

“HOME”

Chapter 1

On the Searcher, it had been a little over 7 months since the death of Marc and Lola on the peaceful planet of Serenity. Karri, Saleena, and the twins had become part of a very large family. With their uncle Hawk, they had traveled from planet to planet, solar system to solar system searching for their lost people. Karri and Saleena had become young adults. Their light grey plumage had changed to pure white plumage, the sign of an adult female. During their time on the Searcher the girls had learned to fly a shuttle and learned some medical knowledge from Dr. Goodfellow. Hawk sometimes took one of the girls out on patrol with him, to teach them to fly the War Hawk. The twins, Falcon and Kala, were growing bigger every day. A young couple on the Searcher had been taking care of the twins since they came on board. Karri, Saleena, and Hawk were a big part of their everyday life. Hawk had seen several young human males looking at Karri and Saleena. As soon as they saw Hawk watching them, they would turn their attention to something or someone else. Even though they seemed to be happy living on the Searcher, Karri and Saleena longed for finding mates of their own. They were approaching the age for mating. Though the human males were cute, Hawk would not allow it. Being the only living male relative, it fell upon Hawk to approve or deny the young male suitors.

“Hawk, please report to the bridge.”

Hawk made his way to the bridge. Waiting there were Buck and Colonel Deering.

“What is it, Admiral?” Hawk asked.

“We’re getting some strange readings from that planet. First there are human life form readings, then they seem to disappear. I want you, Buck, and Colonel Deering to go down and investigate. But, be careful. Find out what is going on and report back to me,” Asimov said.

“All right Admiral.”

Buck, Hawk, and Colonel Deering left the bridge and headed for the hanger. “I have to make a quick stop first,” Hawk said.

Buck and Wilma smiled. “We know, you have to let the girls know that you’ll be gone for a while. And for them not to get into any trouble,” Wilma said smiling.

Hawk turned and smiled. “Otherwise they would get worried,” Hawk said.

“Well, do you blame them? You are their only living relative, so far,” Buck replied.

“I’ll join you in the hanger bay in a few minutes. Don’t leave without me,” Hawk said with a smile.

Buck and Wilma nodded, and left for the hanger bay.

Hawk knocked on Karri’s and Saleena’s quarters door.

“Enter,” one of them said.

Hawk opened the door and entered. “I have to go investigate this planet below us. I should be back soon.” Hawk saw that the girls were playing with Falcon and Kala. “How are they doing?” he asked.

“They have gotten so big, uncle. Pretty soon they’ll be walking. How long will you be gone?” Karri asked.

“Not long. Buck and Wilma are going with me,” Hawk said, looking at Falcon and Kala.

“You girls behave yourselves while I’m gone,” Hawk said while smiling at the babies.

“We will, uncle. You be careful, okay?” Saleena said.

Hawk nodded and walked out the door. Outside the door he couldn’t help but smile. “I have a family,” he thought to himself, as he made his way to the hanger bay. There Buck and Wilma were waiting.

“Are the girls and babies all right?” Wilma asked.

“Yes, the girls were sitting on the floor playing with Falcon and Kala. We better get going, the Admiral probably wants a report as soon as possible,” Hawk said.

Hawk, Buck and Wilma got into their fighters and started the engines. Within seconds they were heading for the planet surface. They flew over a small valley, then over a small town. They landed just on the other side of the small town. As they exited the fighters the first thing they noticed was that there were no people.

“I wonder where everyone is at? Someone should be here, the fires are still going and there’s food sitting out,” Buck said.

“I don’t know. I didn’t see anybody when we flew over. Maybe they’re hiding,” Hawk replied.

“Maybe, or maybe not. Looks like they all left in a hurry. If they left at all,” Buck said with a puzzled look on his face.

“Let’s look around, see what we can find,” Wilma said.

“All right, but be careful. They might not have left voluntarily,” Buck said.

They split up, each headed in a different direction. Hawk started to enter the houses. Buck started to search the surrounding area for tracks. Wilma started to look for any tracks or anything that might look out of place. After a thorough search they met back in the center of town.

“Let’s try the outside of town. Maybe we can come up with some tracks or something,” Hawk suggested.

They all headed for the outside of town when they finally came across some tracks.

“It looks like something was being dragged. It goes off in that direction,” Hawk said, pointing in the direction that the drag marks were going.

“Remember, be careful. Let’s not take any unnecessary chances,” Buck said.

They followed the drag marks for about ten to fifteen minutes. The marks disappeared behind some bushes. Hawk looked at Wilma and Buck. “I don’t like this. Wilma, you stay here. I’ll check it out,” Hawk said. Hawk started to push the bush aside and jumped back all of a sudden.

“What is it Hawk? What did you find?” Buck asked.

“I think I found one of the townspeople. Or what’s left of one,” Hawk said backing out from the bush.

Buck and Wilma started to enter the bush when Hawk grabbed Wilma by her arm, stopping her from looking. “I don’t think you should look at it, Wilma. It looks like someone or something tore him or her apart,” Hawk said.

Buck looked at Hawk. He then parted the bush, and looked on the other side. Backing up and gagging, he asked “What could have done that?”

“I don’t know. I think we should inform the Admiral, tell him what we’ve found and request more security, before we look around anymore,” Hawk said.

“Good idea. We don’t know what, or who caused this,” Buck said.

They turned to go back to the fighters when Wilma doubled back and opened the bush. “Wilma, stop!” Hawk warned her. But it was too late, Wilma opened the bush and looked inside. “Oh My God!....what did that?” she asked as she ran off to get sick. Buck and Hawk caught up with her.

“Are you okay?” Hawk asked.

Wilma shook her head. “Yes, I’m all right. What do you think did that?” she asked.

“I don’t know, but until we get more security down here let’s not separate,” Buck said.

“I agree. Let’s go back to the fighters and inform the Admiral,” Hawk said.

But, just as they were walking back to the fighters, they heard a woman screaming. Without thinking Hawk took off in the direction of the scream. “Hawk, come back here. We’re not going to separate till the extra security gets here. I should have known better than to say that,” Buck said to Wilma. “He never listens anyway.” Buck and Wilma started to run after Hawk. Hawk ran for a while then stopped. Not hearing the screaming anymore he lost sense of the direction it was coming from. He stood there for a moment, just as Buck and Wilma caught up to him the screaming started again. As with before, Hawk took off following the sound. On the other side of the ridge he saw what he thought was a dog of some kind, attacking a

woman. Hawk fired his weapon at it, chasing it away from the woman. Buck and Wilma ran up to the woman and Hawk took off looking for the animal.

“Hawk, let it go. We need your help over here,” Buck said. Hawk walked back over to Buck and Wilma.

“What was that thing?” Wilma asked.

“I don’t know. It looked like some kind of dog,” Hawk said.

They knelt down next to the woman. “Is she alive?” Hawk asked.

“Yes, but she needs medical help right away. Help me get her back to the fighter. We’ll take her back to the Searcher,” Buck said.

Just as Hawk was lifting the woman up to carry her, she opened her eyes. “No please, my child. You must get my child,” she said in a weak voice.

“Where is your child?” Wilma asked.

“She’s up there,” the woman pointed up in the tree.

Hawk and Buck looked at each other. “Your child is in the tree?” Buck asked.

The woman nodded. “Yes, they can’t climb,” she said.

Hawk and Buck started to look up in the tree next to the woman. There on a high branch sat a little girl. Hawk started to smile as did Buck.

“What are you two smiling about?” Wilma asked.

Hawk pointed up to the child. “She’s another one of my people,” Hawk said as he was about ready to climb the tree.

“Hawk, you better stay down here in case that creature comes back again. I’ll climb up and get her,” Buck said.

Hawk nodded, and stepped away from the tree. Buck started to climb the tree. But he noticed that every time he would take a step up the tree, the child would move further up and started to cry.

Buck came back down. “Hawk, for some reason the child is afraid of me. You better go up after her,” Buck said.

Hawk smiled and started to climb the tree. Just as he was up about half way to the child, Hawk noticed that the creature was coming back. “It’s coming back!” Hawk shouted, pointing in the direction the creature was coming from. Buck and Wilma drew their weapons, and prepared for the arrival of the creature. Hawk looked at the little girl. “You stay there, you’ll be safe up here,” he said. The little girl stared at Hawk for a moment then became completely quiet. Hawk looked at her and smiled. Buck and Wilma watched in the direction that the

creature was supposed to be coming from.

“Where is it?” Buck asked.

Hawk started to look around. He didn't see the thing anywhere. “I've lost it. But it must be close by, so keep an eye out for it. I'm going to get the little girl,” Hawk said.

Buck and Wilma looked around. Not seeing it, they put their weapons down. Hawk was just reaching for the girl when he saw movement in the bushes just to the right of Wilma.

“Wilma, to your right,” Hawk yelled out.

Just as he did, the creature made a lunge towards Wilma. Buck shot at the creature, but it moved so fast that he missed. It circled Wilma and Buck, growling. Soon after that another one of the creatures appeared, then another, and another. “They're surrounding us,” Wilma yelled out.

“Quickly, hand me the woman, then climb the tree,” Hawk said.

Chapter 2

Buck picked up the woman and handed her to Hawk. She was conscious enough to understand what he was trying to do. She started to climb the tree on her own. Buck sent Wilma up next, then he followed.

“Now what? We’re all up a tree,” Buck said.

“That’s true, but they can’t climb. We can shoot them without any danger to us or the woman and child,” Hawk said.

“I see now. Before we were the sitting ducks, now they are,” Wilma said with a smile.

Hawk smiled and nodded. “I just hope that this is all there is,” Hawk said.

Buck turned to the woman. “Do you know how many there are?” he asked.

The woman, getting weaker and weaker, looked at Buck for a moment. “No, but I do know that they didn’t appear till about 3 days ago, shortly after my child and I got here. I heard that a ship crashed here about a month ago, carrying some unknown cargo. Then about three days ago, people were starting to get killed,” she said, closing her eyes.

Hawk gazed over at the woman. “How did you come to be with this child?” he asked.

The woman opened her eyes and looked at Hawk and tried to smile. “We’re from a planet named Acklon. It’s located in the Talani system. On our planet there are humans and bird people living in peace with each other. We protect one another,” she said.

Hawk looked at the woman. “You mean there’s more bird people on your planet?” Hawk asked, with a smile on his face.

“Yes,” she replied.

Hawk glanced over at Buck and Wilma and smiled, forgetting about the creatures below them. Buck and Wilma smiled back. “Now, all we have to do is get rid of our uninvited guests,” Wilma said.

Hawk took aim and started to shoot at the creatures. He managed to kill two of them. The others took off running for the cover of the bushes. Hawk looked around and couldn’t see any movement or any sign of them anywhere. “Maybe we should make a run for it,” Buck said.

“I have a better idea. I’ll go get the War Hawk. I can carry several people in it,” Hawk mentioned.

“Hawk, that means you have to get down on the ground, and run,” Wilma said.

“I know, but with you two up here shooting at the creatures. I’ll have a better chance of getting to the ship,” Hawk said.

“Please, be careful Hawk,” Wilma said.

“I will. Besides, I have a family on board the Searcher that needs me,” he said smiling.

Hawk looked around again for any sign of the creatures. Not seeing any he dropped down and started to run towards the ridge. As he reached the ridge he turned and saw that the creatures were back, but they had not seen him. He ran the rest of the way to the War Hawk, climbed in and started the engines. He didn't hesitate, he lifted off and headed back to his friends. As he got there the noise must have scared the creatures off. They were no where to be found. Buck and Wilma helped the injured woman into the War Hawk, then Buck went up to get the child. The child, not sure of this human, started to climb higher and higher again. “I'm not going to hurt you. I want to help you,” Buck said. But she kept climbing.

Hawk kept the engines on to make sure the creatures did not sneak back up on them while they had their backs turned.

“Hawk, I'm afraid I can't get the little girl. She seems to be frightened of me. You'll have to get her,” Buck said.

“All right, I'll be right there,” Hawk said. He walked to the tree and started to climb it. As he got closer to the little girl, he could tell she was not afraid of him. In fact, she was smiling and holding out her arms to him.

“Come along little one,” he said softly. The little girl reached out for Hawk. “Hang on to my neck,” he said. The little girl did just what he asked her to do. She wrapped her arms around Hawk's neck and held on. “That's a good girl.” Hawk climbed back down the tree and handed her to Buck, which she did not like -- she started to cry. The creatures heard her. They braved up enough to see where the crying was going from. Thinking that the noise thing was going to leave, they came out from hiding, standing along the bushes watching.

Hawk climbed back into the seat of the War Hawk, lifted off, turned it around to face the creatures and opened fire. The blast from the War Hawk destroyed the bush line completely, including the creatures. Hawk then flew Buck and Wilma over to their fighters. As he was watching them go to their fighters, a movement caught his eye. More of those creatures were running towards the fighters.

“There's more coming,” Hawk yelled out while pointing in the direction they were coming from. Buck and Wilma were already in the fighters by the time they got there. “We better get the woman and child up to the Searcher,” Hawk said.

All three ships lifted off. Heading back to the Searcher, Buck radioed the Searcher.

“Buck to Searcher.”

“Go ahead Buck. What did you find out?”

“Admiral, the people down on this planet were being killed by some kind of creature. We don't know how many are left. We do have two survivors, a woman and a young child. The woman will need medical help as soon as we land. Admiral, I recommend you put a quarantine on this planet,” Buck said.

“I agree. I want you, Hawk, and Wilma to report to me upon your arrival,” Asimov requested.

“Understood, Buck out.”

“I just hope there were no other people left on that planet,” Wilma said.

“We can have the ship run a scan over the planet, to see if there are anymore survivors,” Buck said.

Hawk turned his head to check on the woman and the little girl. “Are you all right?” he asked the little girl. She just nodded her head. She watched as Hawk reached back to check on the woman. “You’re safe now. We’ll get you medical help as soon as we land on the Searcher,” he said softly to the woman. He could tell that the woman was seriously injured. The bite marks were everywhere on her body. “You are one brave woman to stand alone against all those creatures,” Hawk said softly. He looked at the girl again. “Can you tell me your name?” Hawk asked. She sat there next to her mother, looking at Hawk and smiling. Hawk smiled back at her. “You know, I have two nieces on the ship,” Hawk said to her. She remained looking at Hawk. “They’re just like you and I.” Hawk was hoping to get the little girl to talk. But she didn’t say a word.

“Hawk to Searcher.”

“Go ahead Hawk.”

“Requesting landing bay number,” Hawk asked.

“Searcher to Hawk. Approach at landing bay 5. Searcher out.”

“Landing bay 5....understood. Hawk out.”

Hawk headed for landing bay 5. By the time he landed Buck and Wilma had already landed and were walking over to help the medical team with the injured woman, and the little girl. Hawk opened the hatch and climbed out first. He then reached inside to assist the woman out, then the child. When he handed the little girl to the medics she started to cry. They looked at Hawk. “What’s wrong with her?” they asked. Hawk got down from the War Hawk and reached for her. After she got into his arms she stopped crying. “She’s afraid of humans, I guess,” Hawk said. She hung onto Hawk’s neck all the way to the sick bay. Before he tried to put her down, he glanced over at the nurse. “Could you please call for Karri to come down to sick bay for me,” Hawk asked. The nurse nodded, then went over to the intercom.

“Karri, please report to sick bay.”

It was about 5 minutes later that Karri and Saleena both showed up. They walked over to Hawk. “Uncle, are you all right?” Karri asked. Hawk turned around. “I’m fine,” he said holding the child. “Uncle, where did she come from?” Karri asked holding her arms out to the little girl. The little girl went right to Karri.

‘She’s from that planet below. Her mother is over there. She’s been injured pretty badly. Could you two watch her for a while? She doesn’t seem to like humans too much. I have to go talk to the Admiral,’ Hawk said.

‘Of course uncle, she is a cutie,’ Karri replied.

Hawk smiled and gently touched the little girl’s cheek. ‘I’ll be back as soon as I can,’ he said.

Chapter 3

Hawk left the sick bay to go talk to the Admiral about the planet, and what they found. He made his way up to the bridge where the Admiral, Buck and Wilma were waiting.

“I’m sorry I’m late sir. I wanted to make sure that the child was all right, and in good hands,” he said.

“It’s all right Hawk. Buck filled me in on the child and the reaction she had to humans. What can you three tell me about the planet? Did you find any more survivors down there?” the Admiral asked.

“We didn’t get a chance to thoroughly check out the planet sir. With finding the woman and child, and being attacked by those creatures, we didn’t have time. Sir, may I request a scan of the planet surface, to see if there are any more people down there?” Hawk said.

“Yes, that would be a wise idea. If there are more people down there, it would be a lot easier to know where they are first,” Asimov said as he walked over to the control center. “Make a full complete scan of that planet. I want to know if there are any more people down there, at once,” he ordered.

“Yes sir,” the radar person replied.

Asimov turned to face Hawk, Buck and Wilma again. “What kind of creatures were they?” he asked.

“They looked like a cross between a dog and a rodent, sir. A large creature with long teeth and a long tail with no hair or fur on it. But the face was like a rat’s, sir,” Hawk replied.

“Did you say a rat?” the Admiral asked.

“Yes sir. The size is that of a dog, but with a face and tail of a rat,” Hawk said.

“Buck, Wilma, did you see this thing Hawk is describing?”

“Yes sir, we did. And it’s just like Hawk said it looked like. But one thing about this giant rat sir, it kills people,” Buck said.

“I understand. Are there any life signs on this planet?” Asimov asked.

“No sir, just animal signs. No human life signs at all.”

“Very well, put a call through to the Galactic Council, and have it patched through to me in the meeting room. I’m going to request permission to destroy this planet completely,” Asimov said.

“Yes sir.”

“Sir, with your permission. I’d like to go check on the woman and the child?” Hawk asked.

“Of course, go ahead,” Asimov replied.

Hawk left the bridge and headed for the sick bay.

“Is there something I should know about this woman and child?” Asimov asked.

Buck and Wilma glanced at each other and smiled.

“Admiral, the reason why Hawk is excited about this woman and child is because, the child is a bird person also. The woman comes from a planet with a lot of bird people on it,” Buck explained.

“Oh, I see. Did this woman say where this planet of hers is located?”

“Yes sir, she said it is located in the Talani system. And the planet is called Acklon,” Buck said with a smile.

The Admiral was quiet for a moment. “I’d like to talk to this woman,” he said.

Hawk, who had just arrived at the sick bay, walked over to the woman’s bed. “How is she doing, doctor?” Hawk asked.

“She is going to be all right. The bites are deep, but she’ll survive,” Goodfellow said.

“How about the child?” Hawk said looking over at Karri and Saleena, who were holding the child.

“Oh, that one is doing great. She has a set of lungs on her. I tried to examine her and she started to cry, loudly,” Goodfellow said with a smile on his face.

Hawk walked over to Karri and Saleena. “How is she doing? Has she said anything yet?” Hawk asked.

“No, uncle. She just watches her mother. Uncle? What happened down there?” Karri asked with concern in her voice.

Hawk started to tell Karri and Saleena what happened. “But, there is a good possibility that what the woman said is true. About there being another planet where our people and humans live together in peace,” Hawk said.

Just as Hawk was about ready to take Karri, Saleena, and the little one to their quarters, the Admiral walked in.

“How is she, doctor?” Asimov asked.

“She’ll survive, Admiral.”

“Good.” The Admiral looked over at the woman. “Could you notify me when she’s well enough to get visitors?” he asked.

“Yes, of course,” Goodfellow said.

The Admiral walked back over to Hawk. “Is this the child that was with the woman?”

“Yes sir. I was taking her to Karri’s and Saleena’s quarters. She seems to be more comfortable with them, than in here with doctor and nurses,” Hawk replied.

The Admiral looked at the little girl. “How old do you think she is?”

“I’d say 6 maybe 7 years old sir.”

“Too young to lose a parent, human or bird people. Did you tell me that this woman was protecting this child with a stick against this creature?” Asimov asked.

“Yes sir. I couldn’t believe it either. She had her back against the tree, and was swinging at the creature with a large branch. If there would have been more than one of those things, I don’t think she would have survived,” Hawk said holding the little girl in his arms.

“Amazing, a woman her size, beating off a creature like that. She must truly love the child,” Asimov said.

Hawk looked over at the woman, then at the little girl. “Yes, amazing to think that a woman would give her life to protect a child that was not even from her race of people. If this planet she was telling us really does exist, maybe, just maybe there is hope for Karri and Saleena,” Hawk said smiling at the Admiral.

“What do you mean by that, Hawk?” Asimov asked.

“Sir, if this planet does exist. Karri and Saleena might be able to have a full life with people of our own kind. To find a mate, to have children of their own. For me, I could never find another mate. No one could replace my beloved Koori. But for them, their life is just beginning. I want them to have a chance at it,” Hawk said with tears forming in his eyes.

The Admiral hung his head for a moment, then looked back up at Hawk. “As soon as this woman comes to, I’ll find out where this planet is. I promise you Hawk, Karri and Saleena will have a chance,” he said placing his hand on Hawk’s shoulder.

Hawk smiled. “Thank you sir. That would mean a lot to me.”

Karri and Saleena stood there for a moment. “Uncle, we don’t want to leave you,” Karri said.

Hawk turned, gazed at Karri and Saleena with love in his eyes. “I know, little ones. But, on this planet you’ll be able to find mates, and live as a family once again.”

“Uncle, you are our family,” Karri said with her eyes swelling with tears.

Hawk knew that when the time came his heart would be broken again. “Let’s worry about that when the time comes. Let’s get the little one to your quarters so she can get some sleep,” he said fighting back the tears.

Hawk and the girls left the sick bay. The Admiral stood there for a moment. He looked over at Goodfellow. "I'll have a very hard decision to make later. I just hope that the Galactic Council goes for it," he said to the good doctor.

Goodfellow looked at the Admiral. "I know you will make the right choice. I just hope you make the right choice for Hawk."

The Admiral nodded his head. "Call me when she wakes up." The Admiral left the sick bay. He walked slowly back up to the bridge. "Have you received any messages from the Galactic Council yet?" he asked.

"No sir, not yet."

Chapter 4

Hawk, Karri, and Saleena took the child back to their quarters. The poor little girl was so exhausted that she had fallen asleep in Hawk's arms. Karri opened the door to their quarters and walked in to turn on the lights. Hawk entered next, followed by Saleena. Karri walked over to her bed and pulled back the covers. "Put her in my bed, uncle. I'll sleep on the floor or with Saleena," Karri said while pulling the covers the rest of the way down.

Hawk gently placed the girl in the bed and started to cover her, when she opened her eyes and started to weep. "It's all right little one. You're safe now, get some rest," he said softly stroking her cheek. She looked up at Hawk and for the first time it looked like she wanted to say something, but she just smiled.

Hawk's heart started to melt at the sight of her smile. He smiled back. "I wish you could tell us your name, and who that woman is. Well, when you feel like talking you'll tell us. Until then, get some rest. You've had a very long, hard day," he said softly still stroking her cheek as he covered her up.

Hawk started to walk away when he heard a soft voice say, "My name is Koora."

Hawk turned around and smiled. "My name is Hawk, these are my nieces Karri and Saleena," he said.

The little girl looked over at Karri and Saleena and smiled at them.

"Can you tell me who that lady is?" Hawk asked.

"She's my mother. Her name is Kalee. Where is she?" Koora asked.

"She's in the sick bay. She's going to be all right. How old are you, Koora?" Hawk asked.

"I'm going to be 7 next month. Can I go see her?" she asked.

"Later, she's resting right now, as you should be. Karri and Saleena will take you to her later," Hawk said.

Koora smiled.

"I am kind of tired. Maybe I should sleep for a little while. Then when I wake up could you take me to my mother?" she asked.

"Of course Koora, but it's getting late. You get a good night sleep and first thing in the morning, I'll take you to see her," Karri said smiling.

"Thank you," Koora said yawning.

Koora laid back down. Hawk walked back over to her and covered her up. "Good night little one," he said as he turned and left the room.

The next morning in the sick bay, Dr. Goodfellow was sitting at his desk when he heard a light moan. He got up and slowly walked over to the woman.

