quiet ride home. Even Hawk was silent. Within a few minutes they were at the house. Hawk landed his fighter just to the north of the house. He opened the door and the girls got out. Still being silent, they made their way to the house. Inside Lola and Marc were waiting to hear about their night on the mountain. But Karri and Saleena went straight to their room. Hawk sat down at the table.

"It's time for me to leave," Hawk said sadly.

"Is something wrong?" Marc asked with a concerned look.

"No, nothing's wrong. I just didn't think it would be this hard to leave Karri and Saleena," Hawk said.

"Don't worry Hawk, we'll take good care of them while you're gone," Marc said with a smile.

"I know you will. It's just that I'm going to miss them very much," Hawk replied.

"You won't be gone very long, will you?" Lola asked.

"I don't know how long I'll be gone. Right now any length of time is too long," Hawk said.

"I'll get the girls, so they can say their goodbyes," Lola said.

"Marc, I was wondering if it would be all right if Karri and Saleena go up to the cave once in a while? It seems it gives them peace," Hawk said.

"Of course they can," Marc said.

Karri and Saleena came into the dining room followed by Lola. "Go ahead, tell him what you told me," Lola said.

Karri and Saleena looked at Lola, then looked at Hawk. "Uncle, we don't want you to leave," Saleena said with tears in her eyes.

"What would happen if Mr. Finney tried to do something again," Karri said crying.

Hawk stood up and put his arms around the girls and held them close. "I'd have to kill him," he said softly to them.

Karri and Saleena gazed up at Hawk, "You'd kill him?" they asked.

“Yes, if he tried to harm either of you, I wouldn’t hesitate a minute. I’ve lost all our people on Throm, and my beloved mate. I refuse to lose you two. If it was up to me I’d take both of you with me, but I’m afraid I can’t,” Hawk said with tears in his eyes. “But, I’ll be back soon. Your father said you can go up to the cave when ever you like. But, tell them when you go. Don’t just take off without telling them. Karri, Saleena, keep the cave as a safe house while I’m gone. I’d feel better if I knew you had a safe place to go if anything does happen while I’m gone,” Hawk said.

“All right uncle,” Karri said, lowering her head weeping.

“Now, what did I tell you girls about lowering your heads,” Hawk asked.

“Never lower our heads, be proud of who and what we are,” they said together.

“That’s right, now walk me out to the War Hawk. But hold your heads high,” Hawk said.

Karri, Saleena, Lola, and Marc walked Hawk out to the fighter. As they were walking up to the fighter, Hawk looked up on the hill and saw the wolves standing up there watching. “Look,” he said pointing at the wolves. “They came down off the mountain to see you,” Hawk said.

“No uncle, they came down to see you,” Karri said.

Hawk gazed at Karri and Saleena. “I’m truly going to miss you two. Come here, give me one last embrace,” Hawk said with tears forming in his eyes.

The girls went over to Hawk and wrapped their arms around him for the last time. Hawk wrapped his arms around them, then gently kissed both girls on the top of their heads.

“I have to go,” he said.

Marc walked up to Hawk. “Come back soon, you’ll always have a home here,” Marc said shaking Hawk’s hand.

“Thank you, Marc. By the way, what is the name of this planet?” Hawk asked.

“This planet is called, ‘Serenity,’” Marc replied.

“Serenity, I like that,” Hawk said.

Hawk looked at the girls. “You two behave yourselves while I’m gone.”

Hawk climbed into the War Hawk and buckled his harness. He looked out the window and saw Karri and Saleena crying. Hawk then started the engines, and waved out the window. Karri and Saleena buried their faces into Lola’s and Marc’s shoulders. Within a few seconds, Hawk was gone.

Lola and Marc put their arms around the girls and walked them towards the house.

Little did they know that a sinister person lurked in the shadows, watching and listening.

“He’s gone,” the mystery person said.

The End.