“Umm m, where am I?” she asked as she slowly opened her eyes.

“You’re on the research vessel Searcher, you’ve been injured,” Goodfellow said.

The woman tried to sit up but was forced to lay back down due to the pain she felt in her waist and legs. “Where is my daughter?”

“Your daughter is with Hawk and his family. Do you remember anything? How you got here? Or who you are?” he asked.

She looked over at the doctor and smiled. “My name is Kalee. My daughter’s name is Koora. The last thing I remember is that a birdman carried me to a ship. After that, I don’t remember anything. Is there a birdman on this ship? Or was I seeing things?” she asked with a confused look on her face.

The doctor smiled. “No, you were not seeing things my dear. His name is Hawk. In fact, I should notify him that you are awake. I must also notify the Admiral. He has been waiting to talk to you. I told him that I would let him know when you were awake. Do you think you are up to having visitors?” Goodfellow asked.

“May I see my daughter first?” she asked.

“Of course, I’ll notify Karri and Saleena right now. I’ll be right back. Please, stay in bed, you’re still too weak to try to walk right now,” he said as he turned to walk away. Goodfellow walked over to the ship’s intercom.

“Karri, Saleena, would you please bring our young guest to the sick bay. And would Admiral Asimov, and Hawk please report to the sick bay,” he said over the intercom.

He had just walked back over to Kalee when the sick bay door opened. In walked Karri and Saleena with Koora. Koora saw that her mother was awake, ran over to her. “Mother,” she cried.

“Oh my daughter, thank god you are all right,” she said kissing Koora on her cheek and crying.

“I thought those monsters were going to get you,” Koora cried embracing her mother.

“I’m fine. Are you all right?” she asked looking towards the doctor.

“She’s doing very well, she had no injuries. But she does have a very good set of lungs on her,” the doctor said smiling.

They started to laugh. “You must be Karri and Saleena? Which one is which?”

“I’m Karri, and this is Saleena. Hawk is our uncle,” Karri said.

“My name is Kalee. I guess you all ready know my daughter,” she said.

“Hello Kalee,” Karri and Saleena replied.

Just then the door to the sick bay opened. Admiral Asimov entered first followed by Colonel Deering, Buck, then Hawk.

“Ahh, may I introduce Kalee. Kalee, this is Admiral Asimov, Colonel Deering, Captain Buck Rogers and this fine feathered gentleman is Hawk,” Goodfellow said.

“I want to thank you for saving mine and my daughter’s life,” Kalee said while shaking each of their hands.

“Can you tell us what happened down there? Where did those creatures come from?” Asimov asked.

“I’ll tell you what I know. About a week ago people started to disappear. Some people told me that about a month ago a ship crashed about 2 miles from town. When they went out to investigate, they found busted up crates inside of the ship. There was no manifest, no papers, nothing. In fact even the crew was gone. Then after that more and more people disappeared everyday. I met up with a pilot that told me he would take my daughter and myself to Acklon. When we started to leave, the creatures were in town. He told me he was going to go get his ship then come back for us. He never came back. We waited for as long as we possibly could. After two days, we decided to try to get to the next town, which was about 5 miles away. We only made it to where you found us. I saw something coming out of the bushes, so I pushed Koorra up the tree. I knew I wouldn’t have time to get up it, so I grabbed the only thing I could find. That was that large branch you saw me with. Just as I was about to pick it up, the creature jumped on my back and started to bite and claw me. I managed to grab it by the throat and started to squeeze. It let loose long enough for me to pick up the branch, then I started to hit it over the head with it. It staggered back for a moment then it charged again. As I was turning to take another swing at it, it bit me on my side. I thought I was going to die then. It wouldn’t stop, and it wouldn’t let loose. It kept biting. I was getting exhausted. I told Koorra to stay in the tree no matter what happens. Then I remember hearing a shot, and the creature ran away. I sank to the ground, then I heard voices next to me. I couldn’t open my eyes again till I finally had enough strength. That’s when I saw you, Hawk. After that I don’t remember anything else,” Kalee said.

“Well young lady, sounds like you had one scary event. You’re safe now, as is your daughter. I had my crew run a scan of the planet. There is no more human life on this planet. You, and your daughter are the only survivors,” Admiral Asimov informed her.

“All those people are dead?” she asked.

“Yes, I’m sorry.”

Chapter 5

“Hawk was telling me that you and your daughter are from Acklon, in the Talani system. Where is that?” the Admiral asked.

“It’s about one and a half light years from here. Or as some of the humans say on my planet, a skip and a jump from here,” she said smiling.

“I’ll take you and your daughter back home. But, right now I’m waiting to hear from the Galactic Council. I’ve requested permission to destroy this planet. Those creatures are too dangerous to let anyone else land on this planet,” Asimov said.

“I understand Admiral. I feel sorry for all those innocent humans and other bird people that lost their lives down there. When do you think you’ll hear from the Galactic Council?” Kalee asked.

“I don’t know. It might take a few days or it might take a week. Either way, we can’t leave this planet till then. I’m sorry,” Asimov replied.

“Oh Admiral, I understand. You have to make sure nobody else falls prey to that planet and those horrible creatures. And I really do appreciate the ride home. But, where can my daughter and myself stay on your ship?” she asked.

“Don’t worry Kalee, we’ll find you and your daughter a nice quarter to stay in. I’m sorry, but I really must return to the bridge. Hawk and Dr. Goodfellow will tend to your needs. It was very nice to meet you,” Admiral Asimov said as he turned to leave.

“It was nice meeting you also, Admiral, and thank you.”

“Hawk, where are you and your darling nieces from?” Kalee asked.

“I’m from Throm, and Karri and Saleena are from Serenity. Have you lived on Acklon all your life?” Hawk asked.

Kalee giggled.

“No, I was born on Earth. About 20 years ago my real parents were killed. So I was put up for adoption, I was only five at the time. During the hard times on Earth, they sent some of the orphans to other planets, hoping to find them a good home somewhere else. I was adopted by Peregrine and his mate Kalana. When I was old enough, I asked them why they adopted me, when there were other bird people children still there. They told me that a bird person would find a home a lot easier than a human child. They wanted me to have a good life and help me learn the ways of their ancestors. When they died, I was all alone. I talked to the elders about if it was against the rules for me to adopt a child of their kind. They smiled and asked me why I wanted to do that. I told them, so I can give back to our people what their people gave to me. I guess they liked what I said, because they gave me their permission the next day. So the next day, I came to this planet and found Koora. That was about five years ago. We came back to find another child to adopt. But, then this happened,” Kalee said hanging her head. “All those people and children, they never had a chance,” she said with tears in her eyes.

The doctor walked over. "I'm sorry Hawk, but Kalee needs her rest. Why don't you leave for a while and come back later?" Goodfellow said.

"I'm sorry doctor. I didn't mean to keep her up. If it's all right with Kalee, I would like to come back later," Hawk said.

"I'd like that. Maybe you could tell me about Throm," Kalee replied.

Hawk nodded, then turned to the girls and little Koora. "All right, you heard the doctor. We better leave for a while so she can get some rest. We'll keep Koora in your room for right now Karri, till her mother gets better," Hawk said.

They turned to leave and Koora ran back to her mother and gave her a kiss on her cheek. "I'll see you soon mother, I love you," Koora said.

Kalee embraced Koora, even with the pain she was in. "I love you too, my daughter," she said in return while kissing her on the top of her head. "You do what Hawk, Karri and Saleena tell you to do. When they say it's time for bed, go to bed, all right?" she said.

Koora smiled and embraced her mother even more. "I will, I promise."

"Time to go Koora, your mother needs her rest. We'll come back down later to see her, all right?" Karri said.

Koora smiled at Karri and Saleena. "Would it be okay if I got something to eat? I'm a little hungry," she said.

"Of course, the food dispenser in our quarters makes some very good seed bread. It also makes some very tasty cake too," Karri said.

Hawk looked at Karri and Saleena.

"You make sure she eats right. Not just cake. Make sure she gets plenty of fruit also," Hawk said.

"We will uncle," they said as they left the sick bay.

"They are very sweet girls, Hawk. What happened to their parents?" Kalee asked.

Hawk looked over at the doctor. Doctor Goodfellow smiled, "You can come back later and tell her about the girls Hawk. Right now she really does need her rest, my dear boy," Goodfellow said with understanding eyes.

"All right, doctor," Hawk replied.

"You need to do what the doctor says. He knows what he's talking about, and he is right. You do need your rest. I'll come back later and tell you about the girls," Hawk said with a smile.

"All right, I'd like that," Kalee said as she smiled back.

Hawk left the sick bay and found the girls right outside the door. He took them and Koora and headed for Karri's and Saleena's quarters when the intercom started to crackle.

"Captain Rogers, Colonel Deering, and Hawk. Please report to the bridge conference room."

"I have to go. You girls take Koora in and get her something to eat. I'll be back as soon as I can," Hawk said.

"All right uncle. Come along Koora, let's get something to eat," Karri said.

The girls went to their quarters and Hawk headed for the bridge. When he got there Buck and Wilma were waiting. The Admiral motioned for them into the conference room. They entered and the door closed.

"I have some news from the Galactic Council," he said with a disturbed look on his face.

"What is it, sir?" Wilma asked.

"I found out where those creatures came from," he replied.

Hawk, Buck and Wilma sat down and tried to study the look on the Admiral's face.

Chapter 6

The Admiral walked over to the portal and gazed out.

“I’ve heard from the Galactic Council. They informed me of some rather upsetting news. I don’t think you’re going to like it,” the Admiral said, turning to face them again.

“Admiral, what is it? Did they deny your request?” Buck asked.

“Yes and no. The news I received was how the creatures might have gotten there in the first place,” Asimov replied.

“What did they say Admiral? How do they know how the creatures got there?” Hawk asked.

“About a year ago, some scientists were experimenting on dogs and rats. Somehow they combined the DNA and created this creature. At first it was easy to control. But as time went by, the creature started to multiply on its own. They think it might have been due to the fact that the dog was a female and the rat a male. Somehow it created its own reproduction organs. Within a month’s time it had ten babies. They destroyed the adult. But the babies kept growing more and more. They finally decided to destroy the babies: they put them on a ship and wanted the pilot to take them to a desolate planet where they could be destroyed. But the ship never was heard from after the 3rd day of its journey. The Galactic Council only could assume that the ship was hijacked by pirates, or that the creatures somehow got out of their crates and attacked the pilot. They could only hope that the pilot was able to blow the ship before he died,” Asimov said.

“Why didn’t they check on the route manifest?” Wilma asked.

“They had no route manifest, Wilma. The route was kept a secret, only the pilot knew the route. That way it would never be known about,” Asimov said.

“A suicide mission?” Buck asked softly.

“Yes, Buck. I’m afraid so. The pilot was dying, he wanted to die in space. So the Council approved him to pilot the ship. He knew the dangers. But he accepted it,” Asimov hung his head and sobbed softly.

“Admiral, you knew this pilot didn’t you?” Wilma asked.

Asimov lifted his head and gazed at them.

“Yes, the pilot and I were very close. He was my younger brother,” he replied hanging his head as he wept.

Hawk, Buck and Wilma hung their heads.

“I’m so sorry Admiral,” Buck said.

“How did you know your brother was the pilot?” Wilma asked.

Asimov looked up.

“The Galactic Council just informed me. They said that no one was allowed to know of the mission. The last time I saw him or talked to him was over a year ago,” he replied.

For once in his life Asimov broke down and cried in front of the crew. Wilma stood up and walked over to him and embraced the Admiral.

“I’m so sorry Admiral,” she whispered as she held him.

Hawk and Buck stood and walked over to him.

“Admiral, we’re sorry to hear that it was your brother. But sir, he did something nobody else would have done. He was willing to give his life to protect others. I understand that he was dying, but he didn’t have to take the mission, did he?” Hawk asked.

The Admiral looked at Hawk.

“No, he didn’t have to take the mission. He could have just left and died in space without anybody knowing,” Asimov replied.

“Well sir, we have to finish what your brother gave his life for. We have to destroy every one of those creatures,” Hawk said.

The Admiral gazed back out the portal.

“There’s more, the council would like us to destroy the creatures without destroying the planet.”

“How are we going to do that sir? If those things can reproduce without a mate, there’s no telling how many there are right now,” Wilma said with a concerned look on her face.

“Cyanide,” Asimov replied.

“But sir, that will kill every living thing on the planet,” Wilma said.

“Yes, it will. But it will not harm the trees, grass or contaminate the water. It only affects living animals. Then after a week or so, I’ll send a team down to make sure every one of those creatures are dead. But for safety, we’ll scan the whole planet first. The only regret I’ll have about using it, is that it will kill all of the wild life. But, we can replace the natural wildlife. The birds, deer, all of it. If they would like ants, we’ll give them those also. They want to try to keep the planet, if at all possible. That way it can be re-populated again with people,” Asimov replied.

Hawk, Buck and Wilma looked over at the Admiral.

“Do you think it will work, Admiral?” Hawk asked.

“I pray it does Hawk, I really do. We’ll do one more complete scan, just to make sure we didn’t miss anyone. Then if it’s clear, we’ll load up five shuttles with the cyanide bombs and

start dropping them all over the planet. Then I'll send out a quarantine signal. After we do that, we can take our guest home. By the time we leave Acklon, and get back here, the cyanide should have worn off. But I'll run another scan just to make sure it's safe for the team to go down to the planet. I'll have them check the cyanide level and to see if by chance any of the creatures survived," the Admiral said as he looked into their faces.

"Do you have any questions or concerns?" he asked.

"Yes sir. I do have one question," Hawk replied.

"Yes Hawk, what is it?"

"When do we start?" Hawk asked.

"Right now," Asimov replied.

They walked out of the meeting room and the Admiral gave the order to load up five shuttles with cyanide bombs. At first the crew members were a little shocked. Then after the Admiral explained why, some understood.

"I know some of you don't understand, and some of you do. And some are probably even questioning my command. But, it's the only way we can save this planet and destroy those creatures. I wish I could give you full detail, but we don't have the time."

The Admiral went over to the intercom.

"This is the Admiral, we are going to drop cyanide bombs on the planet below to destroy all the creatures. But, in the process we will also be destroying the natural wildlife. I want five shuttles loaded up with cyanide bombs, then I need five good pilots to deliver them," he said.

"Sir, there are three good pilots right here. So all you'll need is two more pilots," Hawk replied.

"Admiral, this is McGregor. Sir, I want to volunteer for this mission," McGregor requested over the intercom.

"All right McGregor, you're in. I need one more," he said.

"Sir, this is Murphy. I volunteer also sir."

"Thank you Murphy, you're in too."

"All right, we have our five pilots, sir. When do we start?" Buck asked with a smile on his face.

"Radar, run another complete scan of the planet. I want to make sure there are no more humans down there. Then I also want you to count how many of those creatures are down there. I want an exact number," Asimov said.

"Yes sir."

“Admiral, I’d like to go check on Karri and Saleena before we leave,” Hawk said.

“Go ahead Hawk, it’ll be a while before the bombs are loaded,” Asimov replied.

“Thank you sir,” Hawk said as he left the bridge and headed for Karri’s and Saleena’s quarters.

As he walked down the corridor, the only thing he could think about was what would happen if something happened to him. “Who would take care of Karri and Saleena? I have to stop by and talk to Kalee. I want to ask her, if anything should happen to me if she could take care of them?” Hawk shook the thought out of his head. “I’m still going to talk to her about it,” he said to himself. He found himself standing in front of the two girls’ door. He knocked.

“Enter.”

Hawk entered. “Karri, Saleena, I have to go on another mission. I want you to look after Koora and Kalee while I’m gone,” Hawk asked.

“All right uncle. Where are you going?”

“Not far, I’ll be back soon. I have to go talk to Kalee for a few minutes. You girls go to bed. You must be tired, and it’s late. I’ll see you when I get back,” Hawk said as he kissed them both good night and walked out the door.

Hawk made his way to the sick bay. The door opened and he walked in. Kalee was sitting up in bed reading from the archives.

She looked up and smiled. “I heard about what the Admiral is planning on doing. Are you one of the pilots?” she asked.

“Yes, I’m getting ready to leave now. I just wanted to stop in and check to see how you were feeling,” Hawk said.

“I’m feeling so much better. The good doctor said I might be able to get out of bed tomorrow and do some walking. So, will I see you when you get back?” Kalee asked with a smile.

Hawk smiled.

“I’ll stop by later this evening, and let you know how things went,” Hawk said.

There was a crackling noise on the intercom.

“Buck, Hawk, Wilma, McGregor and Murphy please report to the hanger bay.”

“Well, I better go. They must be ready. I’ll see you later,” Hawk said. Without thinking he bent over and kissed her on her cheek, he then turned and walked out of the sick bay.

Kalee sat there with a smile on her face.

Doctor Goodfellow walked over to her and smiled.

“I must say, that is the first time Hawk has done anything like that since he lost his mate.”

Down at the hanger bay, all the pilots were getting ready to board their shuttles, then the Admiral walked in. “The scan showed no human life at all on the planet surface. Go to your drop sites and start dropping the cyanide bombs. There are 20 bombs on each shuttle. Each bomb will cover a range of 200 square miles each. Drop them, then return to the Searcher. And good luck,” the Admiral said.

They all boarded their shuttle and closed the doors. A countdown started as the shuttles got ready to launch. Within about 10 seconds all the shuttles were on their way to the planet surface.

Chapter 7

All the shuttles went to their designated drop sites and started to drop the cyanide bombs one at a time. As Buck looked out the window, he could see some of the creatures running as if trying to stay with the shuttle. When the bombs hit the ground they exploded. The cyanide gas started to saturate the air. Buck had dropped about 10 of his bombs. He turned the shuttle and headed for another part of his drop site. He could see that some of the creatures were lying on the ground already kicking. He saw a few of the others come over and start to eat the ones lying on the ground. Within a few minutes they too were lying on the ground. Hawk was having the same reaction in his areas. As was Wilma.

“Buck to Searcher.”

“Go ahead Buck. Is everything all right?”

“Yes sir. It seems to be working. A lot of them seem like they are dying or are dead,” Buck replied.

“Very well. Keep me posted. Searcher out.”

Hawk had the mountain areas. There were caves and caverns along the cliffs, so he was extra careful to get the bombs in the right area so they could saturate the caves and caverns as well.

“Hawk to Searcher.”

“Go ahead Hawk.”

“Sir, how does it look on the scanner? Are there any more places that need to be bombed?” Hawk asked.

“Stand by.”

The Admiral ordered another scan of the planet. “It’s completely covered with the cyanide gas, sir,” Anderson said.

“Very good, thank you Anderson,” Asimov said patting him on his back.

“Searcher to Hawk.”

“Go ahead Searcher.”

“Hawk, the scan shows every bit of the planet is saturated with the cyanide gas. Well done everyone, return to the Searcher. Searcher out.”

On the way back to the Searcher everyone dropped the remaining bombs in different areas.

“Let’s go home,” Buck said as he started to head back up to the Searcher.

Within about one and a half hours they managed to saturate the whole planet with the cyanide bombs.

“Is there any movement down there at all, Anderson?” Asimov asked.

“Not that I can see Admiral,” he replied.

All the shuttles landed safely on the landing deck of the Searcher. As the pilots exited their shuttles, the crew members started to applaud. Along with them was Admiral Asimov.

“Well done,” he said shaking each of their hands.

“Admiral, with your permission. I’d like to go check on Karri and Saleena,” Hawk asked.

“Permission granted,” Asimov replied patting him on his back as he walked by.

Hawk headed straight for Karri and Saleena’s quarters. He knocked, then entered.

“Uncle! You’re back. How did it go?” Saleena asked.

“It went just fine. We got them all,” he said embracing both of them.

“What will happen to the planet now?” Karri asked.

“The Admiral will set up a quarantine signal. To keep anyone from landing on the planet. Then when we return in about a week. We’ll go down and clean up, to make sure none of those creatures survived. If they did we have to destroy them. We don’t want any of those things left alive. Right now we’re on our way to Acklon. How is Koora?” he asked.

“She’s doing great. She was watching the shuttles take off, then she went right to sleep,” Karri replied.

“That’s good. I promised Kalee I would stop by after I came back. You girls are doing a great job watching out for Koora. I know her mother really appreciates it. I’ll be back in a little while,” Hawk said as he gently kissed each one on the top of their head.

“Uncle, you like Kalee, don’t you?” Saleena asked.

“Yes, I do like her. She is the first human female that would give her life to protect a child that was not of her kind.” Hawk stopped for a moment then lowered his head. “I was wrong, there was one other,” he said looking up at Karri and Saleena.

“Lola?”

“Yes, she was a very good woman,” Hawk said.

“I have to go see Kalee now. You girls should get some rest while you can. Before Koora wakes up,” he said smiling.

“All right, uncle.”

Hawk walked out the door and started towards the sick bay. He walked into the sick bay and saw the doctor leaning over Kalee.

“Doctor, what’s wrong?” Hawk asked.

“Kalee has a very high fever right now. Come over here, Hawk. I want her to rest,” Goodfellow motioned for Hawk to come over to his desk.

“What happened? When I left she was sitting up reading and smiling,” Hawk asked with concern.

“I’ll tell you what I know. I was at my desk doing some paper work, I looked up and I noticed she was sweating. I asked her if she was all right. She told me she didn’t feel good and that she was feeling very cold. I went over and checked her temperature and found she had a temperature of 104 degrees. The next thing I knew she passed out. I had the nurse run a complete exam and found out that the creature that attacked her had rabies. So now we are treating her for that and her high fever,” Goodfellow said.

“But, she going to be all right, isn’t she?” Hawk asked.

“Time could only tell my dear boy.” Goodfellow was quiet for a moment. “Hawk, could you do me a favor? Could you keep an eye on her so I can do some more reading on rabies. I’ll be right over there if you need me. I would really appreciate it,” the doctor asked.

“Of course doctor. I’d be happy to,” Hawk said. Hawk pulled up a chair and sat next to Kalee. He reached out and gently touched her face, then reached up and pushed her long black hair out of her face. Kalee moaned lightly. “You have to be all right,” he said softly.

Hawk stayed at her side all night, even when the doctor came to check on her. Some time in the middle of the night Hawk had fallen asleep at her side. The next morning he was awakened by Goodfellow’s voice.

Chapter 8

“Hawk, it’s time to wake up dear boy,” Goodfellow whispered softly.

Hawk opened his eyes and looked at Kalee. “How is she? Is she going to be all right?” Hawk asked with a concerned voice.

“I don’t know. Right now her system is trying to fight off the rabies. But she’s so weak, and she still has a high fever. I just don’t know,” Goodfellow replied.

Hawk sat up and looked at Kalee. He noticed that he was holding her hand. He glanced over at the doctor, and smiled. “I better go, I have patrol today. Let me know if there are any changes at all,” Hawk said as he stood up.

“I will, I better get back to my book. Maybe I missed something.”

Hawk nodded then left the sick bay. He went straight to Karri’s and Saleena’s quarters. He stood outside the door for a moment trying to gather his thoughts. He then finally knocked.

“Come in,” Karri said.

Hawk walked in, and smiled. But there was something different and wrong with his smile. Karri and Saleena picked up on it right away.

“What is it uncle? What’s wrong?” Karri looked deep into Hawk’s eyes and could see the pain he was in. “It’s Kalee, isn’t it?” she asked.

Hawk looked over at Koora who was still sound asleep. “Yes. Kalee is not doing very well right now. The bites she got when she was attacked by that creature had rabies. Her body is so weak now that she can’t fight the virus off. The doctor is trying everything possible.” Hawk hung his head. “Don’t take Koora to see her mother today, unless the doctor calls you. I have patrol today. I’ll be gone almost all day. I told the doctor to call if he needs me,” Hawk said.

“Uncle, would it be all right if I went to see her. Maybe I can find out what is wrong. Remember, Goodfellow trained Saleena and myself in some medicine. Maybe we can help. We can take turns helping the doctor. That way Koora is not left by herself. Please uncle? Let us try,” Karri pleaded.

Hawk looked at the two girls and smiled. “If the doctor says it’s all right, then it’s fine with me. But, don’t leave Koora alone, and don’t take her see her mother, not right now anyway,” Hawk replied.

“I have to go. I’ll be back later this afternoon. You two stay out of trouble, at least until I get back,” he said smiling. “Come here,” he said holding his arms out.

The girls went over to Hawk and embraced him. He kissed each one of the girls on the top of their head. He then walked over to Koora and gently kissed her on the top of her head.

“Be careful uncle,” Karri said.

Hawk smiled as he left the room.

Back at the sick bay Dr. Goodfellow was reading up on the different types of rabies. He was comparing rat rabies to dog rabies. "That's it," he said out loud.

The nurse came over. "What is it doctor? What did you find?" she asked.

"I've been comparing the rabies of a rat to the rabies of a dog. I've only been treating one type of them. They're two different types. We have to treat both types at the same time. But, it's going to be dangerous for her," he said, looking over at Kalee.

"How dangerous?" she asked.

Dr. Goodfellow walked over to Kalee and felt her forehead. "Very dangerous. Right now in her condition, it could kill her." Goodfellow didn't notice Karri standing by the door.

"You have to do something doctor, you have to save her," Karri said.

Goodfellow walked over to Karri, "Do you need anything, child?" he asked.

"No, I wanted to see if I can help. Remember you did teach me and Saleena some medical technology. Please, let me stay and help," she said softly.

Goodfellow looked over at Kalee then back at Karri. "All right, you may stay. Maybe you could find out what Kalee is feeling. Tell me if she's in pain or what she's thinking or dreaming about," Goodfellow said.

"I'll try, I never tried it on a human before. I don't know if it'll work," Karri replied.

"Just try, child."

Karri nodded then walked over to Kalee, and looked at her face. "I can't do it. Her eyes are closed. They have to be open to see inside of her soul," she said.

Just as she was about to walk back over to the doctor Kalee opened her eyes.

"Karri," she said softly. Karri quickly walked back over to her. "I'm here, Kalee," Karri said.

"Where is Koora?" she asked.

"She's in my quarters, sleeping."

Kalee nodded.

"Kalee, how do you feel?" Karri asked.

"Like my insides are on fire. What is wrong with me?" she asked softly.

The doctor walked over to her. "My dear, I found two different kinds of rabies in your blood. Until now I've only been treating one kind. My dear, it's going to get worse. If I give you the

treatment, it could kill you in your present state. But if I don't most likely you'll die. What do you want me to do?" he asked.

Kalee looked over towards Karri. "Where is Hawk?" she asked in a weak voice.

"He's out on patrol. But he told me if I needed him I'd know what to do." Karri closed her eyes and started to think of Hawk. Within seconds Hawk got the message and was on his way back to the Searcher. "He's on his way," Karri said.

All Kalee could do was smile.

"I have to talk to him," she said as she closed her eyes.

Chapter 9

“Hawk to Searcher.”

“Go ahead Hawk. What’s wrong?”

“Admiral, I just received a message from Karri. I have to return right away,” Hawk said with concern in his voice.

“Hawk, we didn’t send any message. How could you have gotten a message from Karri when she’s not up here?”

“Trust me, I got a message from Karri. I’m returning to the Searcher. Hawk out.”

The Admiral looked at Buck and Wilma. “Did you send a message?”

“No sir. Remember when I first met Hawk and Koori. How Koori communicated with Hawk by telepathy. I think that’s how he got this message from Karri. So that means something is wrong,” Buck said looking at Wilma.

“I better go check on the girls. Coming Wilma?” Buck asked as he was heading out the door.

Back in the sick bay, Karri was sitting at Kalee’s side, holding her hand and wiping the sweat from her forehead. Doctor Goodfellow approached.

“How is she doing?” he asked.

“Not very well doctor. Her fever has gone back up to 105 degrees. I hope my uncle gets here soon,” Karri replied.

Buck and Wilma arrived at the girls’ quarters. Buck knocked on the door.

“Enter,” Saleena replied.

Buck and Wilma entered and looked around.

“Where’s Karri?” Buck asked.

“She’s in the sick bay. She went to see if she could help Dr. Goodfellow,” Saleena said.

“Why, what’s wrong?”

“We don’t know. Hawk’s on his way back from patrol. He said he got a message from Karri. So we assumed something was wrong in here,” Buck replied.

Just then Koori woke up and started to fuss. Saleena walked over to her and picked her up. “It’s okay little one, I’m here,” she said softly.

Buck and Wilma smiled. “We better go check the sick bay. Sorry to have bothered you Saleena,” Buck said.

“It’s all right. Please hurry and check on my sister,” Saleena said.

Buck nodded. He and Wilma left and headed for the sick bay.

In the sick bay, Karri was still at Kalee’s side. “Doctor, what can we do? She’s getting worse,” Karri said.

“I don’t know my dear girl. For some reason, she will not tell me what she wants me to do. Until she’s talked to Hawk. So until he returns, the only thing we can do is make her as comfortable as we can. I just pray Hawk can talk her into taking the treatment. I’m afraid if she doesn’t, she’ll die for sure,” Goodfellow said.

Buck and Wilma reached the sick bay. As they entered they noticed Karri sitting next to Kalee. “Karri, what’s wrong?” Buck asked.

“Kalee is very ill, uncle Buck,” she said.

“Did you send a message to Hawk through telepathy?” Buck asked.

“Yes, Kalee won’t take the treatment until she talks to Hawk. Uncle, if she doesn’t take it, she’ll die for sure,” Karri said with tears running down her cheeks.

Buck looked at Karri, then over at the doctor.

“It’s true, Captain. If she doesn’t get the treatment soon, she won’t survive another 12 hours. But for some reason, she will not allow us to give it to her until she talks with Hawk,” Goodfellow said.

Buck walked over to the sick bay intercom.

“Buck to bridge.”

“Go ahead Buck. Did you find out what was going on?” the Admiral asked.

“Yes Admiral. Kalee is going to die if she doesn’t get some medicine soon. But, she’s refusing to take the treatment until she talks to Hawk,” Buck said.

“Understood....bridge out.”

“Searcher to Hawk.”

“This is Hawk.”

“Hawk, it is imperative you return to the Searcher immediately.”

“Understood...Hawk out.”

“Thank you uncle,” Karri said.

Buck nodded and smiled.

“Is there anything we can do?” Wilma asked.

“I’m afraid not. Not until Hawk gets here and talks to her. I swear, this woman is about as stubborn as Hawk is,” Goodfellow said.

“Kalee, Hawk is on his way. Please hold on a little bit longer,” Karri whispered.

Hawk soon had an overwhelming feeling of sadness. “Kalee,” Hawk said to himself. Hawk then pushed the War Hawk even more. “Hold on Kalee.”

Karri smiled. “Hawk is almost here.”

“How do you know?” the doctor asked.

“They have their own communication system,” Buck said.

“Hawk to Searcher...requesting landing bay number.”

“Searcher to Hawk....approach landing bay 4... Searcher out.”

“Landing bay 4..Hawk out.”

Within minutes Hawk landed and was running to the sick bay. He entered and went straight over to Kalee.

“Kalee, it’s Hawk.”

She opened her eyes and gave a small smile.

“Hawk... I want you to promise me something... If something goes wrong, I want you to take care of Koorra, promise me,” she said in a very weak voice.

“Nothing is going to happen to you. You have to take the treatment. I cannot lose you too,” Hawk said in a low voice.

Kalee smiled. “Promise me.”

Hawk lowered his head.

“I promise, now please take the treatment,” Hawk begged.

Kalee nodded her head.

“All right doctor, you can start the treatment,” she said softly.

“I want you to understand something, Kalee. As weak as you are right now, there’s a slight possibility you might die,” Goodfellow explained.

“I understand doctor. That’s why I wanted to wait: I had to talk to Hawk first,” she said.

“All right, let’s get started,” Goodfellow said.

Kalee closed her eyes.

“I love you, my daughter,” she said softly.

“Nurse, I want 4cc’s of agent 118 and 2cc’s of agent 014.”

The nurse retrieved the agents and readied them for the doctor to inject into the IV. Dr. Goodfellow wiped down the IV insert tube and began to inject the serum.

“Now, we wait,” Goodfellow said.

“Admiral Asimov to sick bay.”

Hawk walked over and answered the com. “Sick bay, this is Hawk.”

“Hawk, how is she doing?”

“Unknown at this time Admiral. The doctor just injected the first part of the treatment serum. He said all we can do now is wait,” Hawk said.

“Hawk, I’m going to notify Acklon. They should know that we have Kalee and Koora on the Searcher. And what is going on right now,” Asimov said.

“Good idea Admiral. I’ll keep you posted. Hawk out.”

On the bridge the Admiral glanced over at the communication officer. “Get me in contact with Acklon. See if they can get a hold of any of her family or friends,” Asimov requested.

“Yes sir, right away.”

A hour later.

“Admiral, I’ve have Acklon on sir.”

“Very good, patch it through.”

“You have a open line to Acklon sir,” the communications officer repli ed.

“This is Admiral Asimov on the research vessel Searcher. We have on board a woman and a child that say lives on your planet. Their names are Kalee and a Koora. Is there anyone there that knows this woman?” Asimov asked.

“Searcher, this is magistrate Wilkins. Yes, we do have a woman and child by that name that lives here. What seems to be the problem?”

“Mr. Wilkens, we found them on a planet by the name of Septer 205. The woman Kalee has been badly injured by a creature there. She is undergoing treatment right now for two

different kinds of rabies as we speak. Does she have any relatives or family of any kind there?" Asimov asked.

"I will send notification to her people. Please make contact again in one hour, Acklon out."

"Will contact you again in one hour, Searcher out."

The Admiral looked over at the communications officer.

"Keep that channel open," he said.

"Yes sir."

Chapter 10

In the sick bay, the first signs of the treatment were starting to show. Kalee started to shake severely. Sweat poured off her face and body. The nurses changed her bedding and gown every 10 to 15 minutes to keep her as dry as possible. Hawk had not left her side once since he got there, even at the request of Doctor Goodfellow.

“I’m not leaving her side,” Hawk said.

Karri stayed next to her also, wiping her forehead with a cool damp cloth. Then the treatment really started to take its toll on Kalee’s body. She started to have convulsions.

“Doctor!” Hawk yelled.

Goodfellow rushed over.

“She’s having convulsions due to the high fever and treatment. Raise the rails and hold on to her, gently but firmly. They should stop within a few minutes,” Goodfellow said.

As the doctor said, the convulsions stopped a few minutes later.

“Is that it? Is she going to be all right?” Hawk asked.

“Oh, I’m afraid not, dear boy. The worst is yet to come. Her fever is going to get even higher, she might go into a coma. If she does, she’ll die. We have to keep her as awake as possible. Is there anything you can think of that might help us do that?” Goodfellow asked.

Hawk thought for a moment, then looked over at Karri.

“Go get Koora,” he said. “If she knows her daughter is here, it might keep her awake. I’m hoping anyway,” Hawk said.

“Good idea dear boy, with her daughter here she’ll fight to stay awake.”

Karri ran out of the sick bay, down the corridor and into her quarters. “Get Koora ready to go see her mother, we have to hurry,” Karri said.

“Why, what happened? Is Kalee all right?” Saleena asked while getting Koora ready.

“We need her there to keep Kalee awake. If she goes to sleep --” Karri glanced at Koora. “She won’t make it,” she said softly.

Saleena and Karri looked at Koora.

“Do you want to go see your mother?” Karri asked.

“Yes, I haven’t seen her for a few days and I miss her,” Koora replied.

“Good. Koora, you’re a big girl, right? Well your mother is very, very sick right now. And if she goes to sleep, we’re afraid she might not wake up again. Do you understand what I am saying?”

Koora nodded.

“We need you to help us keep your mother awake. Can you help us do that?” Karri said.

“Yes, if my mother goes to sleep, she’ll die, right?” Koora asked.

“Yes, I’m afraid so,” Karri said lowering her head.

“My mother once told me, never lower your head, be proud of who and what you are. Are you ashamed of who or what you are? Because you’re lowering your head,” Koora said.

Karri looked up at her and smiled.

“I’m very proud of who and what I am. But I’m afraid for your mother’s life right now, that’s all. Hawk taught Saleena and myself that also,” Karri replied.

Koora smiled.

“The elders on our planet taught my mother when she was a little girl,” Koora said.

Karri nodded.

“Are you ready to go see her?”

“Yes.”

All three girls walked out of their quarters, down the corridor to the sick bay. The doors to the sick bay opened. Koora went straight to her mother’s side. “Mother, I’m here,” she said softly.

Kalee’s eyes opened for a few seconds, she smiled then closed them again.

“Good, she acknowledged Koora was here. Now Koora, I want you to keep talking to her. In fact I need both you and Hawk to keep talking to her. Remind her you’re both here. Talk about your home planet of Acklon. Hawk, tell her how you feel about her. We need to keep her conscious for at least 24 hours,” Goodfellow said.

Hawk looked over at Goodfellow. “Tell her how I feel about her?” he asked.

“Yes, my dear boy. Tell her how you feel about her. I know you have feelings for this woman, I can see it in your eyes,” he replied.

“Hawk, please if you have any kind of feelings for my mother, any at all. Please, let her know,” Koora said with a tear running down her face.

Hawk lowered his head again.

“Kalee, please hear me. What your daughter says is true. I do have feeling for you, strong feelings. From the first time I saw you, I could tell you were a very special woman. I have not had any feeling since I lost my beloved mate Koori. I know we are different, you and I. But, I swear if you can come through this I want to try. And I’m telling you this not for your sake or mine, I am telling you this for their sake, Koori’s, Saleena’s and Karri’s. They all need a mother, and a father. I know I can never be Karri’s or Saleena’s true father. But they are like daughters to me. Please, fight with everything you have to come back. I know you can do it, you fought off that creature, you can fight this off as well,” Hawk said with tears swelling in his eyes.

Kalee moaned lightly.

“Keep it up, she can hear you. You must keep her conscious. Koori, Karri, Saleena talk to her. Tell her how you feel. Let her know that you want her to fight with all her might,” Goodfellow said.

Karri sat down next to Kalee.

“Kalee, please come back to us. What my uncle says is true. I’ve grown very fond of Koori. She’s like a baby sister I never had. We need you here, for all our sakes,” Karri said with tears in her eyes as well.

Kalee started to stir a little bit.

Saleena sat down next to Kalee next.

“Kalee, I’ve helped take care of Koori since we brought you and her on board the Searcher . She is like a baby sister to me also. I only got to know my real mother for about a year. I know you are like her. Warm, caring, and loving. Please... come back to us,” Saleena said crying.

It was Koori’s turn next.

“Mother, I’ve already lost one mother. I cannot lose another. You’re very special to me. You, a human opened your heart and your home to me. We live with both bird people and humans. But, it was you who took me. You’ve heard everyone wants you to live. Hawk really cares for you, mother. As do Karri and Saleena. Please mother, come back to us,” Koori said.

Kalee started to moan and move more in the bed.

“She’s fighting back, keep talking to her. Hawk, you told her you would tell her about Koori when you got back. Tell her now. Make her want to come back,” Goodfellow said.

Hawk started to tell Kalee about Koori. From how they met to the time she died in his arms up in the mountain cave. How he met Buck, to now. Everything Hawk could think of he told to Kalee.

“But most important of all, Kalee, is how I feel about you right now. Kalee... I love you,” Hawk said.

Kalee started to fight back even more.

“That’s it, it’s working. Her temperature is coming down a little, and she’s not sweating as much,” Goodfellow replied.

“What does that mean, doctor?” Koora asked.

“It means my dear child, your mother might make it after all. If we can keep her conscious for about another six hours. You all must keep talking to her. Tell her anything. How you feel, what you want to do when you get older, anything. Just keep talking to her,” Goodfellow said.

Up on the bridge it had been a little over an hour.

“Acklon to Searcher.”

“Go ahead Acklon, Admiral Asimov here.”

“Admiral, we’re sorry to say she does not have any living relatives. The elders are here though. Stand by.”

“Searcher, this is elder Black Hawk, we found out about Kalee’s and Koora’s injury. How is Kalee? Is she going to live?” the elder asked.

“Stand by, I’ll check in with sick bay,” the Admiral said.

“Bridge to sick bay.”

“Sick bay here.”

“How is Kalee doing? Is she going to survive? I have one of the elders on the com right now. They want to know.”

Hawk got on the intercom.

“Admiral, this is Hawk. May I speak to the elder?”

“Of course, Hawk. Stand by, we’ll patch them through.”

“Go ahead Hawk.”

“Elder of Acklon. I am Hawk. I am with Kalee and Koora now as we speak. Kalee will survive, and there was no harm to Koora. I wish to come down and speak with you,” Hawk said.

“Hawk, you are permitted. We will await your arrival.”

“Thank you, Hawk from the Searcher out.”

“Acklon...out.”

Chapter 11

Hawk turned to Dr. Goodfellow.

“Do you think she’ll survive, doctor?” Hawk asked.

“Oh yes, my feathered friend. She’s out of the danger zone now. She’s starting to fight back more and more. The next good sign will be seeing her break into a cold sweat, which will mean that her fever has broken completely. Then it will be only a matter of time before she’s fully awake and eating. Are you going to go talk to the elders of Acklon?” he asked.

“Yes, I want to talk to them about Kalee and Koora.” Hawk glanced over towards Kalee. “I’d like to make sure it would be not be against the rules if I decide to stay with her. But not as a mate -- not right now anyway,” Hawk said.

“My dear boy, are you sure that’s what you want? Most likely she didn’t understand anything you said. She just reacted to your voice, that’s all,” Goodfellow said.

Hawk looked at Kalee and back at the doctor.

“I do love her. But, I’m not sure if I love her as I did Koori, or as a sister,” Hawk replied.

“Have you thought about requesting some leave time from the Admiral? This planet Acklon sounds like a wonderful place to take a little vacation. Maybe if you had time to get to know her, that would help you decide how you really feel about her.”

Hawk thought for a moment.

“I don’t know if the Admiral would give me leave. Remember, they still might think I’m a threat to humans,” Hawk replied.

“Oh my dear boy. How can they think that now. You have two adopted daughters, and two human children under your wing right now. Though Falcon and Kala are living in a different household, that doesn’t mean anything. Those children are Karri and Saleena’s brother and sister. Maybe not by blood, but they are from the same mother, which you my friend took into your heart. I really don’t think the Galactic Council will refuse you a little R & R. You should talk to the Admiral before you go down there. Request it, at least my friend,” Goodfellow said with a smile.

“I will, doctor. Thank you,” Hawk said, placing his hand on Goodfellow’s shoulder.

Hawk walked back over to Karri and Saleena. “I’ll be back as soon as I can. Stay here and help the doctor as much as you can. Koora, your mother will be just fine. There’s no need to worry. I’m going down to meet with the elders right now. But first I have to stop by the bridge,” Hawk said.

“All right uncle. We’ll keep talking to her. Who knows, maybe by the time you get back, she’ll be awake,” Karri said with a smile.

Koora walked up to Hawk and wrapped her arms around him. "Thank you Hawk, for saving my mother and me," she said softly.

Hawk embraced her back. "It wasn't just me, Koora. Buck and Wilma helped a lot also. That reminds me: why were you so frightened of Buck?" Hawk asked.

Koora put her head down. "I was frightened of him, because I didn't know him," she said.

"But you came right to me?"

"Because you're like I am, I guess."

"Well, you're not afraid of him now, are you?" Hawk asked.

Koora smiled. "No."

"All right, I'll be back soon," Hawk said as he left sick bay.

Hawk thought of how he was going to ask the Admiral for leave time on his way to the bridge.

"Admiral, I'd like permission to go down and talk to the elders," Hawk said.

"Of course Hawk, permission granted."

"And Admiral, I'd like to request some leave time on this planet."

The Admiral looked at Hawk with a strange look on his face.

"May I ask why?" he asked.

"Admiral, I would like to stay on this planet, at least for a while. I would like to spend some time with Kalee and Koora," Hawk replied.

"Hawk, I don't know if the Galactic Council will approve it."

The Admiral looked at Hawk. "But, I could ask them. How long where you wanting to stay?"

"I'm not sure sir. Maybe a month or so," Hawk replied.

"I'll tell you what Hawk. You go ahead and go talk to the elders, and I'll send a request to the Galactic Council. I can't promise anything, but I'll try," Asimov said.

"Thank you sir. That's all I ask," Hawk said.

Hawk left right away for the hanger. As he was climbing into the War Hawk, Buck came into the hanger.

"Where are you heading? You don't have patrol today," Buck said.

"I have to go talk to the elders of Acklon. I won't be gone long," Hawk said as he shut the hatch to his ship. Within moments Hawk was on his way down to the planet surface.

"Hawk to Acklon."

"Welcome Hawk. The elders had already informed us that you were coming. Please follow the landing patrol, Acklon out."

"Thank you Acklon."

As the landing patrol guided Hawk into the city, he noticed how many humans and bird people there were below. He smiled. The patrol took Hawk to a landing grid, where he landed and opened the hatch to his ship. Out from the building in front of him walked three older bird people, all with very dark feathers on their heads, which showed that they were very well up in age. "These must be the elders," he thought to himself. Hawk climbed out of his ship and started to walk towards the elders. They all stopped, looked at each other then bowed their heads to each other, showing respect.

"I am Hawk from Throm," Hawk said.

"I am Black Hawk. This is Grey Falcon, and White Eagle. Welcome to Acklon Hawk. Please, follow us," Black Falcon said.

Hawk nodded and walked behind them into the building. They walked through a passageway and into what looked like a meeting room. The elders went behind a long table and sat down. They then motioned for Hawk to be seated. Hawk lowered his head, then sat down in a chair that was in the middle of the room.

"We have heard a lot about you Hawk. We've heard of your fight against the humans that killed your people on Throm, and of your mate's death. What can we do to help you?" Black Falcon said.

Hawk stood and looked at the elders.

"I would like your permission to stay here on Acklon, with Kalee and her daughter Koorra. I have two more survivors on the Searcher. One is my niece, Karri. The other is a survivor from the planet of Serenity, her name is Saleena. They too are bird people," Hawk said.

The elders looked at each other for a moment. "How old is your niece and Saleena? Are they of breeding age?"

"Yes."

They talked among themselves for a moment again. "How long did you wish to stay, Hawk?" Gray Falcon asked.

"I wish only to stay for a few months. But I wish for my niece and Saleena to remain here," Hawk replied.

“Your amount of time is granted. But be warned, if at any time you attack or harm any human here, you will be banished from Acklon forever, do you understand?” Grey Falcon asked.

“I understand. I will abide by your rules. I have no desire to harm any human. Here or anywhere else,” Hawk said.

“Very well. How are Kalee and Koora? Is Kalee going to make it?”

“Yes, Kalee will survive and Koora is doing fine, she is with my niece and adopted niece,” Hawk said with a smile.

“That is good to hear. When do you think they will be able to return home?” White Eagle asked.

“I’m not sure, it should be soon. I was wondering, why are you so interested in Kalee?” Hawk asked.

“Kalee is the adopted daughter of one of our dear friends and an elder which passed away. Does that ease your mind?” Black Falcon asked.

“I’m sorry if I offended you. I was just wondering,” Hawk replied lowering his head.

“He should know the truth. I can see he cares a great deal for Kalee and her daughter,” Black Hawk said.

“We agree,” Gray Falcon and White Eagle replied.

“I should know what?” Hawk asked with a puzzled look on his face.

Chapter 12

Hawk sat back down and gazed at the elders.

“I should know what about Kalee?” he asked with a concerned look on his face.

Gray Falcon stood up and walked over to Hawk. Hawk stood up out of respect. Gray Falcon put his hand on Hawk’s shoulder.

“She is a very special person to us. Really there are two things you should know about her,” Gray Falcon said.

“What is it? Is something wrong with her?” Hawk asked.

The elders started to laugh.

“No, nothing is wrong with her, it’s just that she is not what she appears to be. Many years ago our people colonized different planets. Well, on some of the planets the females of our kind did not survive long. So some and only some of our male people took human females for mates. Kalee is a result of one of those matings. She is half human and half birdperson,” Black Hawk said.

Hawk started to walk in a circle, rubbing his head feathers.

“You mean she’s half human and half one of us?”

“Yes. But that’s not all Hawk. Her real father was an elder. So being a offspring of an elder she has the right to become an elder. The first ever female elder. She has a small idea of what she is. She knows she is different from the other humans on our planet. But she does not know the whole truth, not yet anyway. And that’s the way we would like to keep it, for now,” White Eagle said.

“Of course, I understand,” Hawk replied.

Gray Falcon looked into Hawk’s eyes.

“You have deep feelings for her, don’t you?” he asked.

“Yes, I do have feelings for her and her daughter. That is the main reason why I wish to stay on Acklon for a while. To get to know her better, and maybe take her as my mate,” Hawk said.

“We heard you were a great protector on Throm. We would be proud to have you remain here with us, for as long as you’d like.”

Hawk smiled.

“I have to wait for an approval from the Galactic Council from Earth first. As part of my punishment for killing some humans, that I believed might have been the ones that attacked

my village. I am under their conditions right now. Which I do accept, for killing all those humans that did not have anything to do with the attack,” Hawk replied.

“Hawk, we know of the conditions. If you’d like, we could talk to the Galactic Council. We can guarantee that you will not leave this planet. That you will stay within our guide lines. If that is what you wish,” Black Hawk said.

Hawk thought for a moment.

“I appreciate the offer. But I want only to stay for a few months, to see if what I feel for Kalee is the same as what I felt for my mate, Koori,” Hawk replied.

“We understand. Still we will talk to the Galactic Council, on your behalf,” White Eagle said.

“Thank you. Now if you would excuse me, I must return to the Searcher. I have to see how Kalee is doing and talk to the Admiral,” Hawk said standing, and lowering his head.

“You may go. We will talk with you again soon,” Gray Falcon replied.

“Thank you for seeing me,” Hawk said as he turned around to leave.

Hawk made his way back to the War Hawk, looking around as he went. He climbed inside and started the engine, then lifted off. Heading back to the Searcher he remembered what the elders told him.

“She is very special to us,” kept going through his mind.

“Hawk to Searcher.”

“Go ahead Hawk.”

“Requesting landing bay number,” Hawk replied.

“Approach landing bay 3.”

“Landing bay 3. Confirmed. Hawk out.”

Hawk gently landed in hanger bay 3. He shut down the engines and climbed out. He went directly to sick bay.

As Hawk was about to enter those words were still in his mind. “She’s very special to us. She does not know the whole truth, not yet anyway.” Hawk stood there for a moment, trying to clear his mind. He finally entered the sick bay. He looked over at Kalee and noticed she was not moving or sweating any longer. “Doctor, is Kalee all right?” He asked.

“I’m sorry Hawk.”

Hawk ran over to Kalee and picked up her hand, and started to weep softly. Doctor Goodfellow walked over to him and patted him on his back.

“My dear boy, you didn’t let me finish. I was going to say that I’m sorry, but she just broke her fever completely. She was asking for you, I told her you had gone down to talk to the elders. She fell asleep shortly after that,” Goodfellow said.

Hawk wiped the tears from his eyes. “You mean, she’s all right?”

“Oh yes, my feathered friend. She’s just resting now. If you’d like, why don’t you come back in an hour or so,” Goodfellow said.

Hawk stood and gazed at the doctor. “Thank you so much. You saved a very special person,” Hawk said.

“Oh, did the elders tell you?” Goodfellow asked.

“Tell me what?” Hawk asked.

“That she is part human and part birdperson,” Goodfellow replied.

“Yes, they told me. But, please doctor, don’t tell her anything. She doesn’t know. How did you find out?” Hawk asked.

The doctor looked at Hawk and smiled.

“I found out when I examined her. She is indeed a very special person,” Goodfellow said.

Hawk smiled.

“You must excuse me doctor. I have to talk to the Admiral,” Hawk said as he turned to walk out of the sick bay.

“Of course my dear boy. Good luck,” Goodfellow said with a smile.

Hawk stopped at Karri’s and Saleena’s quarters first. He knocked on the door, but there was no answer. He entered and found the girls were sound asleep. Lying next to them was Koora. He gently covered them up and kissed each one on the forehead. He quietly left their quarters and proceeded to the bridge. As he entered the bridge the Admiral motioned for him to go into the meeting room.

“I’ll be right with you Hawk,” the Admiral said.

Hawk walked into the meeting room and stood until the Admiral entered. “Please be seated, Hawk,” the Admiral said.

Hawk sat and gazed over at the Admiral.

“Hawk, I don’t know what happened down there. But, the elders of this planet put in a call to the Galactic Council before I did. It looks like you’ll get your two months leave here on this planet,” Asimov said with a smile.

“Thank you sir,” Hawk said with a smile.

“Don’t thank me. You need to thank the elders. They’re the ones that really got the council to agree to it. I just backed them up, guaranteeing that you would behave yourself while you were here,” Asimov replied.

“When do I start my leave sir?” Hawk asked.

“Well, seeing Kalee is not well enough yet, let’s hold off till she’s feeling better and ready to go home. Have you told the girls yet?” the Admiral asked.

“No sir. I didn’t want to tell them till I found out for sure.”

“Well, why don’t you go tell them now?”

“I would sir, but on my way up here I stopped by to see them and they were all asleep. And I didn’t want to wake them,” Hawk said starting to yawn. “I’m sorry sir.”

“I’m ordering you to your quarters. You need to get some rest. From what the doctor told me you didn’t leave Kalee’s side once last night, and you were up all night watching over her. So this is a direct order: report to your quarters and do not report for duty till tomorrow morning. Do you understand me?” Asimov commanded.

“Yes sir. Thank you sir,” Hawk said as he left the meeting room. Hawk went straight to his quarters and laid down on his bed. Within minutes he drifted off to sleep.

Chapter 13

The next morning, Hawk was awakened by the crackling sound of the intercom. He swung his legs off the bed, stood up, yawned, then stretched. The first thing that popped into his mind was Kalee. He walked out the door and down the long corridor to the sick bay. "I hope she's awake," he thought to himself. The door to the sick bay opened and out walked the Admiral.

"Good morning Hawk. Did you get any rest?" he asked.

"Yes sir. I guess I was more tired than I thought I was," Hawk replied.

"I thought you might be. You looked exhausted. I just stopped by to see how Kalee was doing. She is one remarkable woman. First to fight off that creature, then to pull out of that deadly bite. You're a very lucky man," Asimov said.

"Thank you sir. I agree, she is one remarkable woman. Sir, was she awake when you were in there?" Hawk asked.

"Yes, as a matter of fact she was. She was sitting up eating. Have you gotten to talk to her at all yet?" the Admiral asked.

"No sir."

"Oh, I just remembered, I received a message from a White Eagle. He asked me to inform you that the elders have arranged a place for you to stay while you're here," Asimov said.

"Thank you sir. I really appreciate everything you've done. Will you excuse me sir? I'd like to go in and see Kalee," Hawk said.

"Oh, of course Hawk. I'm sorry to have kept you. I'll talk to you later," Asimov said with a smile as he walked off.

Hawk smiled back, then went inside. There sitting on the edge of the bed was Kalee eating some breakfast. She smiled as he approached.

"How are you feeling?" Hawk asked.

"A little tired. But, the good doctor told me that I'll feel that way for a few days," Kalee said with a smile.

"I'm glad to see you feeling better, and eating," Hawk said sitting down in a chair next to her bed.

"Thank you for everything. The Admiral was just here, and told me that you went to see the elders last night. May I ask why?" she asked.

"I was wanting to take some leave while I was here. I've searched for years trying to find more of my people. Now, since you told us of this planet. I wanted to spend as much time as possible with you, Koora and them. And I also wanted to make arrangements for Karri and

Saleena to stay here. To be with their own kind. And who knows, maybe find a mate,” Hawk said blushing a little.

“Did I hear you correctly? You wanted to spend time with Koora and me?” she asked.

“Yes, if you don’t mind. I’d like to get to know you better. But, only if you feel comfortable with that,” Hawk said.

Kalee smiled. “I’d like that. How much leave time do you have?”

“I’ve got permission for two months. Do you think you and Koora could up with me for that long?” Hawk asked jokingly.

Kalee looked into Hawk’s eyes.

“On three conditions,” she replied.

Hawk looked at her with a concerned look on his face.

“Condition number one, you bring Karri and Saleena with you. Condition number two, you, Karri and Saleena stay in my home. I have plenty of room. The Admiral told me that Karri and Saleena have a baby brother and baby sister that are human, but that they have bird people names. What were they, oh yes, Falcon and Kala. Is that true?” she asked.

“Yes, their mother died shortly after birth. Right now they are living with a couple on the Searcher. Why?” Hawk said.

“Well, that’s condition number three, that you bring them with you. A family should be together, not separated like that,” Kalee said.

Hawk smiled. “I’ll make the arrangements as soon as I leave here,” Hawk said.

Doctor Goodfellow walked over to join them.

“How do you feel my dear?” Goodfellow asked.

“I feel wonderful doctor, thanks to you. Doctor, when do you think I’ll be well enough to go home?” she asked.

“Well my dear, if you keep eating and resting like this, I’d say maybe tomorrow. But, only if you do what you’re told and get plenty of rest,” Goodfellow said.

“Is that a request or an order, doctor?” Kalee asked giggling.

“Both. And Hawk, when you get down there I want you to make sure she doesn’t overdo it. At least for a few weeks,” the doctor said.

“I promise, doctor. She will not overdo anything. I’ll see to it,” Hawk replied.

“Very well. Hawk, I’m trusting you to keep your word. I’ll warn you both right now. If she starts to overdo it before those two weeks are up, she’ll end up right back here in that bed. She needs complete rest. Do you two understand?” Goodfellow said.

Kalee nodded.

“Yes doctor, I understand. Can she have a few more visitors today?” Hawk asked.

“I don’t see why not, as long as she stays in that bed,” the doctor replied.

“I’ll be right back,” Hawk said as he got up and headed for the door.

“Where are you going?” Kalee asked.

“I’ll be back shortly. Within thirty minutes, I promise,” Hawk said as he went out the door.

“Oh my, where is he going in such a hurry?” Goodfellow asked.

“I have a feeling he’s gone to get the girls and little Falcon and Kala,” Kalee said.

“So you know about Falcon and Kala?” Goodfellow asked.

“I just know what the Admiral and Hawk told me. That Karri and Saleena’s baby brother and baby sister are human, and that they have bird people names. And Hawk told me a few moments ago that their mother died shortly after giving birth to them,” Kalee looked at Goodfellow as if wanting to know more.

“I think Hawk should be the one to tell you about them, my dear lady,” the doctor said smiling as he walked away.

Hawk walked quickly down the corridor to Karri and Saleena’s quarters and knocked.

“Enter,” Karri said.

Hawk entered to find Karri and Saleena there with Koora, Falcon and Kala.

“Good, you’re all together,” he said.

“What’s wrong uncle?” Saleena asked.

“Nothing is wrong. I want you girls to pack up your belongings. I requested two months leave, and it was approved. We’re going to be living on Acklon for those few months. We’ll be staying with Kalee and Koora,” Hawk said.

Koora jumped up.

“Are you going to stay with me and my mother?” she asked in an excited voice.

“Yes, your mother invited all of us to stay with you and her,” Hawk replied.

“But uncle, what about Falcon and Kala?” Karri asked.

“Don’t worry, little one. They’re coming with us,” Hawk replied.

“Uncle, have you talked to Karen and Steve yet?” Karri asked.

“No, I was just getting ready to go over there. You girls start getting ready, we’ll be leaving tomorrow morning,” Hawk said.

“I’m going home,” Koorra sang happily.

Hawk looked at her and laughed. “I’ll be back in a little while. Then we’re all going to see Kalee,” Hawk said with a smile on his face.

Hawk left the girls’ quarters and headed for the bridge. As he entered the bridge Asimov smiled. Hawk smiled back, then went over to Steve, who was at the control panel scanning for any problems on the Searcher.

“Steve, the girls and I will be going down to the planet for a few months. I’d like to take Falcon and Kala with us. Where is your mate?” Hawk asked.

“She’s in the rec. room. Are you sure you want to take them with you, Hawk?” Steve asked.

“Yes.”

“I guess you better learn how to change their diapers then. I’m off duty in about one hour. Karen should be in our quarters shortly after that. If you can come back then, we’ll show you,” Steve said with a smile.

Hawk nodded.

“Thank you. I’ll see you two in about an hour then,” Hawk said as he turned to leave the bridge.

The Admiral called out to Hawk before he left.

“When do you plan on starting your leave?” Asimov asked.

“I’m sorry sir. I was so excited that I forgot to tell you. The doctor said Kalee could probably return home tomorrow. So if it’s all right with you sir. I’d like to start my leave then,” Hawk said.

“Sounds good. And you can take today off so you can learn how to change a diaper, and pack,” Asimov replied smiling.

Hawk laughed. “Thank you sir. I guess I am going to have to learn how to do that,” Hawk said with a nervous look on his face.

Chapter 14

Hawk headed back down to Karri's and Saleena's quarters. As he was about ready to knock on their door, Buck came from around the corner.

"Hawk?"

Hawk turned and smiled.

"I heard you're going to be staying on Acklon for a few months," Buck said.

"Yes. I requested some leave time and the Galactic Council approved it. I'm hoping to be able to leave Karri, Saleena and the twins there with people of our own kind, or with Kalee, if she'd take them into her home," Hawk replied.

"Is there another possible reason why you'd want to stay here?" Buck asked smiling.

Hawk smiled back.

"I'm wanting to get to know Kalee a little more. She's a very special woman," Hawk replied.

"I kinda thought that was one of the reasons. When do you start your leave?" Buck asked.

"I'll be starting it tomorrow. That's when Dr. Goodfellow said Kalee should be able to go home," Hawk said.

"So what do you plan on doing until then?" Buck asked.

Hawk's face started to turn a little red. He walked up closer to Buck.

"Steve and Karen are going to show me how to change the twin's diapers," Hawk whispered.

Buck grinned.

"You don't know how to change a diaper?" he asked.

Hawk's face turned completely red, and he lowered his head.

"No. Remember, Koori and I never got to have any children," Hawk replied.

Buck hung his head.

"I'm sorry my friend. I was just teasing you. I didn't mean to upset you," Buck said putting his hand on Hawk's shoulder.

"I know you didn't mean it. I'm just a little nervous, that's all," Hawk said.

"You'll do great, my friend. Don't worry about it," Buck said.

Hawk smiled.

"I better get the girls ready. We're going to see Kalee for a while," Hawk said.

"All right. I'll see you before you leave tomorrow, right?" Buck asked reaching out to shake Hawk's hand.

Hawk removed his glove and shook Buck's hand.

"Yes, we'll see all of you tomorrow before we leave," Hawk replied.

Buck walked away.

Hawk knocked on the door.

"Enter," Saleena replied.

Hawk entered and saw that Steve and Karen were already there.

"I'm sorry I'm late. I was talking to Buck," Hawk said.

"It's all right Hawk. Everyone is a little nervous the first time," Karen said smiling.

Hawk started to blush.

"I really appreciate you teaching me how to change a diaper. I hope I didn't take you away from anything important," Hawk said.

"No, we were just going to spend some time in the rec. room. But this is more important. The rec. room can wait," Karen replied.

"I was wondering. Why is it you two have never had children yet?" Hawk asked.

Karen hung her head.

"We can't have children. We've tried for years to have one. But I guess it was not meant to be," Karen said.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to pry. It was none of my business," Hawk said.

"It's all right Hawk. Caring for Falcon and Kala was a dream come true for us," Karen said smiling.

"Shall we get started? We know you want to go take the girls and the babies to see Kalee," Karen said.

"Yes, please. I need to know how before we go down to Acklon tomorrow morning. May I ask you something?" Hawk said.

"Of course Hawk, what is it?" Karen asked.

"About what age is it when they should be out of diapers?"

Karen giggled.

“Oh Hawk. Each baby is different. When they are ready they’ll let you know. But until then you need to help them along. Are you ready to start?” Karen asked with a smile on her face.

“Yes,” Hawk said nervously.

“Okay, first you remove the old diaper like this,” Karen said showing Hawk how to remove the diaper.

After about 5 minutes of showing and explaining to him how to change a diaper it was Hawk’s turn.

Hawk was so nervous he was shaking.

“Hawk, relax. You’ll be just fine. I’d never changed a diaper before either,” Steve confessed.

Hawk looked at Steve.

“You’d never changed one either?”

“Nope, Karen had to show me how also. But there’s one thing I learned. It takes a man to ask for help. But, it’s always good to have a woman there to teach,” Steve said smiling.

Hawk smiled.

“So what you’re telling me is that men don’t have to know everything right from the start, right?” Hawk asked.

“That’s right Hawk. Now would you like me to show it again?” Karen asked in a soft voice.

“Yes, please,” Hawk answered.

Karen showed him again.

“Okay, now you try it. Remember Hawk, if you need help, don’t be afraid to ask for it,” Karen said.

Hawk took the diaper off with no problem. When he started to put the new one on, he hesitated. He glanced over at Karen. “Karen, now I’m supposed to fold the diaper this way over the baby, right?” Hawk asked.

“Yes Hawk,” Karen replied.

Hawk folded the diaper over the baby like he was supposed to, and then the time came to fasten the diaper. Hawk looked nervously at Karen.

Karen walked over to Hawk.

“Do you remember how to do this part?” she asked.

Hawk smiled.

“Yes, I think so,” Hawk replied as he finished fastening the diaper.

Karen stood next to Hawk and smiled. “I think you’ve done a wonderful job for your first time, Hawk. Do you want to try it one more time?”

Hawk nodded. This time he picked up baby Kala.

“Now, she’s a girl. Does she get changed the same way?” he asked.

Karen laughed.

“Yes Hawk, she gets changed the same way.”

Hawk nodded again and started to remove Kala’s diaper. He stopped all of a sudden. “Karen, what am I suppose to do with this mess?” he asked.

Karen walked over to see that Kala had made a mess in her diaper.

“All right Hawk, remember what I told you to do if this happens?”

Hawk stood there for a moment. He started to get a little queasy.

“I need to sit down for a moment,” Hawk said.

Steve came up next to Hawk and helped him sit down in a chair.

“Hawk, are you all right?” Steve asked.

“Yes, I’ll be all right. I just never knew a little girl could make such a big mess, that’s all,” Hawk said.

Karen and Steve laughed.

“Sometimes it’s a small mess. But then, sometimes it’s a really big mess. But both of them will be doing it Hawk,” Karen said.

Hawk stood up, walked over to Kala and started to clean her up. He then put on a new diaper.

“I want to try it one more time,” he said.

Hawk breezed right through the second time. With no hesitation or concerns.

He handed Kala to Karri.

“How was that?” he asked.

Karen walked over to Hawk.

“That was excellent Hawk. I think you’re ready to take on the role of fatherhood,” Karen said smiling.

Hawk smiled.

“That wasn’t so bad, after you get past the mess,” he said laughing.

“Do you have anymore questions?” Karen asked.

Hawk stood there for a few moments. “No, I think I’m all right with it. I want to thank you again, for helping me,” Hawk said.

“You are so very welcome Hawk. If you need anything else, just let us know, all right?” Karen said.

Hawk nodded. He shook Steve and Karen’s hand.

“Now, might I suggest you get Karri, Saleena, Koorra, and the twins down to see Kalee,” Karen said.

Hawk smiled.

Chapter 15

“You heard them, let’s go,” Hawk said with a smile.

Hawk picked up the twins and started to head towards the door. He turned around to see if the girls were behind him. They were just standing there smiling.

“What are you smiling about?” he asked.

The girls laughed. “Uncle, aren’t you forgetting something?” Karri asked giggling.

Hawk stood there for a moment. “No, I don’t think so,” he replied.

“Uncle, don’t you think it might be wise to get Falcon and Kala dressed first?” Saleena giggled.

Hawk looked down and saw that Falcon and Kala only had their diapers on. Hawk started to laugh.

“I guess it would be nice for them to be wearing some clothing,” he replied smiling.

Hawk looked at the girls, then at Steve and Karen. “Well ummm, where are their clothes?” Hawk asked.

Karri and Saleena both held up clothing for the twins.

Hawk walked back over and gently laid them both back down on the bed.

“Can you girls get them dressed?”

“No uncle, this is part of the training. You have to do it,” Karri said with a smile on her face.

Hawk looked over at Karen. “Karen, could you please help me with this?” Hawk asked.

“I’d be happy to show you, but you’ll be doing it yourself. You have to learn how to dress them, it comes with changing the diapers.”

Just then one of the twins made a sound that only Steve, Karen, and the girls knew. “Umm Hawk, speaking of diapers, you might want to check them again before you put clothes on them,” Karen said smiling.

Just then Hawk smelled something. “What is that smell?” he asked.

He leaned over and smelled the babies. His eyes started to water and he started to gag.

“I don’t know if I can do it again. Do they always smell like that?” Hawk asked.

Karen and Steve were still smiling.

“No, not all the time. Usually only after they eat. That’s when they do that the most,” Karen said pinching her nose closed with her fingers.

“Come on uncle. You have to learn to withstand the smell,” Karri said giggling.

Hawk glanced at Saleena.

“Saleena, would you do this for me?” he asked.

“Sorry uncle. Like Karri and Karen said, it’s part of the training,” Saleena said.

“All right, I can do it. How hard can it be, right?” Hawk said.

Hawk gathered everything again that he would need to clean the baby, including clean clothes. He decided it would be wise to check both of the babies. He already knew which one soiled its diaper, so he started to check the other one first. He proceeded to remove the diaper from Kala. It was clean and dry. He started to dress her. Looking over at Karen once in a while as if to get approval. Karen would nod her head and smile. He then looked at Falcon. Hawk moved over to Falcon, and proceeded to remove his diaper. He started to gag a little but soon got it under control. He cleaned Falcon with a warm wash cloth and gently dried him off. He then put on a clean diaper and clothed him.

“How did I do, Karen?”

“You did a great job, Hawk. Now you have one more thing to do. Get out of here before it starts all over again,” Karen said laughing.

“I agree. Come on girls, let’s go see Kalee,” Hawk said with a big smile on his face.

Steve and Karen were the first to leave, followed by Hawk and the girls. Hawk carried the twins like a proud father. They finally got to the door of the sick bay. Hawk turned to Karri and Saleena.

“I hope you know that I’m doing this for all of us,” Hawk said.

“We know, uncle,” Karri said.

The door to the sick bay opened, and they entered.

Kalee was sitting on the edge of her bed, talking to the doctor. She first saw Karri, Saleena and Koora. Then Hawk entered carrying the twins. She smiled.

“Oh, they are so cute,” she said as she reached out to hold one of them. Hawk handed her Falcon.

“That is Falcon, and this little lady is Kala. They’re Karri’s brother and sister,” Hawk said.

Koora walked over and sat on the bed next to her mother.

“Mother, you should have seen Hawk learning how to change their diapers a little while ago. Falcon made a big mess and Hawk had to change him again,” Koora said giggling.

“I bet he did a wonderful job at it,” Kalee said smiling at Hawk.

Hawk lowered his head and started to blush. “It was the first time I’d ever changed a baby. I wanted to learn before we went down to Acklon, to live for a few months,” Hawk replied.

Kalee smiled. “You got your leave granted?”

Hawk smiled. “Yes, thanks to the elders and the Admiral. We’ll be on your planet for about two months. That is, if you can put up with us that long,” Hawk said looking into Kalee’s eyes.

Kalee smiled back.

“Oh, I guess I could put up with you and those two very sweet nieces of yours, and these two cute little bundles of joy.” Kalee gazed into Hawk’s eyes. “When do you get to start your leave?” Kalee asked.

“The doctor said if you’re still feeling better by tomorrow you’ll be able to go home. That’s when I’ll start my leave,” Hawk replied.

“You mean I have to stay in sick bay one more night?” Kalee asked.

Dr. Goodfellow walked over to her.

“Oh no, my dear lady. I’ve made arrangements with the Admiral to get you and your daughter a state room. It will be next to the sick bay, but you’ll have your privacy. That way, if something should happen, we’ll be right there within seconds,” Goodfellow said.

“Oh, that would be wonderful. No offense doctor, but this bed is a little uncomfortable. When do you think I can move into it?” Kalee asked with a smile.

“Let me think, how about right now. Hawk, could you please show Kalee and Koora state room C?” the doctor asked.

“It would be my honor doctor,” Hawk said with a smile.

Hawk helped Kalee stand up. She was still a little weak in the legs from not standing or walking for so long. She put her arm around Hawk’s neck and held on to him with her other hand.

“Take it nice and easy, there’s no need to hurry,” Hawk said hanging on to Kalee around her small waist.

They slowly walked out of the sick bay and across the corridor to state room C. The door opened and they walked in. She stood there for a moment and looked around.

“Oh, this is beautiful,” she said still looking over the room.

“It’s not that big, but you’ll be more comfortable in here for the night,” Hawk said.

“No, it’s perfect. I can even look out the window and look at all the stars,” she said with a smile.

“The doctor will be in one time tonight, just to check on you. But he will knock first,” the nurse said.

“Well, I guess I’ll see you in the morning, right?” she asked.

“Yes, I’ll be here just before breakfast to take you down to the dining room,” Hawk replied.

“Well, good night then.”

“Good night Kalee. Good night Koora,” Hawk said as he left the room.

Chapter 16

He went back to the sick bay where Karri and Saleena were waiting with the twins.

“Okay. Saleena, Karri, could you please put the twins to bed. I’ll be there shortly to say good night,” Hawk said.

“All right uncle. Uncle, are we really going to live with Kalee for a few months?” Karri asked.

“Yes, it’ll be good for all of us to be with people of our own kind. Then, maybe after the Galactic Council has seen that I can be trusted around humans again they might release me from the Searcher to live on Acklon. And who knows, you both might have found mates and started a family of your own by the time I return,” Hawk said.

“Uncle, you won’t be taking us with you when you leave, will you?” Saleena asked.

Hawk turned his head away.

“No, I’m afraid not, you’ll be staying here on Acklon when I leave.”

“But why uncle?” Karri asked.

“It’s for the best. Like I said before, you’ll be able to find mates of your own and eventually have children. I think that’s what Lola and Marc would have wanted for you, Karri. And Saleena, I didn’t know your parents, but I think they would have wanted the same thing for you. But, when the day comes that the council releases me, I will be back. That I promise,” Hawk said with tears forming in his eyes.

The girls walked over to Hawk and embraced him.

“All right, let’s get these babies to bed. It’s late and we have a lot to do tomorrow.” Hawk placed his fingertips under both Saleena’s and Karri’s chin and gently lifted, looking into their eyes. “I promise, I will be back. Nothing is going to keep me from you. You are my family. You and these two little ones,” Hawk said in tears.

“Uncle, may I ask you something?” Karri asked.

“Of course, what is it?” Hawk replied as they were walking out of sick bay.

“Are you ever going to look for another mate?” Karri asked.

Hawk hung his head.

“I don’t know. I care deeply for Kalee. But her feelings for me might be different. That’s another reason why we’ll be staying with her and Koora. I’ll be able to find out how she feels about me. If she only cares for me as a brother then yes, I would like to find another mate, someday. But, it wouldn’t be fair to try to find a mate right now. What made you ask me that Karri?” Hawk asked.

“I was just wondering. You’re always worrying about us and Falcon and Kala. But I’ve never heard you say anything about what you wanted or would like,” Karri said.

“My main concern right now is taking care of you, Saleena, Falcon and Kala. You four are my number one priority right now,” Hawk said.

Hawk opened the door to Karri and Saleena’s quarters.

“Now you two better get some sleep. I’m going to take the twins back to Steve and Karen’s for the night. This will be the last night they will be seeing them. I want them to spend as much time with them as possible. Then I’ll be going back to talk to Kalee about something. I’ll see you girls first thing in the morning,” Hawk said as he embraced and kissed both of them good night on the top of their heads.

“Good night uncle,” Karri said.

“Good night uncle,” Saleena said next.

“Good night,” Hawk replied.

Hawk left carrying the twins to Steve and Karen’s quarters. He knocked and Karen answered the door.

“Hawk, is something wrong?” she asked.

“No. I was wondering if you’d like to keep the twins for the tonight? Seeing that tonight is the last night you’ll be seeing them,” Hawk said.

Karen’s eyes filled with tears.

“By all means yes. We would truly love to keep the twins for the night. Steve and I were hoping and praying that you would bring them to us. Please, come in,” Karen said.

Hawk entered their quarters.

“I’m sorry I brought them so late. But we were visiting with Kalee and lost track of the time. I thought maybe you would like to see them one more time,” Hawk said.

“I’m so happy you brought them. We’re really going to miss them,” Steve said while taking Falcon from Hawk.

Karen didn’t hesitate, she took Kala. The twins snuggled right up to Steve and Karen, as if they were their parents. Hawk noticed how comfortable they were with each other. He could actually see the love between them.

“Well, I’ll leave them in your loving arms. I have to go finish packing and take care of some last minute things. Good night,” Hawk said as he left their quarters.

“Good night Hawk, and thank you,” Karen replied.

Hawk headed straight back to Karri and Saleena's quarters. He knocked lightly, in case they were all ready asleep. The door opened and there stood Karri.

"Uncle, what's wrong?" she asked.

"Nothing is wrong. I want to talk to you girls. Is Saleena still awake?"

"Yes uncle. I'm awake," Saleena replied.

Hawk entered their quarters and sat down in the chair. The girls sat on the edge of the bed and studied Hawk's face.

"What is it uncle?" Kari asked.

Hawk hung his head, then raised it again to look into the girls eyes.

"I know you two love Kala and Falcon, right?" Hawk asked.

"Yes uncle, we love them very much."

"I know you might not want to talk about this, but I think we should. How would you girls feel about Karen and Steve adopting Falcon and Kala? They have been their mother and father ever since they were born. They know no others. They are very happy together. When I took them back to Karen and Steve tonight for their last night together, they took them from me and you could see the love they held for one another. Falcon and Kala were very happy. I know you girls don't want to give up part of the family, but I think it might be better for them. And you heard them earlier, they've tried to have children but can't. Maybe it's a medical reason, I don't know. But, I do know that all four of them love each other very much. I saw it in their eyes," Hawk said looking into their eyes.

Karri and Saleena looked at each other then looked at Hawk.

"Uncle, may we tell you something? We too have noticed the love between them. Saleena and I have talked about this several times. And we agree with you. It would be better for them to stay with Karen and Steve. Like you said, they belong together. Don't get us wrong, we love them with all our heart. But they need a mother and a father right now. They can't be taken away from two people that have taken care of them since they were born to be placed with strangers," Karri replied.

"So, you're telling me that you'd feel better if they stayed with Karen and Steve also, right?" Hawk asked to make sure of what he heard.

"We agree with you 100%, uncle," Karri said smiling.

Hawk smiled and stood up, walked over to them and held out his arms. Karri and Saleena both stood up and embraced their uncle. Hawk embraced them back and kissed them on their heads.

“I want to make it legal though. I have to go talk to the Admiral, and the Galactic Council. But I’d better talk to Karen and Steve about it first, to see how they feel about it.” Hawk smiled. “Would you girls like to go with me?” he asked.

Before he knew it they ran into the bathroom and were dressed within moments.

“We’re ready uncle, let’s go,” Karri and Saleena said together.

Before Hawk could answer, the girls were out the door. He followed, and down the corridor they walked, straight to Karen and Steve’s quarters. Hawk knocked. A moment later the door opened, and there stood Steve holding Falcon and feeding him.

“Hawk, is something wrong?”

“May we speak to you and Karen? We know it’s late, but it’s very important,” Hawk said.

“Of course, won’t you come in?” Steve replied.

Hawk, Karri and Saleena entered their quarters. Steve went into the back room. “Karen, Hawk and the girls are here. They want to talk to us. Could you come out here?” he said.

“I’ll be right there, I’m changing Kala,” she replied.

A moment later, Karen entered the room.

“Hawk, girls, what’s wrong? Are you leaving tonight instead? ” she asked with a look that her heart was about to be broken.

“Karen, Steve, the girls and I have been talking. We’ve noticed the love you have for Falcon and Kala. We’ve also seen the love they have for you. You have been their parents since the day they were born. You’ve gone through illnesses, teething, and all those diaper changes. Since we’re not sure of how things are going to go down there on Acklon, we were wondering if you two would like to adopt them as your own?” Hawk said.

Karen started to cry, as did Steve.

“Oh Hawk, we would love to adopt them. We love them so much. They are like the children we could never have. Are you serious about this?” Karen asked looking Hawk in the eyes.

“Yes, we are very serious. We couldn’t think of a more loving couple than you and Steve to raise them,” Hawk replied.

Chapter 17

Hawk took a deep breath.

“We have to go talk to the Admiral next. Then I have to talk to Kalee. I just hope she understands. She strongly believes in family being together and staying together,” Hawk said.

“From what you’ve told us about this woman, I think she will understand. She’ll know that since we raised Falcon and Kala, it would be hard on the twins to have them taken away from us now. Since they consider us as their mother and father,” Karen explained.

Hawk nodded.

“Well, I better go talk to the Admiral. I want to make this completely legal. Then I’ll go talk to Kalee. I’m sorry to have kept you up so long,” Hawk said.

“It’s quite all right Hawk. You, Karri and Saleena are welcome here anytime,” Steve replied.

“Thank you. Well, good night,” Hawk said as he and the girls left.

On their way to the bridge Hawk stopped and looked at the girls.

“What’s wrong uncle? Why did you stop?” Karri asked.

“You girls look exhausted. Why don’t you go ahead and go back to your quarters, and get some sleep. I’ll talk to the Admiral,” Hawk said.

“Are you sure? We could go with you if you want,” Saleena replied.

“No, you girls need your sleep. I’ll see you in the morning,” Hawk said with a smile.

“All right uncle. Good night,” Karri and Saleena said trying not to yawn.

“Good night girls. I’ll see you in the morning,” Hawk said.

The girls headed for their quarters and Hawk headed for the bridge.

Up on the bridge, the Admiral was tending to a small problem.

“We have to get that repaired before we head back to Septor 205. It is vital that it gets repaired as soon as possible,” Asimov said.

Hawk entered the bridge. The Admiral glanced over at him and smiled.

“What are you doing up? I figured you’d be sound asleep by now,” the Admiral said.

“Sir, I need to talk to you. It’s rather important,” Hawk said.

“If you’re up this time of the night Hawk, it must be important. What can I do for you?” Asimov asked.

“Sir, Karri, Saleena and I have talked it over, and we all agreed that it would be in the best interest for the twins that they stay with Karen and Steve. They’ve raised them since they were born. Falcon and Kala have come to know them as their parents. It wouldn’t be right to take them away, and try to find new parents,” Hawk said.

“What can I do to help?” the Admiral asked.

“Sir, we’d like for Karen and Steve to legally adopt them,” Hawk replied.

“Legally huh? That’s going to take some time. I’d approve it, but then we have to wait for the Galactic Council to approve it also. But, since Falcon and Kala have no living relatives, they should approve it a lot faster,” Asimov replied.

“Sir, they do have living relatives,” Hawk said loudly.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean it that way. I meant living blood relatives,” Asimov replied.

“How long do you think it will take the council to approve it?” Hawk asked.

“Not long. I’ll speak to the council on your behalf, if that’s all right with you?” the Admiral said.

“Thank you sir. I’d really appreciate it,” Hawk replied.

“Are you sure you want to do this?”

“Yes sir.”

“All right.” The Admiral looked at the communications officer. “Send a request for the Galactic Council to contact me,” the Admiral ordered.

“Yes sir, sending it now Admiral.”

Asimov turned to Hawk.

“You go to your quarters and get some rest. I’ll notify you when I hear from them,” Asimov said.

Hawk nodded.

“I want to talk to Kalee first. I’d like to let her know what’s going on,” Hawk said.

“I understand,” the Admiral replied.

Hawk left the bridge and slowly made his way to state room C. He softly knocked on the door. There was no answer. He knocked again, still no answer. Figuring they were probably sleeping, Hawk turned to walk away. Then the door opened.

“Hawk? Is everything all right?” Kalee asked in a low soft voice.

“Yes, Everything is fine. I was just wondering if I could talk to you for a couple of minutes. But I see you were probably sleeping. I’m sorry if I disturbed you. It can wait till tomorrow,” Hawk said turning to walk away.

“Hawk, I was just sitting down to have some coffee. Would you like to come in and join me?” Kalee asked softly.

“I would like to come in and talk to you. It’s kind of personal. It’s about Falcon and Kala,” Hawk said.

“Are they all right? They’re not ill are they?” Kalee asked in a concerned voice.

“Oh no, they’re fine. But I do need to talk to you about them,” Hawk said.

“Please, come in.”

Hawk entered Kalee’s quarters. She motioned for him to sit down on the sofa. After he sat down she sat down next to him, at a respectable distance from him.

“What is it, Hawk?”

“I wanted to let you know that the twins will not be coming with us. Karri, Saleena and I have talked it over, and we all agreed that the best thing for the twins was for them to stay right where they are, with Karen and Steve. They’ve raised them since they were born. It would be like someone taking Koora away from you. You and Koora belong together just like Falcon and Kala belong with Karen and Steve. I just hope you can understand,” Hawk said.

Kalee gazed into Hawk’s eyes.

“Hawk, I do understand. You want the best for them. There’s nothing wrong with that,” she said reaching out to touch Hawk’s hand.

Hawk smiled. “I just wanted to let you know why I’m doing it. They’ve been so good to them. Falcon and Kala love them very much. And I know Karen and Steve love them also. I’ve seen it in their eyes, the way they hold and care for them. They would be good parents.”

Kalee smiled. “I know, I’ve seen them with the twins.”

Hawk stood up, walked over to the portal and gazed out. Kalee got up and walked over to where Hawk was standing.

“What are you thinking about?” Kalee asked studying Hawk’s face.

Hawk turned and gazed into Kalee’s eyes.

Chapter 18

“I was thinking about how much I’m going to miss Karri and Saleena. They’re pieces of my heart. Without them, I won’t be whole till I return,” Hawk said gazing deep into Kalee’s eyes.

Kalee gazed back into Hawk’s eyes.

“I’ll take good care of them while you’re gone,” Kalee said gently placing her hand on Hawk’s chest.

Hawk gently put his hands around Kalee’s slender waist and started to lean towards her. He released his hands from around her waist.

“I’m sorry,” he said backing away.

“Hawk, I care about you very much, but it is too soon. We should get to know each other better first. You have a lot on your mind right now. When you and the girls come down to my home. Maybe you’ll be more relaxed. And we can talk and get to know each other more. I’m going to enjoy showing you and the girls Acklon. I think they’ll like it. There’s a marvelous school, with both bird people and humans. I know the girls are of marriage age now, but they might enjoy it,” Kalee said changing the subject to ease Hawk’s mind.

Hawk smiled.

“I think I better go. You need your rest. I’ll see you in the morning,” Hawk said as he headed for the door.

“Good night Hawk,” Kalee said softly.

“Good night,” Hawk said in return.

The door opened and Hawk exited. The door closed behind him. He noticed his heart was beating fast. He didn’t know if it was from being close to Kalee, or the feelings he had for her. He slowly walked back to his quarters and finally laid down. He had just closed his eyes when the intercom started to crackle.

“Hawk, report to the bridge.”

He got up, left his quarters and headed for the bridge. Up on the bridge the Admiral was waiting.

“I’m sorry Hawk. Did I wake you?” Asimov said.

“No sir, I was just resting. Did you hear from the Galactic Council?” Hawk asked.

“Yes, they needed some more information. Like the parents names that want to adopt the twins, and sorry to say, what happened to their real parents. At 10:00, you, Steve, Karen and myself have to be in the bridge conference room,” Asimov said with a smile.

“Why, sir?” Hawk asked with a confused look on his face.

The Admiral smiled.

“You have to be there so you can confirm that is your wish,” the Admiral replied.

Hawk stood there for a moment, not realizing what the Admiral was talking about. Then he started to smile.

“They approved the adoption?” he asked.

“Yes Hawk.”

Hawk looked down at the floor for a moment, then looked up at the Admiral.

“Sir, I think it would be better to have Falcon and Kala’s real sisters up here for that. After all, they are their only living relatives, and they are of age,” Hawk said.

“I was thinking about that also. But I wanted to make sure if it was all right with you first,” Asimov replied.

“Yes sir, it is.”

“Fine, I’ll have them called up to the bridge soon. Or would you rather go down there yourself and tell them?” the Admiral asked.

“If it’s all right with you sir. I’d like to tell them myself,” Hawk replied.

“Very well. They should be contacting us shortly. You should go down and talk to the girls now. I already have Steve and Karen coming to the bridge,” Asimov said.

Hawk nodded, and as he turned to leave the bridge, Buck entered.

“Hawk, I heard you were going to let Steve and Karen adopt the twins. How do Karri and Saleena feel about it?” Buck asked.

“They’re fine with it. They know it’s for the best. Falcon and Kala will have a good home with them. After all, they raised them since birth. Karen and Steve are their parents as far as they know. Well, excuse me, I have to go get the girls,” Hawk said as he left the bridge.

Buck turned to the Admiral.

“Is he all right?” Buck asked with concern.

“I think it’s tearing him apart inside. But, you know Hawk, he won’t let his emotions show. He wants what’s best for the twins. And right now, that is to give them up,” Asimov replied.

Buck shook his head.

“I guess I still don’t understand him,” Buck said with a confused look on his face.

“I don’t think we ever will, Buck. But I do know one thing. If I’m not mistaken, he does have feelings for Kalee and her daughter,” the Admiral said with a grin.

“Really? I didn’t know that. Is that why he’s taking his leave time on Acklon?” Buck asked.

The Admiral smiled, and turned away. Buck smiled, then left the bridge.

Hawk made his way down to the girls quarters. He stood outside the door for a moment, then knocked.

“Enter.”

Hawk walked into Karri and Saleena’s quarters with a gloomy look on his face.

“Uncle, what’s wrong?” Karri asked walking over to him.

“The Admiral has heard from the Galactic Council. I want you and Saleena to come with me up to the bridge for the meeting with them. I wanted to talk to you first before we go up there.” Hawk sat down, rubbed his hand over his forehead, then looked up at them. “Are you sure you two feel comfortable letting Karen and Steve adopt Falcon and Kala? If you don’t, let me know now. Because once this meeting is over, the twins will be Karen and Steve’s children, for the rest of their lives,” Hawk said.

“Uncle, we love Falcon and Kala very much. And we also know that they will have a better life with Karen and Steve. They will have a mother and a father. But we will miss them terribly. But as long as they are happy, that is the main thing,” Karri said with tears starting to swell in her eyes.

Hawk looked over at Saleena.

“How do you feel about it Saleena?” Hawk asked.

“I feel the same way, uncle. It’s true our family will be apart, but we have to think of them. What would be best for them. And to me the best thing to do is let them stay with Karen and Steve,” Saleena replied with tears in her eyes also.

“Very well. Come on, we have to go up to the bridge for the meeting. Then we will leave for Acklon,” Hawk said.

The girls nodded.

Chapter 19

They left Karri and Saleena's quarters and headed for the bridge, knowing that shortly they would be losing a part of their family. As they entered the bridge, the Admiral motioned for them to enter the bridge conference room. The door closed and the meeting started.

"Saleena, Karri, has Hawk explained what will be going on in here?" Asimov asked.

"Yes Admiral, he has."

"Do you understand that after this meeting is over, Falcon and Kala will no longer be a part of your family unless Karen and Steve allow it?" Asimov said.

"Yes sir, we understand," Karri and Saleena replied.

"Very well, please be seated. The Galactic Council will be ready in a moment."

The girls seated themselves next to Hawk.

"The Galactic Council will now begin. This hearing is for the legal adoption of two children, Falcon and Kala. Will the foster parent and any other siblings please stand, and state your name."

Hawk stood.

"I am Hawk. I am the guardian of those children," Hawk said, then seated himself again.

Karri stood up next.

"My name is Karri, I'm Falcon and Kala's sister," she said, then she sat down. She nudged Saleena and motioned for her to stand. "You're next," Karri said.

"But I'm not related to them," Saleena said.

Hawk leaned over to her and whispered. "Saleena, you are just as much of a sister as Karri is. Stand and state your name," he said softly.

Saleena stood.

"My name is Saleena. I'm the other sister to Falcon and Kala," she said, smiling as she sat down.

"Is there anyone else?" the Council asked.

"No sir," Admiral Asimov replied.

"Very well. Are Karen and Steve Wilkins in the room? If they are, please rise," the head council member said.

Steve and Karen stood up and faced the Galactic Council.

“I am Steve Wilkins, and this is my wife Karen Wilkins,” Steve said.

“We want to make sure that you agreed to this adoption of Falcon and Kala without being forced into it,” the council said.

“No, we were not forced into it sir. We would love to adopt Falcon and Kala. We have raised them as our own since they came to live on the Searcher after their real mother and father were killed. Please, we really love these children,” Steve said with tears swelling in his eyes.

“Thank you Steve. Karen Wilkins, do you feel the same way?”

“Oh yes sir. I don’t know what I would do if they were to leave us. Like my husband said sir, we love these children with all our heart and soul,” Karen said.

“Thank you Karen. You and your husband are excused from this hearing. Please wait outside.”

Karen and Steve left the room. Hawk, Saleena and Karri were sitting there, waiting for the Galactic Council to call on them.

“Hawk, you are the guardian of Falcon and Kala, is that right?”

Hawk stood. “Yes sir.”

Then he seated himself again.

“Karri, Saleena, you two are the older sisters of Falcon and Kala, is that right?”

Karri and Saleena stood up. “Yes sir.”

Then they seated themselves again.

“Ka rri, are there any other living relatives left in your family?”

“No sir, just myself and Saleena sir.”

“Hawk, Karri and Saleena, are you really willing to give up these children to Karen and Steve Wilkins?”

They all stood, looked at one another and nodded.

“Yes sir, we are,” Hawk replied.

One of the council members looked at Hawk and the girls.

“I just have one question to ask. Why do you want to give up Falcon and Kala?” he asked.

Hawk stood again.

“Sir, since their real parents died, Karen and Steve have been raising them as their own. The children are well cared for and loved deeply. We just can’t take Falcon and Kala away from them. And the children love them in return, sir,” Hawk said.

“Thank you Hawk, you and the girls are excused from the rest of this meeting. Please wait outside. We’ll notify you and the Wilkins as soon as we’ve made a decision,” the council member said.

Hawk, Saleena and Karri stood, and walked out of the conference room. Outside the room Karen and Steve were waiting also.

“Did they say anything yet?” Steve asked.

“No, not yet. They told us that they would let us know when they’ve made a decision,” Hawk said.

Karen was getting more and more nervous.

“What’s taking them so long?” she asked.

Steve smiled.

“Honey, it’s only been a few minutes since Hawk and the girls came out. It might take a few minutes to a few hours,” Steve explained.

Karen smiled.

“I’m sorry Steve, I’m just worried that the council will deny the request,” she said with a worried look on her face.

“Why would they deny it? You two are the most loving and caring humans I’ve met. You took two orphans into your home. You’ve cared for them, loved them just like they were your own. Why would the council deny that,” Hawk said.

“I don’t know Hawk. I think I’m just worried they might think that they will be better off with someone else,” Karen replied.

“I promise you Karen, they will not take Falcon and Kala away from you and Steve,” Hawk said.

Karen looked into Hawk’s eyes.

“Hawk, please don’t make promises you won’t be able to keep. If the council says no, there must be a good reason. I can only pray that they approve it,” Karen said with tears forming in her eyes.

Hawk gazed at Karen. Deep down inside he knew she was right. He shouldn’t make a promise that he might not be able to keep.

Steve moved closer to Karen and held her in his arms. Everyone on the bridge watched as Karen turned to Steve and started to cry.

Buck walked over to Hawk.

“What’s wrong with Karen? Did they deny the adoption?” Buck asked.

“No, she’s afraid that they might deny it though. I’ve told them that no one will take Falcon and Kala away from them. I’ve never thought of what would happen if they denied it,” Hawk said.

“Why would they deny it?” Buck asked.

Just then the door to the conference room opened.

“Would you all please come in? The council has made their decision,” Asimov said gesturing for them to enter.

Hawk, Karri, Saleena, Steve and Karen entered the conference room, and seated themselves again. The door closed behind them.

“This court is now in session. Will the interested parties please rise, and face the council.”

Hawk, Karri, Saleena, Steve and Karen stood and faced the council. Karen, getting more and more worried, grabbed Steve’s arm.

One of the head council members stood.

“I think we all agree, the best thing for these children is to have a loving and healthy environment. So, keeping the best interest in mind for these children, the Galactic Council has made its decision based on the information given to us by a number of interested parties. Therefore, the Galactic Council has no choice but to award Falcon and Kala to....”

Chapter 20

“Steve and Karen Wilkins,” the council member said.

Karen and Steve embraced each other. They walked over to Hawk and shook his hand.

“Thank you Hawk. This means the world to us,” Steve said holding Karen with tears in his eyes.

Hawk smiled.

“I know they will be loved and well cared for with you and Karen,” Hawk replied.

Karen whispered something into Steve’s ear.

“I don’t know, we could ask,” Steve said softly back to her.

Steve turned and faced the Galactic Council one more time.

“Sir, my wife and I were wondering is there a legal way we can name Hawk as Falcon and Kala’s legal godfather?” Steve asked.

Hawk gazed at Steve and Karen.

Steve looked at Hawk and smiled.

“Why do you ask such a request?” one of the council members asked.

“Sir, if anything should happen to my wife and myself, we want to make sure Falcon and Kala are taken care of. With a legal godparent, they won’t have to worry about who will care for them, or worry about another hearing,” Steve replied.

The Galactic Council talked among themselves for a moment then faced the screen again.

“Hawk, will you accept the responsibility of Falcon and Kala, if something should happen to Steve and Karen Wilkins?” the head council member asked.

Hawk smiled.

“Yes, I would be honored to be their godfather, and to take full responsibility of them if anything should happen to Steve and Karen Wilkins,” Hawk replied with a smile on his face.

“Let it show in the archives that Hawk has accepted the responsibility of Falcon and Kala as their legal godfather. Also, let it state that if anything should happen to Steve and Karen Wilkins, that legal custody will be turned over to Hawk with no court hearing,” the council member said.

“This hearing is now closed.”

Karri and Saleena went over to Steve and Karen and embraced them both.

"I hope you girls know that you will always be welcome to come and see them whenever you like," Karen said while embracing Karri and Saleena.

"Thank you, it's going to be a while before we see them or you again though. We'll be living on Acklon for a few months if not more," Karri said with a forced smile on her face.

"Oh, I forgot. Well, when you girls come up for a visit then. Or maybe we can even come down to Acklon for a visit," Steve replied.

Karri and Saleena forced another smile.

"That would be great," Karri said.

Hawk knew it was tearing the girls' hearts out. He walked over to them and embraced them.

"I know how you're feeling right now. Like a piece of your heart was ripped from your chest. But you'll be able to see them anytime you like. And Steve said that they could come to Acklon for a visit. Now, I want you girls to go give Steve and Karen an embrace; we have to leave for Acklon. Kalee and Koora must be getting pretty impatient about now. They must really miss their home and friends also," Hawk said gently guiding the girls towards Steve and Karen.

"You promise you'll come down to Acklon for a visit real soon, all right?" Saleena said with her eyes starting to swell with tears.

"We promise," Karen replied.

Hawk walked over to Steve and Karen one last time and shook their hand.

"If there's anything you need or I can help you with, please let me know," Hawk said.

He turned to the girls and motioned for them to follow. Hawk and the girls left the conference room and out onto the bridge. Buck and everyone else were watching for the door to open. When Hawk and the girls came out Buck walked up to them.

"Well, how did it go? Did Karen and Steve get the twins?" Buck asked.

"Yes, the Galactic Council granted the adoption of the twins," Hawk replied.

Hawk and Karri and Saleena left the bridge and headed for Kalee and Koora's quarters. As they were about ready to knock on the door, it opened and out walked Kalee.

"I was just heading for the girls quarters to see if you were there. How did the adoption go?" she asked.

"Steve and Karen are now Falcon and Kala's legal parents," Hawk replied.

"I'm so glad that they now have a mother and father. How do you girls feel?" Kalee asked.

“I’m going to miss them terribly. I know it’s for the best. Like you said, now they have a mother and a father. But that doesn’t cure the pain I have in my heart right now,” Karri replied.

Kalee walked over to Saleena and Karri.

“I know. You’ll always have that pain, but with time it will turn to happiness.”

Karri and Saleena looked up at Hawk.

“Is that true uncle? Will the hurt go away?” Karri said with a hurt look on her face.

“Believe it or not, yes. But it will not go away completely. The pain will become lighter and lighter, but you will always remember,” Hawk replied.

Hawk smiled at Kalee.

“Come on girls. We have to get ready to go. Do you have your things packed and ready to go?” Hawk asked.

“Yes uncle.”

Hawk turned to face Kalee again.

“We’ll be leaving shortly. Are you and Koorra ready?” he asked.

“Yes, I think she’s been ready to go now for about 6 hours,” Kalee replied smiling.

Hawk turned and faced Karri and Saleena.

“Go get your things and meet me in the hanger. I have to get a few things then I’ll meet you there,” Hawk said.

“I’ll go get Koorra and meet you there also,” Kalee said.

Hawk nodded then walked off.

Kalee, Karri and Saleena stood there and watched Hawk walk away.

“He’s dying on the inside,” Karri said.

“I know. It’s hard to let the ones you love go. I’m still not over losing my adoptive parents. But I know it gets better in time,” Kalee said.

“Come on Saleena, we have to get our things. We’ll see you in a few minutes, Kalee. We’ll stop back by and take you to the hanger,” Karri said.

“All right girls, we’ll be ready,” Kalee replied as she watched them walk away.

About thirty minutes later the girls came back and knocked on the door.

“Kalee, Koora, are you ready?” Karri asked.

The door opened and out walked Koora followed by Kalee.

“Yes, we’re ready.”

They started to walk towards the hanger. As they approached the hanger door someone called to them from behind.

“Karri, Saleena.”

They turned to see Karen carrying the twins.

“I was hoping I would catch you before you left. I was wondering if you’d like to say goodbye to the twins?” Karen asked.

Karri and Saleena walked back to Karen and took Falcon and Kala from her arms and embraced them, perhaps for the last time.

“I’m going to miss you, little one,” Karri said starting to sob.

“And I’m going to miss you too,” Saleena said also.

They swapped and embraced the other one.

They handed the twins back to Karen and looked at her with tears in their eyes.

“Please, take good care of them,” Karri said as they turned to walk away.

“I promise, I will,” Karen replied.

At the hanger Hawk was waiting for them to arrive. The hanger door opened and Karri, Saleena, Kalee and Koora entered. Hawk had them enter the shuttle, then he entered and closed the hatch behind him. The shuttle started its engines, and before long it was on its way to the planet surface of Acklon.

Chapter 21

As the shuttle was getting closer to the planet of Acklon, Hawk got on the radio.

“Hawk to Acklon.”

“This is Acklon.”

“This is the shuttle from the research vessel Searcher. Request permission to land,” Hawk said.

“Welcome Hawk, permission to land granted. Follow the landing beacon to landing pad 9.”

“Landing pad 9... Hawk out.”

“Acklon out.”

As the shuttle was about ready to land the girls looked out the shuttle windows and were amazed at all the bird people and humans walking around together. They looked at each other and smiled.

“Uncle, this is amazing. Look at all those bird people,” Karri said with excitement in her voice.

“You’re really going to like the humans here as well. They’re very nice. Here we protect each other. If something bad happens, let’s say one of the farmers’ crops catches on fire, or is in need of being worked, everyone goes to help that farmer in whatever way possible. If they are bird people or human, it doesn’t matter. Here everyone is equal,” Kalee said.

Karri and Saleena smiled at Kalee.

“Are there any single male bird people here?” Karri asked gazing over at Hawk.

“There are some. But we get more and more bird people finding their way here almost everyday. So today, we might only have ten single males. But, by next week, we could have twenty,” Kalee replied.

Kalee looked over at Hawk and smiled.

“Hawk, we even have single female bird people here,” Kalee said with a smile.

Hawk smiled back and turned to face out the window.

“He must still be thinking about the twins,” Kalee said to Karri.

“I know he is. I have them on my mind also,” Karri replied.

“I know how you feel, Karri. But with me it was losing my adoptive parents. I don’t even remember my real parents. I know it’s not the same, but the pain is about the same. It’s a deep

pain in your heart. You don't think it will ever mend," Kalee said putting her hand on Karri's shoulder.

"That's how I feel right now," Karri replied looking into Kalee's eyes.

Kalee looked at Saleena.

"You feel the same way, don't you Saleena?" Kalee asked.

"Yes, I know it'll mend with time. But it hurts so bad right now," Saleena replied with tears forming in her eyes.

Kalee embraced both Karri and Saleena.

The shuttle set down with a light thump. Hawk got up out of his seat and opened the hatch. Karri, Saleena, Kalee and Koorra left the shuttle, followed by Hawk. Hawk then turned to the pilot and thanked him. He shut the shuttle door, backed up and stood and watched the shuttle take off. Soon it was gone. Kalee took Karri and Saleena by their hand and led them.

"I'll show you where you'll be living first, then I'll take you on a tour," Kalee said.

As they walked through the village both humans and bird people were greeting them. Some approached Kalee and Koorra and welcomed them home. As they walked Kalee pointed out the different kind of stores. They noticed that all the stores sold food for both bird people and humans together. Saleena started to smile.

"Where do you live? In town or on the outside of town?" Karri asked.

Kalee smiled.

"Well, I have two houses. One that belonged to my adoptive parents, and the other I had built. I can show you both, if you'd like," Kalee said with a smile.

The girls nodded and smiled.

As they turned the corner to walk down a small narrow street, Hawk noticed that all the houses looked almost the same, except one that stood out from the rest. As they approached it, Hawk started to smile. On the front of the house was a beautiful stone monument of Make-Make. Kalee noticed that for once Hawk was smiling. She stopped outside the home.

"This was the home of my adoptive parents," she said pointing to the well kept home.

Karri and Saleena walked over the monument and gently touched it, and smiled.

"Where is your other home?" Saleena asked.

Koorra grabbed Karri and Saleena by their hand.

"Come on, I'll show you," Koorra replied smiling.

They darted down the street and around the corner, and stopped in front of a small, beautiful little house. It had a small fence around the front yard. Karri and Saleena smiled.

“Oh uncle, this is the house where we want to stay in,” they shouted as they opened the gate.

“I think we’d better let Kalee and Koora decide where we’re going to stay. After all, we are their guests,” Hawk replied.

“Oh Hawk, that’s why I’m showing you both homes. So you and the girls can decide which one you’d like to live in. Come on, I’ll show you the inside of this one first, then I’ll show you the inside of the other one,” Kalee said with a smile.

Hawk nodded as he walked up the cobblestone walkway.

Kalee opened the door and motioned for them to enter. Saleena, Karri and Koora were the first ones in the door. As they got inside the whole house opened up.

“Go ahead, look around,” Kalee said with a smile.

Soon a little girl came running up to Kalee and Koora.

“Kalee! Koora! You’re home,” she said with excitement as she ran up to Kalee and embraced her.

“Hello Ashla, where’s your mother?” Kalee asked while embracing her.

“She’s coming. Who are these people? Are they friends of yours?” Ashla asked looking at Hawk and the girls.

Kalee laughed.

“Yes, this is Hawk and his two nieces Karri and Saleena,” Kalee said.

Ashla walked over to Hawk and shook his hand. “It’s nice to meet you, Hawk,” she said.

“It’s nice to meet you too, Ashla. This is Karri and this one is Saleena,” Hawk said putting his arms around the girls.

Ashla walked over to them and shook their hand also.

“It’s nice to meet you,” she said in a soft voice.

The girls nodded.

“Likewise, Ashla,” Karri and Saleena said together.

Ashla turned to face Kalee.

“Where have you been, Kalee? We’ve been so worried about you,” Ashla asked.

"I'm sorry I had you and your mother worried. I ran into a little problem, but everything is fine now," she said glancing over at Hawk and smiling.

Hawk heard someone walking up to the door.

"Kalee, are you home?" a female voice asked.

"Come on in, Aslana," Kalee said.

Aslana walked in and walked over to Kalee, and gave her a hug.

Hawk stood there for a moment gazing at this beautiful birdwoman. Her head feathers were pure white. He noticed a few cream brown feathers above her eyes. Her waist was slender, and she was wearing the traditional clothing for their kind. Last time he had seen any of their traditional clothing was on his mate Koori. He stood and watched every move Aslana made. Kalee noticed that Hawk was having trouble keeping his eyes off her. She smiled. Kalee introduced them to each other.

"Aslana, this is Hawk... Hawk, this is Aslana."

"Hello Hawk, it's very nice to meet you," Aslana said with a sparkle in her eye and a smile.

Hawk stood there for a moment.

"It's nice to meet you too, Aslana," Hawk said, finally getting the words out.

"Well Hawk, which house would you and the girls like to live in?" Kalee asked, even though she knew what the answer would be.

Hawk looked over at Kalee and saw that she was smiling.

"I thought you were going to show us the other house as well," Hawk said.

"I could, unless you like this one," she said still smiling.

"I like this house. Karri, Saleena, what do you think? Do you like this one or would you like to see the other one?" Hawk asked not taking his eyes off Aslana.

Karri and Saleena watched as Hawk kept staring at Aslana.

"I think this house is great... uncle," Karri said nudging Saleena.

"I like this one... uncle," Saleena said giggling.

Kalee stood there and smiled. She knew that for some reason, Hawk and Aslana were meant to meet. She also knew that she had lost a chance for a mate. But seeing Hawk looking at Aslana that way, she knew it was meant to be.

Chapter 22

“Well, I think I better leave you three alone for a while so you can get settled. I’ll be by in a while to show you our nice little village, and go shopping for food. I bet you girls would love to see the shopping area. Come on Koorra. We’ll be back later,” Kalee said.

Aslana and Ashla glanced over at Kalee and Koorra.

“I think we better go as well. It was nice meeting all of you. I hope you enjoy it here. It is a very nice village, plain and simple. If you need anything, please don’t hesitate to let me know. I live right next door,” Aslana said with a smile.

Hawk couldn’t help but smile back. Her smile, the way she moved, reminded him so much of Koori.

“It was nice meeting you Aslana, Ashla,” Hawk said.

Aslana, Ashla, Kalee and Koorra left, closing the door behind them. Karri and Saleena had already picked out the rooms they wanted. The best room they saved for Hawk. The house didn’t look that big from the outside. But when they entered, it opened up to a beautiful home. Carvings on the wall of Make-Make, pictures of Peregrine and his mate. And on the far wall was a picture of a birdman and Kalee. Hawk stood there for a moment and studied the picture.

“That’s strange. I know him from somewhere, but where?” Hawk said.

Karri and Saleena walked over and gazed at the picture.

“You know him, uncle?” Karri asked.

“I’ve seen him somewhere before. I just can’t remember where,” Hawk replied.

“Is he a friend of yours or Koori’s?” Karri asked.

Hawk started to smile.

“I remember where I’ve seen him before. That is a picture of your father’s brother. I wonder how she got his picture?” Hawk said with a confused look on his face.

“You mean I have another uncle?” Karri asked.

“If that’s him, yes,” Hawk replied.

Karri turned and looked at Saleena.

“We have another uncle!” she said with excitement in her voice.

“Now let’s not get too excited. It might not be him. But I have to admit it does look like him,” Hawk said.

“Are you going to ask Kalee when she comes back?” Karri asked.

Hawk gazed at Karri and Saleena.

“Yes, I’ll ask her when she comes back. But in the meantime we need to unpack and get settled in. Did you girls unpack yet?”

“Yes uncle, we’ll show you the room we left for you. It’s really nice,” Saleena said as she reached for Hawk’s hand.

They guided him to the master bedroom. There on the wall were pictures and wood carvings of Make-Make. And again another picture of that birdman with Kalee and her adoptive parents. Tucked away in the corner of the room was a fireplace. Hawk put his bag down on the bed and walked over to gaze out the window. It had a beautiful view of a wooded area with a stream that flowed past. A knock came at the door. Karri and Saleena walked over to answer it. There stood an older birdman. He smiled at the girls.

“Excuse me, is Hawk here?” he asked .

“Yes, won’t you come in,” Karri said.

Saleena quickly walked to Hawk’s room and knocked.

“Uncle, there’s an older birdman here to speak to you,” Saleena said softly through the door.

Hawk opened the bedroom door and walked into the living room where the birdman was waiting. Hawk knew right away who it was when he saw him. It was one of the elders.

“Please, come in and sit,” Hawk said.

The gentleman walked in and went over to the sofa and sat down. Hawk sat in a chair across from him. Karri and Saleena watched from a distance. The older birdman looked over at Karri and Saleena, and smiled.

“You two must be Karri and Saleena. Welcome to Acklon,” he said.

“Thank you,” Karri and Saleena replied with a confused look on their face.

Hawk could see that they were confused.

“Karri, Saleena, this is Black Hawk. One of the elders I told you about.” Hawk turned his gaze back to Black Hawk. “What can I do for you sir?” Hawk asked.

Black Hawk glanced over at the girls, then returned his gaze to Hawk as if telling Hawk to send the girls out of the room.

“Karri, Saleena, if you’re finished unpacking why don’t you go out and look around. But stay close, Kalee should be back soon,” Hawk said.

“All right, uncle. It was nice meeting you sir,” Karri said as she and Saleena walked out the front door.

“I’m sorry you had to send the girls out, but it’s very important that they don’t know about Kalee, not yet anyway. We elders have decided to tell Kalee of her family and her position tomorrow night. Could you please bring her and your nieces to the great hall?” Black Hawk asked.

“Of course, sir. But why should my nieces be there, if you don’t mind me asking?” Hawk said.

Black Hawk smiled and stood up.

“Have you seen the pictures of Kalee and a birdman on the walls?” he asked.

Hawk nodded.

“Yes, I was wondering who he was at first. But I figured out that it was a picture of Kestrel. He was the brother of Karri’s father, Falcon. So that makes him her real uncle,” Hawk replied.

“That’s right. Kestrel was also going to be Kalee’s mate, but it didn’t work out. When he returned from Throm, he was very bitter to humans for a long time,” Black Hawk explained.

“He came to Throm?”

“Yes, he went to see you and Koori get married, and to visit Falcon and Kala. But he was delayed. He arrived about two weeks after the murder of your people on Throm. He thought the humans killed everyone including you and Koori. When he came back he became very cruel to Kalee, almost blaming her for what happened on Throm,” the elder said lowering his eyes.

“But Falcon and Kala were already gone. They didn’t know about mine and Koori’s wedding. They left a year or so before that. I wonder why Kestrel didn’t know that. Surely they kept in contact with each other. How was Kalee responsible for the murders on Throm? Because she’s human?” Hawk asked. Then, thinking about what they had told him earlier, “I mean, because she’s part human?”

“We don’t know. That’s why we were very happy to hear that you, Hawk, were still alive. Maybe you can talk to Kestrel. Tell him what happened on Throm. That his brother didn’t die there and that he has two nieces.”

“Oh, Saleena is not his niece. I don’t know who Saleena’s family was. I found Karri and Saleena on a planet by the name of Serenity. They were being raised by a couple of humans.”

Hawk looked at the elder, then lowered his head. “I’m sorry sir, I didn’t mean to waste your time telling you about how I found them,” Hawk said.

“No Hawk, please. I’d like you tell the other elders your story tomorrow night on how you came to find the girls. I had better leave now. We will talk more tomorrow night,” the elder said as he stood.

Hawk walked over to him and reached out his hand to shake his. At first the elder looked a little confused, he then smiled and reached his hand out in return.

“It’s been ages since I’ve shook anyone’s hand,” he said.

Hawk smiled.

“Do you remember how to get to the hall?”

“Yes sir. I’ll find it,” Hawk replied.

Black Hawk started to walk towards the door, when it opened and in walked Karri and Saleena.

“I’m sorry, we didn’t know you were still here sir,” Karri said.

“It’s all right Karri. I was just leaving. I’ll see you young ladies tomorrow night,” Black Hawk said as he closed the door behind himself.

Karri and Saleena walked over to Hawk.

“What did he mean that he’ll see us tomorrow night?” Karri asked with a confused look on her face.

“You’ll find out tomorrow night. Kalee and Koora should be here soon. Well, did you girls see any of the village?” Hawk said changing the subject.

“Oh yes uncle. The village is beautiful. The humans are so friendly here. We already made a new friend. Her name is Julie. She lives just on the outside of town,” Karri said with excitement.

“That’s good to hear. Is she human or one of us?”

Karri smiled. “She’s human,” she replied.

Hawk smiled. He walked over to them and embraced both of them. “I think you’ll do just fine here,” he said.

Just as they were about to ask why, there was a knock at the door.

“That must be Kalee and Koora,” Hawk said as he walked over to open the door.

He opened the door, and there stood Kalee and Koora. Kalee was dressed in the traditional clothing of his people. Her long black hair swept over one of her shoulders. All Hawk could do was just stand there looking at her. She was so beautiful. Karri and Saleena walked up behind him and smiled.

“Hello Kalee, hello Koora,” Karri said with a smile.

Hawk finally shook himself out of his trance and smiled.

“Are you ready to see the village?” she asked.

Hawk nodded. Karri, Saleena and Hawk left the house and followed Kalee and Koorra down the street to the main part of town. The town seemed to have just opened up. There were stores all over town, and humans and bird people walking together.

“I’d like to introduce you to someone v ery special,” Kalee said with a smile.

They walked to a small fruit store and walked inside. There behind the counter were an elderly human man and woman. Kalee walked up to them and embraced them. She turned to Hawk and the girls.

“This is Ben and his w ife Lorrene. They are my grandparents,” she said smiling.

Hawk smiled and walked over to them to shake Ben’s hand. Ben walked over to Hawk and stood toe to toe with him and gazed into Hawk’s eyes. He looked into Hawks eyes for a few moments then back away from him.

“Kalee, I like him. He is understanding, truthful and kind.” He then walked over to Karri and Saleena. He then looked into their eyes as well. But this time he got a little surprise in return. Karri looked back into his eyes. Ben backed up, and smiled.

“You have the gift, you are the special one,” he said.

Kalee looked at her grandfather.

“Grandfather, what do you mean she has the gift?” she asked.

“She has the ability to look into the souls of others,” he said putting his arm around Karri and embracing her.

“She will become a great healer,” Ben said.

Chapter 23

Hawk stood there a little confused. “How can a human know of Karri’s abilities? He was human.” Hawk thought to himself.

Ben smiled at Hawk.

“I know what you’re thinking. You’re wondering how I can tell that your niece has the gift, aren’t you?” he asked with a smile.

“Yes, I thought only our people had that ability. How did you know?” Hawk asked.

Ben laughed.

“My dear friend. Your people are not the only ones with ESP. Some of us humans have had the ability for some time now. But living here with the bird people has helped out a great deal,” Ben replied.

Hawk still a little confused.

“What did you mean that she would be a great healer?” Hawk asked.

“Her love of people, and her growing knowledge of medicine. Karri, you’ve had some training in medicine, haven’t you?” Ben asked.

Karri smiled.

“Yes, I did learn a little on the Searcher, from Dr. Goodfellow.”

“I can see her working with the children and young adults here. She also has a very special spot in her heart for animals. I sensed that she had a close friendship with some wolves. She still feels the pain over the loss of one, and the fear that she will never see the rest of them again. The one that was lost gave its life for you, didn’t it?” Ben asked.

“Yes, it was the Alpha male. He gave his life for Saleena and myself,” Karri replied.

“How can you know all this? You only looked into her eyes for a few moments,” Hawk said still confused.

Ben smiled.

“And you my friend, you lost your mate about 2 years ago. Her name was Koori.”

Hawk was getting more upset now more than anything else.

“How did you know my mate’s name? Tell me old man,” Hawk said raising his voice in anger.

Kalee put her hand on Hawk’s shoulder.

“Hawk, he doesn’t mean any harm. He’s a seer. He can look into your heart and soul, just like Karri can. He knew Koori’s name because your love for her, even after she’s gone, is still very strong,” Kalee explained.

Hawk looked into Kalee’s eyes. When he did he found peace. He glanced back over at Ben. “I’m sorry for lashing out at you like that, Ben,” Hawk said.

Ben smiled.

“I understand Hawk, no need to apologize. I should have realized your pain was still there. I’m sorry for upsetting you like that,” Ben said.

Ben turned to Karri.

“You found out that you have another uncle, didn’t you? And you are wondering where he is,” Ben said smiling at Karri.

“Yes, we saw his picture on the wall at Kalee’s house. Is he here?” Karri asked.

“No, little one. But he will show up soon. He will find out that he has a family member here and will rush home,” Ben replied.

Ben walked over to Saleena, and looked into her eyes.

“I’m sorry little one. I don’t know where your parents are. I see in your heart and soul your love for Karri and Hawk. To you, they are your family. I also see that you had a hard life.” Ben stopped, tears started to swell in his eyes. He turned his head away. He then turned to face Saleena again.

“I’m so sorry my dear child. I didn’t look deep enough into your soul. You saw your parents being murdered, didn’t you? You were very young, your parents were killed by a man as they walked into a small town. That man wore a black cloak with the hood pulled up. He picked you up and handed you to a woman that was there with him,” Ben said with tears in his eyes.

Saleena started to cry. Karri and Hawk walked over to her, stood next to her with their arms around her. Hawk gently kissed her on the top of her head and held her close.

Ben was sobbing, as was Kalee.

“I’m so sorry, Saleena. But I do have some good news for you. You will not be alone. I feel someone close has a great love for you.”

“How can that be? The only ones here are Hawk, Karri, and Kalee. I know my uncle and sister love me. And Kalee, is a friend,” Saleena replied.

“I know, Saleena. But there is someone here on Acklon very close to you that you don’t remember. I think when the time is right, that person will reveal themselves to you. But don’t fear. This person is from your family but different, in a wonderful way,” Ben said.

Saleena turned, looked at Hawk then back at Ben.

“Are you telling me that I have a family member here on this planet?” Saleena asked.

Ben nodded.

“Yes, you do. But remember this person will not reveal themselves to you till the time is right. So you must be patient,” Ben replied with a smile.

Saleena smiled and wrapped her arms around Ben’s waist. All Hawk could do was smile. Hawk walked over to Ben and glanced over at Karri and Kalee.

“I’d like to talk to Ben for a moment,” Hawk said as he lightly pulled Ben over to the corner of the store.

“Why are you telling her that? She has no relatives, she’s an orphan. Why do you want to hurt her like that? Get her hopes built up like that, just to have her get hurt again when she finds out there is no family member,” Hawk said.

“Hawk, I’m not trying to hurt Saleena. I would never do that. I know for a fact that there is a family member of hers here on Acklon. But this person doesn’t know of it yet. They will find out soon. Please, trust me,” Ben said.

Hawk looked deep into Ben’s eyes.

“I don’t know why, but I believe you. I only pray to Make -Make that you’re right. Other wise her heart is going to be broken again,” Hawk replied.

Ben smiled.

Hawk turned to gaze at Saleena, who was watching every move Ben made.

Ben looked at Hawk.

“I see you have something on your mind. And it doesn’t have anything to do with Saleena. Is there anything wrong?” he asked with concern.

“No, I was thinking of tomorrow night. A lot of things are going to change, for the better. I hope,” Hawk said glancing over at Kalee.

Ben studied Hawk’s face for a little while longer.

“You know, don’t you?” Ben asked.

Hawk faced Ben and nodded.

“Yes, I know.”

“Do you still feel the same about Kalee? Or has that changed?”

“I still have deep feelings towards Kalee. But I’m not sure how she feels about me,” Hawk replied.

“I feel a lot of caring and respect coming from her. But as for love, no.”

Hawk hung his head.

“I guess I’ve known how she’s felt about me for some time. Maybe I was just hoping for too much, too soon,” Hawk said putting his hand on Ben’s shoulder.

Hawk walked back over to Kalee, Saleena and Karri.

“Well, you told us that you’d show us the town. Shall we go?” Hawk asked.

Chapter 24

Kalee, Saleena, Karri and Hawk turned to leave the little store. Just as they were about to exit, the door opened and in walked a little old lady carrying an empty bag.

“Kalee, is that you? Oh my dear, I feared something terrible had happened to you. Are you all right?” she asked while embracing Kalee.

“Yes Judy, I’m fine,” Kalee replied embracing her back.

The older lady looked at Koora and smiled, then turned her gaze onto Hawk and the girls.

“Who are your friends?” she asked.

“This is Hawk and his nieces, Karri and Saleena,” Kalee replied.

“It’s very nice to meet you,” Judy said smiling at Hawk and the girls.

“It is nice meeting you also Judy,” Hawk replied.

She turned to look at Kalee again.

“You will stop by to see Dennis, won’t you?” she asked.

“We were just getting ready to leave to go over there. Is he busy?” Kalee asked.

“A little. He was just telling me last night on how he wishes he had an assistant. But everyone around here is too busy or doesn’t have any knowledge of medicine. He’s getting too old to handle everything alone. I keep telling him he should retire, but you know Dennis. He said he can’t and won’t retire from this town until someone can take over for him. I swear that man is getting more and more stubborn everyday,” Judy said jokingly.

Kalee giggled.

“I do know someone that has had some medical training. I’ll talk to them later about it to see if they’re interested in going into that line of work,” Kalee said.

“That would be wonderful, even if they don’t have that much knowledge of medicine. Dennis can train them. I’ll tell him about it later this evening,” Judy replied.

Hawk glanced over at Ben who was standing behind the counter, smiling.

“I can’t promise they’ll say yes or be interested. But I’ll let them know,” Kalee said.

“Oh honey, that’s all I ask. If they are interested, please send them over to the clinic as soon as possible,” Judy said.

Judy looked over at Hawk and the girls once again.

“I hope you enjoy Acklon,” she said as she turned her attention back to Kalee.

“You better go say hello to Dennis. He would feel awfully hurt if you didn’t,” Judy said.

“We’ll go over there right now. I remember how worried he got when I left to go adopt Koora. I was only gone for a day or so. I can only imagine what he’s thinking right now.”

Kalee turned to Hawk.

“It won’t take long, Hawk. He was very close to my adopted father. Then I can show you, Karri and Saleena more of Acklon,” Kalee said.

“Family is very important. We’ll spend as much time as you want with him,” Hawk replied.

Kalee smiled. “Thank you.”

Kalee embraced Judy. “I’ll talk to you soon,” she said.

“All right dear,” Judy said with a smile.

They left the little store and walked down the cobblestone street. Along the way Kalee pointed out the different stores. She informed them that some sold clothing, and some sold different kinds of food. She told them that all the stores sold items for both humans and bird people together.

“They wouldn’t have it any other way. I guess you can say, we’re one very large family here. Bird people and humans,” she said with a smile.

As they approached a corner, they all stopped. Floating around in the light breeze was an aroma. It caught everyone’s attention, including Hawk’s.

“Mmmm, that smells good. It smells like fresh seed bread right out of the oven,” Saleena said still sniffing the air.

They turned their heads as if to follow the heavenly aroma.

“Where is it coming from?” Karri asked.

Kalee smiled.

“We’re right across the street from the bakery. They only bake seed bread when you order it. So when you get it, it’s nice and hot. What’s nice is that they still use the old way of baking bread, in a brick oven,” Kalee said.

Karri and Saleena looked at Hawk with pleading eyes.

Hawk smiled.

“We’ll pick some up on the way back. If that’s all right with Kalee?” Hawk said glancing over at Kalee.

“Of course we’ll stop and get some. I would love to have some for dinner tonight to,” Kalee said smiling.

“Are we almost at the clinic?” Saleena asked.

“Yes, it’s right around the corner and three doors down on the right,” Kalee replied.

They turned the corner and walked a few more steps and soon found themselves outside the clinic doors.

“Why don’t we wait for you out here? That way you can have some privacy,” Hawk suggested.

“No, I’d like you and the girls to meet him. Besides, who knows how long he’s going to embrace me. The last time I saw him was the day before I left to go adopt another child on Septor 205. That was what, about seven days ago. No, Hawk, he’ll be asking me all kinds of questions that I don’t have the answers to. Well, some of them I’ll be able to, but not all. I was kind of out of it for a few days, remember...Please?” Kalee begged.

Hawk smiled and nodded.

Kalee smiled back.

“Okay, here we go.”

She opened the door and walked in, they walked in behind her. Inside was a nicely arranged office. Behind the front table was a little woman, her hair was dark brown with a little grey. She looked up and smiled.

“Kalee, you’re home!” the woman said in an excited voice.

She hurried out from behind her desk and embraced Kalee then Koora.

“He’s been so worried about you. Stay here, I’ll let him know you’re here.”

She swiftly walked over to the closed door that lead to all the exam rooms, leaving it open a little. She knocked on one of the many closed exam room doors.

“I’m sorry to bother you doctor...but Kalee is here,” she said.

“Kalee’s here?” he repeated. He turned to the patient, “I’m sorry, I’ll be right back,” he informed the patient. Within seconds he was out in the office.

“Kalee! My girl, where have you been? I’ve been so worried. Are you all right? What happened?” he asked, not giving Kalee time to answer.

All Kalee could do was stand there and smile. The doctor backed away from her after almost squeezing the life out of her.

“I’m fine,” she said, finally being able to answer.

“What happened?” he asked.

“It’s a long story. I know you’re busy, so we won’t stay. I’d like it if you and Judy came over for dinner tonight, then I can tell you everything.” Kalee said.

“Is six o’clock all right with you?” she asked.

“Six o’clock is fine,” he replied as he looked over at Hawk and the girls.

“I know you from somewhere,” he said staring at Hawk. “But I can’t remember from where.”

“I’m sorry, this is Hawk, and these are his nieces Karri and Saleena,” Kalee said.

Dennis’s eyes started to swell with tears.

“Hawk?” he said softly.

Chapter 25

Hawk walked over to the elderly gentleman and looked into his eyes. They stood there gazing at one another for a while then Hawk started to smile.

“Is it you?” Hawk asked.

The elderly gentleman smiled back and nodded.

“Yes,” he answered softly.

“Oh Hawk, it was terrible. Those men came into our village, and they didn’t even hesitate. They just started firing their weapons at our people. Myself and a few others made it out with some of the children. I stayed as close as possible to the village, hoping to see you and Koori when you returned from the soaring place. But with those men staying close by also, I didn’t dare show myself. I heard them talking, saying they had to make sure everyone of us were dead. Then when it was all clear, you and Koori were gone. I thought they had gotten you to. Oh Hawk, I’m so sorry, I should have stayed and fought with the rest of them,” Dennis said hanging his head sobbing.

Hawk embraced him.

“No dear friend, you did the right thing by getting the children out of there. How many did you get out? Do you know where they are?” Hawk asked holding Dennis gently by his shoulders.

“They were put on a planet a long way from here. I don’t remember the name of it. I do know that they had other bird people there also. They said from there they should be able to find new homes,” he replied.

Kalee hung her head.

“Oh Hawk, he’s talking about the planet where you found Koori and myself.” She walked over the old man and gently put her arms around him and embraced him for a long time sobbing.

“Why are you crying child? What’s wrong?” he asked placing his fingers under Kalee’s chin and gently lifting her head up.

“Tell me,” he said softly.

“Something terrible happened on that planet, Dennis,” Hawk replied. “Perhaps it would be better if we talked about it later, at home.”

“Yes, that would be better.” The doctor looked at the receptionist.

“Cancel the rest of my appointments for the day. Ask them if they can reschedule on a later date.”

“Uncle, those people are sick or hurt, he can’t send them away,” Karri said.

Karri approached the doctor.

“Please sir, my sister and myself have had some medical training. Please, you can’t turn those people away. Can we help you somehow?” Karri asked with pleading eyes.

Dennis looked at Karri and Saleena, then at Hawk.

“Is it true, do they have some medical training?”

Hawk nodded.

“You know.. they’re right. You can’t turn these people away,” Hawk said looking into Dennis’s eyes.

Dennis then looked at Kalee. She to nodded in approval.

“All right, wait here a moment while I get my nurse.” He swiftly walked into the back and returned a moment later with his nurse.

“Show these two young ladies where to get their gloves and I’ll be there in a moment,” he said.

The nurse smiled and nodded her head in acknowledgement.

“Come with me please,” she said in a soft friendly voice.

Karri and Saleena followed her into the back.

“With their help, we should be done with all the patients within a couple of hours. You three go ahead, I’ll bring them home after we’re done here,” Dennis said.

“All right, we’ll see you soon,” Kalee said with a trace of tears still in her eyes.

Kalee, Hawk and Koora left and headed for the bakery across the street from the clinic. As they entered the store a delicious aroma overwhelmed them. They noticed that no one was at the counter. So they looked around till someone came out from the back.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I didn’t hear you come in, may I help you?”

Hawk turned around and saw a very small elderly man.

“Yes, we’d like some seed bread. Do you have any ready?” Kalee asked.

“Let me check. I’m pretty sure we have some ready in the back. It’s only about twenty minutes old. Would that be all right?” he asked.

“That would be fine,” Kalee replied.

The elderly man walked to the back of the store. Hawk walked around the store looking at all the baked goods.

“How can a human know so much about baking bread made for bird people? He has all kinds of seed bread here. Plus human bread as well,” Hawk said glancing over at Kalee.

“He’s lived here ever since I can remember. Dennis and Judy told me that he was one of the humans that helped create this planet, making it for both bird people and humans. But he requested that no one be allowed here that didn’t like or care for the other kind. I guess that way, we all knew we could trust our neighbors. And he was right: since I’ve been on this planet not one person was harmed by anyone here,” Kalee said.

Hawk looked at Kalee.

“No one has ever been hurt? Or killed by anyone here?” Hawk asked.

“No one,” Kalee answered.

Just then the little man returned from the back carrying three loaves of seed bread.

“How many would you like?” he asked.

Kalee turned, looked at Hawk.

“Maybe we better get all three. I don’t know how much seed bread Karri and Saleena will eat, but I know Koora, Dennis and Judy love it.” Kalee hesitated for a moment then smiled. “I love it also,” she said blushing.

“I think it would be best to get all three,” Hawk replied smiling back.

“All right, we’ll take all three,” Kalee informed the baker.

The elderly man nodded and proceeded to wrap the breads up in a brown bag.

“That will be \$1.50,” he said handing the wrapped bread to Kalee.

Kalee reached into her bag and paid the elderly man.

“Thank you,” she said taking the bread.

The man smiled. “Come back again.”

Kalee and Hawk nodded and left the store.

They slowly walked towards the house. Kalee was pointing out more stores and introduced Hawk to people that came up to her to welcome her back home.

“Hawk, may I ask you something?”

“Of course, what is it?”

“You still love Koori, don’t you?” Kalee asked.

Hawk stopped, and turned to gaze into Kalee’s eyes.

“Koori was my mate, my friend, and my soul mate. Yes, I still do love her,” Hawk replied.

Kalee hung her head for a moment then returned her gaze onto Hawk.

“She was one very lucky woman,” Kalee said with a smile.

Chapter 26

Hawk and Kalee left the bakery and were heading for the house when off in a distance Kalee saw someone she knew very well. She waved as they got closer. It was another birdman, but who, Hawk didn't know. Maybe an old flame, maybe just a friend. As they got closer, Hawk could see that he was an adult male. Kalee started to smile. The male started to smile back. He walked up to Kalee and embraced her.

"I just heard you were back. How are you?" he asked smiling and holding Kalee's hands.

"I'm fine. How about you? Where have you been?" she asked in return.

"I had to go on a run for the elders. Something about some slavers on our sister planet," he said.

He looked over at Hawk and smiled.

"Hello," he said.

"Oh, I'm sorry. This is Hawk... Hawk, this is...."

"Kestrel," Hawk said the man's name before Kalee could finish.

Kestrel looked at Hawk for a moment.

"Do I know you?" he asked.

"Throm," is the only word Hawk spoke.

"You're from Throm? How did you survive? I was told that all our people there were murdered," Kestrel said.

"All there were murdered, except a few that escaped, and my mate and myself," Hawk replied.

"But how do you know my name? Did you know my family?"

"Yes, I knew your family very well," Hawk replied.

Kestrel gazed at Hawk for the longest time, trying to figure out who he was.

"I'm sorry, I don't mean to stare. But you do look a little familiar. Did Kalee say your name was Hawk?"

Hawk nodded.

Kestrel walked up a little closer to Hawk.

"Do you know Koori?" he asked.

Again Hawk nodded.

“She was my mate. And you Kestrel, are my brother in law,” Hawk said.

Kestrel backed up. Looked at Hawk with a confused look on his face.

“I was told that Koori and you were killed along with the rest of our people,” he said with tears forming in his eyes.

“No, Koori and I had gone to the soaring place to seal our bond after we were married. While we were gone, the humans attacked our village. When we returned, we found all our people murdered.” Hawk moved a little closer to Kestrel. “Kestrel, there’s some thing you should know. You have a niece. Her name is Karri. She’s the daughter of your brother Falcon and his mate Kala, Koori’s sister,” Hawk said.

“I have a niece?” he asked.

“Yes,” Hawk answered.

“Where is she? Is she here with you?”

“Yes. She’s at the clinic helping the doctor for a while. She and Saleena should be home shortly,” Hawk replied.

“Saleena? Who is she?” Kestrel asked.

“She’s an orphan I found on Serenity. She and Karri have become like sisters,” Hawk said.

“Why don’t you come over to night for dinner? Dennis and Judy will be there as well as Hawk and the girls. You’ll be able to meet them then,” Kalee said.

Kestrel smiled.

“I’d like that. But only if it’s all right with Hawk?” he asked looking towards Hawk.

“Of course it’s all right . I want Karri to meet her uncle. We’ll be at the house about six tonight. Do you have a mate?” Hawk asked.

“No, I found only one woman for me and I messed it up. I know there is no way she would forgive me for what I’ve done,” Kestrel replied gazing over at Kalee.

“I wouldn’t say that,” Hawk said with a smile on his face.

“Hawk, I know it’s probably too painful for you to talk about, but I’d really like to know what happened on Throm,” Kestrel said hanging his head.

“I’ll tell you the whole story at dinner tonight. Yes, it is painful, but you have the right to know. I also found that the more I talk about it, the more I feel at ease,” Hawk replied.

Kestrel smiled.

“All right, I’ll see you over at Kalee’s house. Oh, at which house is the dinner going to be?” he asked.

“It’ll be at my parent’s house,” Kalee replied with a smile.

“I’ll be there at six pm sharp. Are you going to tell Karri that I’m coming?” Kestrel asked.

“No, I think we’ll surprise her,” Hawk replied.

Kestrel smiled at Kalee.

“I’m really glad you’re back, Kalee. And Hawk, I’m really happy to see you. I better let you two go. I’ll talk to you later,” he said.

“We’ll see you tonight,” Kalee said as she and Hawk turned to walk away.

Kalee smiled at Hawk as they walked towards the house.

“Are you sure that Kestrel is Karri’s uncle?”

“Yes, Kestrel is Karri’s father’s brother. And Kala is Koori’s sister,” Hawk replied.

“I hope Karri will be excited to meet her other uncle. Are you sure it’s a good idea to spring it on her like that?” Kalee asked with concern.

“Yes, she already knows that she has another uncle. She saw the picture of him at the house,” Hawk replied.

Kalee nodded.

They turned down the cobblestone street going to the house. As they were about to enter the house, Kalee said “I better start fixing dinner. They should be about done at the clinic.”

Hawk followed her in.

“Can I help?” he asked.

She smiled. “Yes, that would be great. You do know how to cook, don’t you?” she asked jokingly.

Hawk smiled.

“It’s been a while, but I’m willing to try, if you can guide me,” Hawk said.

Kalee smiled again. “I think I can do that,” she replied.

They went into the kitchen and started to prepare the meal. Kalee stood just behind Hawk. She was reaching around his waist, with her hands on his showing him how she needed the meat cut for the meal she was going to prepare. Hawk could feel his heart beating faster and

harder. He thought his heart was going to jump out of his chest. He noticed that when she was leaning against him, he could feel her heart beat as well. It too was racing. He smiled.

“Maybe there is something there,” he thought to himself.

“Now, do you think you can do the rest?” she asked.

Without thinking of where she was standing, Hawk turned around and was standing face to face with Kalee.

Chapter 27

They stood there looking deep into each other's eyes. Hawk then thought of what Ben had said to him in the store. "There's caring and respect, but no love. Maybe he was right, maybe there is no love," Hawk thought to himself. Seeing that Hawk was getting a little uncomfortable, Kalee smiled then backed away.

They proceeded to fix dinner.

At the clinic, Karri and Saleena were assisting the doctor in every possible way. When they trained on the Searcher with Dr. Goodfellow, it was on humans only. Now they got to learn about their own kind as well as humans. They were a little nervous at first, but with the help, encouragement, understanding and patience from the nurse and doctor they soon relaxed. Soon after that the doctor would give them their own patient. Nothing really serious, the nurse would oversee the treatment of the patient. She was amazed on how much they knew. The nurse would report back to the doctor on the treatment Karri and Saleena suggested. To the nurse's delight, every suggestion was correct. The nurse also noticed how more relaxed the children were when Karri or Saleena treated them. The doctor would care for the more serious patients. As they were getting closer to being done for the day, another patient came in. This one was a little serious, so the doctor tended to it himself.

"That should do it. If it gets worse or opens up again, I want you to come back in. If we're closed don't wait till tomorrow, call my home," the doctor informed the man.

"All right, thank you doctor," the man replied, and then walked out the door.

"That should be it for the rest of the day. Thank you for your help. You two did an excellent job. The nurse told me you only asked for help once or twice. That's better than a person with full knowledge of medical training. Your uncle should be very proud of you. Are you ready to go home? To tell you the truth, I'm kind of hungry. I didn't eat lunch today," the doctor said with a smile.

No more than a moment later, his stomach started to grumble. They all started to laugh.

"I think we better go home so you can eat," Karri said giggling.

"I think you're right, Karri. But we have to stop off at my house first to pick up Judy," Dennis replied.

The nurse came out from in the back room.

"Will that be all today, doctor?" she asked.

"Yes, thank you Alma. I'll see you in the morning," he replied.

"Good night doctor, good night girls. Thank you for all your help. Will you be here tomorrow?" she asked.

Karri and Saleena glanced at each other for a moment.

“We don’t know. If it’s all right with our uncle and the doctor we will,” Karri replied.

The nurse nodded.

“Well, I hope they let you come back,” she said as she walked out the door.

“I hope uncle lets us come back. I really liked working here,” Karri said.

“So did I. It felt good to help people,” Saleena replied.

“Would you really like to come back tomorrow?” Dennis asked.

“Oh yes, we’d love to,” Karri and Saleena said together.

“Well, I can’t promise you anything, but if you’d like I’ll talk to your uncle tonight during dinner,” he said.

“Would you?” they squealed with delight.

Dennis laughed.

“You girls ready to go?”

Saleena and Karri nodded in approval.

On the way to his home to pick up Judy, Dennis told the girls a little about Throm: what it looked like, and how beautiful it was.

“Do you think you’ll ever go back?” Karri asked.

“Maybe. One day when Acklon no longer needs me, I’d like to go back home,” he replied.

They walked up the walkway to Dennis and Judy’s home. Dennis opened the door and walked in. Karri and Saleena stopped at the doorway, and did not enter.

Dennis turned around to say something to Karri and Saleena, but they were not there. He quickly walked back to the front door. There, standing at the doorway, were Karri and Saleena.

“I am so sorry. I forgot you girls were raised not to enter someone else’s home until you were invited in. Please, come in,” Dennis said.

Karri and Saleena smiled.

“It’s all right. They probably don’t do that here,” Karri said.

“As far as I know, a lot of the bird people still uphold that tradition. It was the way they were raised,” Dennis said.

Judy came out into the living room drying her hands on a towel.

“How was your day dear?” she asked as she gave him a small kiss on his cheek, not seeing Karri and Saleena standing around the corner.

“Honey, this is Karri and Saleena, Hawk’s nieces.”

“Hello again,” Judy said with a smile. “I met Karri and Saleena earlier today. They were with Kalee, Koorra and their uncle.”

“I’d probably still be there if it wasn’t for Karri and Saleena helping me today,” Dennis replied.

Judy looked at the girls and smiled. “You have some medical training?” she asked.

“Yes. Dr. Goodfellow taught us some medical training while we were on the Searcher,” Karri replied.

“They’re pretty good at it too. I think they only asked once or twice for help. I think they would make great doctors,” Dennis said smiling.

“That’s wonderful. I’m so glad you finally have some help. Are they going to work full time or just a few days a week?” Judy asked with excitement in her voice.

“We don’t know yet. I want to talk to their uncle about giving them full medical training here on Acklon. But we had better get going. I told Kalee we would be there as soon as we got off work at the clinic. We’ll be having dinner over there. When dinner is over I’d like to talk to Hawk about the girls,” Dennis said.

Chapter 28

Dennis, Judy, Karri and Saleena left the house and started to walk the few short blocks to Kalee's house where Kalee and Hawk were preparing dinner. It was getting close to 6 pm when Kalee started to set the table. She was about half way done when there was a knock at the door. Hawk, who was watching every move Kalee made, started to walk towards the door.

"I'll get it," he said smiling.

He opened the door, and there stood Kestrel.

"Hello Hawk," Kestrel said.

"Hello Kestrel, please come in," Hawk replied.

The two shook hands and walked into the dining room where Kalee had just finished setting the table.

"Hello Kestrel," Kalee said with a smile.

"You look nice tonight," Kestrel said chuckling. "Looks like you had a fight with the flour, and the flour won," he said laughing.

Kalee smiled.

"Dennis, Judy and the girls should be here in a few minutes. Why don't you two sit down in the living room and talk, while I go get cleaned up a bit," she said trying to wipe some flour from her face.

Kalee quickly walked into the bedroom and closed the door.

Hawk and Kestrel walked into the living room and seated themselves across from each other.

"How do you want to tell Karri that I'm her uncle?" Kestrel asked.

"Karri already has an idea that you are her uncle. She has seen the picture of you and Kalee at the other house. How long ago was that picture taken?" Hawk asked.

Kestrel thought for a few moments.

"I'm pretty sure it was taken about 6 or 7 years ago. I know it was taken before Kalee adopted Koora." Kestrel stopped and started to look around. "Speaking of Koora, where is she?" he asked.

"She's staying over at Aslan's house for the night," Hawk replied.

"Aslana? I haven't seen her for some time now. How do you know her?" Kestrel asked.

"I met her and her daughter Ashla earlier," Hawk replied.

“Hawk, I really would like to know what happened on Throm?” Kestrel said.

“Didn’t Dennis tell you? He was there when it happened,” Hawk said.

“I know, but from what I understood, he ran away when those humans attacked our people,” Kestrel said with hatred in his voice.

Hawk studied Kestrel for a moment. He could see that he still had hatred for humans.

“Kestrel, Dennis told me why he left. He wasn’t running away, he was running to protect as many of the children as he could. Just before the humans attacked our village, the elders knew something was going to happen. They asked Dennis to take the children away from there as fast as possible and hide them. So just before the attack started he grabbed as many as he could, along with a few women and a few older men and took them to his house on the outer side of the village. The murdering humans didn’t get to his house till almost last, almost giving him time to get the children and other adults to the trees. But the older men couldn’t run as fast. Dennis kept running back to help them, but they kept telling him to run, take the children to safety. The older men and women used their own bodies to shield the shots from hitting the children. Many were lost that day, the few adults that tried to leave with Dennis to the entire village. Many stayed to fight; all died, men, women, children..”

Kestrel closed his eyes and hung his head. “I didn’t know. All I heard was that he ran and left our people to die.”

Just then Kalee came out of the bedroom.

“So what did you two talk about?” she said with a smile, not knowing that Hawk told Kestrel the true story about Throm and Dennis.

“I think I owe Dennis a very big apology. And I’ll do that as soon as I see him,” Kestrel said.

“Well, you’ll have your chance in a few minutes. They should be here shortly,” Hawk said.

Kalee looked at Hawk then at Kestrel. “Is everything okay?” she asked.

“Yes, everything is going to be fine, I hope,” Kestrel said glancing over at Hawk.

The front door opened and in walked Dennis, Judy, Karri and Saleena. Kestrel stood up and walked over to Dennis.

“Dennis, I owe you a very big apology. I’m sorry I accused you of running away while our people were being murdered. Hawk set me straight on what really happened. Please, accept my deepest apology,” Kestrel said reaching his hand out to Dennis.

Dennis looked at Kestrel for a moment then turned his eyes on Hawk.

Hawk nodded as if to say, “it’s all right now.” Dennis smiled then turned his attention back to Kestrel. Dennis reached his hand out to Kestrel’s hand and shook it.

“I’m really am very sorry Dennis. I think my anger was turned towards all humans at that time,” Kestrel said as he turned to look at Kalee.

“Even towards those who meant a lot to me.”

“It’s all right. I understand, I would have been the same way if I was in your shoes. But I do want you to know one thing. I would have gladly given my life for all those bird people and their children,” Dennis said.

“I know you would have, my friend,” Kestrel said with a smile.

Karri and Saleena walked over to Hawk.

“Uncle? Is this my other uncle?” Karri asked.

Hawk smiled.

“Karri, this is your father’s brother, Kestrel. Kestrel, this is your niece, Karri.”

Kestrel looked at Karri and smiled.

“Hello Karri,” Kestrel said with a big smile on his face.

Karri looked up at Hawk. Hawk nodded. “Go on,” he said so ftly.

Chapter 29

Karri slowly walked over to Kestrel. She stood there for the longest time looking at him. She turned to Hawk, smiled then turned her gaze back onto Kestrel. She then stepped a little closer. Not sure what to do next Kestrel reached his hand out to her. Karri smiled, then reached out to Kestrel in the same manner. Their finger tips met, then their hands. They gently closed their finger tips around each other's hand. Kestrel smiled, as did Karri. Still not sure how to react towards each other, Karri glanced over to Hawk for reassurance.

"Go on," Hawk repeated softly.

She inched her way towards him. Saleena moved closer to Hawk, with tears swelling in her eyes.

"Karri, you look just like your mother," Kestrel said.

"Really?" she replied.

"Oh yes," Kestrel said.

"Did you know my mother very well?" she asked.

"Yes, she was a very smart and wise woman. She knew a lot about medicine. She used to work at the clinic on Throm. It seemed to come natural to her. Your father's biggest love was for animals. He would be in town or working in the fields and find a wounded animal or an orphaned one, and bring it home. Your mother used to have to chase all of them out of the house when she came home from the clinic. But she never could fool him, she loved animals just as much as he did."

"When was the last time you saw or talked to my parents?" she asked.

"It was a long time ago. They were still on Throm when I left," Kestrel replied.

Karri hung her head. "I don't remember what they look like," she said with tears starting to swell in her eyes.

Kestrel smiled. "Come with me, I'll show you what your mother looked like," he said.

He gently pulled her over to the large mirror in the hall. "What do you see?" he asked.

Karri gazed into the mirror. "I see my own reflection."

Kestrel walked up behind her.

"I see your mother," he said with a smile.

Karri looked at Kestrel's reflection in the mirror.

"Really?" she asked.

“Yes, you look just like your mother,” Kestrel replied.

Kalee walked up to Hawk.

“I think you did a wonderful thing, Hawk, reuniting her with her other uncle,” she said softly smiling.

Hawk nodded.

“So am I. Now if I could just find one of Saleena’s relatives. That way when I leave to return to the Searcher, I won’t have to worry about her,” he said with his arms still holding Saleena.

Kestrel overheard what Hawk had said about Saleena.

“I won’t allow a stranger to take care of my other niece. Come here Saleena,” Kestrel said holding out his hand.

Saleena smiled and walked over to Kestrel with no hesitation. She took his hand.

“You are Karri’s sister, so that makes you my niece as well,” Kestrel announced.

Karri smiled.

“I have a complete family now,” she said with her arm around Saleena’s shoulder.

Dennis and Judy smiled, as did Kalee and Hawk.

“Is anyone hungry?” Kalee asked.

“I sure am,” Dennis replied. “My stomach made all sorts of noises on the way over here,” he said chuckling.

“It sure did. You should have heard it in the clinic,” Karri replied laughing.

Everyone started to laugh.

“Why don’t we go in and eat, dinner is ready. Then Hawk and Kestrel could get caught up on each other,” Kalee said.

The men walked into the dining room and seated themselves. Karri, Saleena and Judy went into the kitchen to help Kalee carry out dinner.

“It looks and smells delicious Kalee,” Kestrel said. “In fact, it smells like the first meal you ever prepared for me,” Kestrel said with a smile on his face.

Kalee smiled. That’s when Hawk realized, that she did not have feelings for him the way that he had hoped. That her true mate was Kestrel.

Hawk smiled.

“So Kestrel, when did you first come to Acklon?” Hawk asked as they started to eat.

“I came here about seven, maybe eight years ago. I found this great planet by accident really,” Kestrel replied.

“Hawk? What happened to Koori?” Kestrel asked. Even though he knew the answer, he had to know for sure.

“The day the humans attacked and murdered our people, I swore to Make -Make that I would kill every human that crossed my path. I guess it was about a week or so after that, that this human was ordered to take me before the Galactic Council. He found the cave up in the mountains and he also found Koori. He grabbed Koori in an attempt to draw me out. As the battle continued, the talons of my ship grabbed his fighter and in the process grabbed Koori as well. I could not retract them so we had to make an emergency landing. By the time I got out of the War Hawk, this human already had Koori by a stream not far from where we landed. I was wanting to kill this human that did this to my mate. But he said that we needed to get Koori to help first, otherwise she’d die. He did what he could do for her; he stopped the bleeding. He said we should make a pact, to get Koori help first, then he and I would fight. I hated this human so much that I didn’t want to believe that he wanted to help Koori.”

Tears started to swell in Hawk’s eyes.

“She told me of the wise one on the mountain. From there we made our way to the mountain. The human was still carrying Koori when some men gathered around us, wanting to fight with this human for some reason. He handed me Koori and told me to take Koori and go. I took her in my arms and started to walk away when for some reason I stopped. I looked back, and for some reason I still can’t figure out to this day, I put Koori down and went back to help the human. As we were about ready to fight these other humans, a bright green light surrounded those other humans, they seemed to have frozen in place. The human and I left, and when we were clear the humans went back to normal. He and I took Koori up to the wise man. Shortly after that ... Koori died in my arms,” Hawk said with tears running down his cheek.

“What happened after that?” Kestrel asked.

“The human and I started to do battle. When I awoke, I was on his ship.”

Karri and Saleena looked at Hawk.

“Was that uncle Buck?” Karri asked.

“Yes,” Hawk replied.

“Who is this uncle Buck? Is he one of us?” Kestrel asked.

Karri, Saleena, Kalee and Hawk smiled.

“No, he is human. He is the one in the story,” Hawk said.

“He’s the one that killed your mate, and you allow your nieces to call him uncle?” Kestrel said with anger in his voice.

“My uncle did not kill my aunt, Koori. Tell him uncle!” Karri said emotionally.

“That’s true. It was just as much my fault as it was his,” Hawk said.

“Where is this human now? Why didn’t he come with you?” Kestrel said with anger still in his voice.

“It’s my leave. I wanted to find a good home for Karri and Saleena here on Acklon,” Hawk said.

As the conversation continued, Karri changed the subject.

“Why don’t you tell uncle Kestrel how you found Saleena and me?” Karri said.

“I think it’s someone else’s turn to tell their story, Karri,” Hawk said looking over at Kalee.

“No, I’d like to hear how you found Karri and Saleena,” Kalee said.

Chapter 30

“Yes, please Hawk. Tell us the story behind Karri and Saleena,” Judy said with delight.

“All right,” Hawk replied.

Hawk started to tell the story of how he and Buck found Karri and Saleena. When it got to the part of Marc and Lola’s murder, Karri and Saleena’s eyes started to swell with tears. Hawk got up from the table, walked over to them and sat down putting his arms around them to comfort them.

“That’s when we found out who hired the killers of our people on Throm. He had Karri and Saleena’s real parents killed. He was the man that kidnapped Karri. He was also the one that had our people on Throm murdered,” Hawk said.

You could see the anger and hatred in Kestrel’s eyes as Hawk continued with the story. Before Hawk got to the end of the story Kalee asked him a question.

“What happened to that terrible man?” she asked.

Kestrel’s rage was getting stronger and stronger.

“Mr. Finney, the man that killed all of our people on Throm. The same man that killed Karri and Saleena’s real parents. The man that brutally murdered Karri and Saleena’s adoptive parents Marc and Lola. And the man that killed his own sister ... is dead,” Hawk said.

“Did you kill him?” Kalee asked.

“No. He fell off a cliff after I rescued Karri from him,” Hawk replied.

“What is the name of this planet you found Karri and Saleena on?” Kestrel asked.

“Serenity,” Hawk replied. “Why?”

“Serenity is our sister planet. We never heard about this man. What was his name a gain?”

“Finney... Mr. Finney. He was the magistrate on the planet,” Hawk answered.

“Finney? How long ago was this?” Kestrel asked.

“Almost a year ago,” Hawk replied.

“I think I remember a man by that name. But the last time I was there, the magistrate’s name was Miller, not Finney,” Kestrel said with a confused look on his face.

“How long ago was that?” Hawk asked.

“Oh, it’s been about five years now. But Miller was a young man, in his early to mid thirties. I wonder what happened to him?” Kestrel asked with concern.

“I don’t know. There was no one there by that name,” Hawk replied.

“You said this man Finney murdered his own sister?” Kestrel asked.

“Yes uncle, I was there. He murdered her right in his office. The housekeeper, Marie told me about it. That’s when I asked her for help,” Karri said.

Kestrel couldn’t believe what he was hearing. His own niece witnessed this cruel and senseless murder of a woman for no reason.

“What did this sister of his do, to cause him to kill her?” he asked.

“She loved a young girl, who she protected from him for several years by disguising her as a human,” Hawk replied looking over at Karri. “The same way Marc and Lola did. A very caring couple loved and protected their child... Karri from the cruelty of humans that they thought would not understand. But it turned out there were many of our people on that planet at one time. The humans there loved and cared deeply for them. Until one human had them all murdered,” Hawk said.

Kalee, her eyes wet from tears, got up from the table and quickly walked over to Karri and Saleena and embraced them.

“Oh my dears. I’m so sorry,” Kalee said while she wept.

Hawk closed his eyes thinking of Marc and Lola. How they gave their lives to protect them, only to have their lives taken away by that monster. Hawk looked at Karri and Saleena, stood up, turned and walked out the front door.

“What’s wrong with Hawk?” Judy asked.

“He cared for Marc and Lola very much. He made a promise to Lola to take care of us, just before she died,” Saleena said with tears still in her eyes.

Karri got up and walked out after Hawk.

“Uncle? Are you all right?” she asked.

Hawk nodded. “Karri, have you ever had a Dreamscape?” he asked.

“No, I don’t think so. Why, what is a Dreamscape?”

“A Dreamscape is a deep dream, where you get to see and say goodbye to your family that’s been taken away. And you never got to say goodbye too,” Hawk explained.

“I never got to say goodbye to Marc and Lola,” she cried.

“Neither did I,” a voice from behind said.

Hawk turned to see Saleena standing there. Hawk walked over and embraced Karri and Saleena together.

“I know,” Hawk said softly.

“It was almost a year before I had my Dreamscape. I was able to see my mate, Koori, my family and friends. I even talked to my grandparents,” Hawk said with sadness in his voice.

“What was it like?” Karri asked.

“It was beautiful. I was up on the ridge just to the west of our village, looking down at a small stream that flowed past it. The sky was a bright blue, with just a few clouds. The breeze was light and warm. The sun cast its light on everything that day. I was able to say goodbye to everyone. I felt like I was in the dream for one day, but I was in it for about seven days,” Hawk said with a smile.

“Will I have a Dreamscape, uncle?” Karri asked.

“I really can’t say. You might,” Hawk replied.

They stood there in silence for a while when the front door opened.

“Is everything all right?” Kalee asked.

Hawk turned and smiled. “Yes, everything is going to be just fine, in time,” he replied.

“I was getting worried. You’ve been out here so long that I thought maybe you decided to return to the Searcher,” Kalee said.

“No, we were just talking about Dreamscapes.”

Kalee nodded.

“Hawk, Dennis wants to talk to you about the girls,” Kalee said.

“I wonder what about?” Hawk said with a smile on his face.

“Uncle, we would really like to keep working at the clinic. We really enjoyed it,” Karri said.

“I thought that was it,” Hawk said smiling.

“All right. Kalee, could you tell Dennis that I’ll be back in there in a moment?” Hawk replied.

“Of course,” she replied.

Kalee went back into the house. Then Hawk turned to the girls.

“Okay, tell me about it,” he said gazing at Karri and Saleena.

“Oh uncle, it was amazing. We got to help all the people. Not just humans, but bird people as well. Uncle, we really liked it,” Karri said with excitement in her voice.

“Saleena, what did you think of it?” Hawk asked.

“I thought it was wonderful uncle. We were actually helping people,” Saleena replied with a smile.

Hawk smiled and nodded. “I think I better go in and talk to Dennis.”

Hawk went back into the house and sat down next to Dennis and Judy.

“Do you want them to work in the clinic?” Hawk asked.

Dennis smiled. “They told you huh?”

“Yes, they said they really liked it,” Hawk replied.

“They did an excellent job today. The patients liked them, as did my nurse. Karri and Saleena have a great amount of medical knowledge. Doctor Goodfellow did a great job teaching them. I might be able to help them finish their medical training in a school just down the street. That is, if they want to go into medicine,” Dennis said knowing the girls were listening outside the door.

The door burst open.

“Oh yes. Uncle please, we really want to,” Karri and Saleena said excitedly.

“Uncle, you always told us we should put our knowledge of medicine to good use. Well with more medical training, we’ll be able to fulfill our dreams. And the dreams of Marc and Lola,” Karri said.

“Karri, you know how I felt about your mother and father. Do you think it’s fair to use them like that?” Hawk asked.

Karri lowered her head. “No uncle, I’m sorry. It’s just that I really want to do this,” Karri replied.

“Dennis, could you please explain to them what being a doctor is really like?”

Dennis nodded.

“You’re on call 24 hours a day. You won’t get a vacation, you go to work early and come home late. Sometimes if you’re out of town, you won’t be home for two to three days at end. I’m not trying to scare you girls, but I want you to really think about it. It’s not a job where you can call in sick; you will be responsible for everyone in this city. I think there is one other doctor, but he’s older than I am,” Dennis said.

Karri and Saleena looked at each other, smiled, then turned to face Hawk and Dennis once again.

“We want this more than anything,” Karri and Saleena said.

Hawk smiled. “All right, you have my permission,” Hawk said.

Karri and Saleena glanced over at one another and squealed with delight.

Kestrel was in the kitchen with Kalee when he heard the girls’ squeal. He came running out with Kalee behind him.

“What’s wrong? Are you girls all right?” he asked looking at the girls.

The girls covered their mouths for a moment, then they smiled.

“Yes uncle Kestrel, we’re okay . Uncle Hawk just gave us permission to go to medical school,” they said with excitement.

Kestrel looked over at Hawk then Dennis.

“Medical school?” he asked with some concern.

“Yes, we’ve always wanted to get more training. Now we can,” Karri replied.

Kalee walked over to Karri and Saleena and put her arms around them.

“I know you two will make great doctors.”

“May I speak to Hawk alone?” Kestrel asked.

Kalee and the girls nodded and walked back into the house.

“What is it Kestrel?” Hawk asked.

“I know I just found out about having a niece. But couldn’t you have asked me what I thought about them going into medicine?” Kestrel asked.

Hawk smiled.

“I’m sorry. For the past year I’ve had the responsibility of the girls. Of course, you have a right to question their dreams,” Hawk said with understanding.

Kestrel looked at Hawk. “Are they good at it?”

Hawk nodded. “Karri has the gift, just like Koori and her sister did,” Hawk replied.

“She does?” Kestrel asked.

“Yes, she can also use it on animals,” Hawk said.

Kestrel smiled. “I guess it ran deep in the family.”

“What do you think the girls should do for a living?” Hawk asked.

Kestrel looked at Hawk and shook his head.

“I guess no matter what I say or want, they are going to be doctors, right?”

Hawk shook his head.

“They are just as stubborn as we are, and their parents,” Hawk said jokingly.

Kestrel chuckled.

Chapter 31

Hawk and Kestrel walked back into the house, and everyone sat and talked about what had happened in their lives the past five to ten years. Hawk told of how they had been going from planet to planet, solar system to solar system looking for more of their kind. How they met Kalee and Koorra on Septer 205, with the creatures, to Kalee's brush with death. Kestrel seemed interested in only one thing... Kalee. His eyes never left her for a moment. Just as everyone was about ready to call it a night, there came a knock on the door. Kalee stood up and walked over to it. She opened the door and there stood Aslana with one of the elders.

"Kalee, is Hawk here?" Aslana asked in a soft voice.

"Yes, please come in," Kalee said as she motioned for them to enter.

But the elder refused.

"Could you please have Hawk come outside?" he asked.

"Of course. I'll get him right away," Kalee replied .

Kalee walked swiftly back into the dining room where everyone was seated.

"Hawk, Aslana and one of the elders are outside. The elder would like to speak to you," Kalee said.

Hawk looked around at everyone.

"Excuse me for a moment," He said as he stood up and walked towards the door.

At the door Aslana and White Eagle were waiting. Hawk walked outside to be with them. Aslana smiled and excused herself, then walked away. Hawk stood there for a moment and watched as she left, then turned his attention back to White Eagle.

"It's an honor to see you again sir," Hawk said lowering his head in respect.

"Hawk, did you bring your two nieces with you?"

"Yes sir. They're inside with Kalee. Would you like me to bring them out here?" Hawk asked.

"No, that's not necessary. But bring them with you tomorrow night when you bring Kalee to the meeting hall," White Eagle said.

"Is anything wrong? Did they break a rule?" Hawk asked.

White Eagle laughed. "No, everything is fine. Please, just bring them with you. I think you'll be happy with the news we have for one of them," White Eagle said with a smile.

"Really? I could use some good news," Hawk replied.

White Eagle smiled. "Remember, bring them all to the meeting hall," he said as he turned and walked away.

Hawk lowered his head again, and watched as the elder left.

"I wonder what he meant by having good news," Hawk thought to himself.

He turned and walked back into the house.

"What did the elder want?" Kalee asked.

"He just wanted to remind me to bring you and the girls to the meeting hall tomorrow at 6 pm. He said something about having some good news," Hawk replied.

"Why do they want me to come?" Kalee asked.

"I don't know. Maybe because you're the one that invited us down here for a while," Hawk said knowing the truth.

Dennis and Judy smiled at one another.

"Well, it's getting late. We best be on our way," Dennis said.

"I'll walk with you for a ways," Kestrel said.

Dennis nodded his approval.

"Will you girls be there in the morning?" Dennis asked.

Karri and Saleena turned to Hawk. "Will we?" Karri asked.

"They'll be there. But I need to have them back here at 5 pm at the latest," Hawk informed them.

"I promise, they'll be home before five. It's a slow day tomorrow, mostly just follow-ups. If a real emergency comes up, I'll take the call and send the girls home early," Dennis replied.

Hawk nodded. "Thank you Dennis."

"Come on dear, we better get home so I can get my rest," Dennis said with a soft chuckle.

They all laughed.

"Good night Dennis, good night Judy. I'll see you tomorrow," Kalee said embracing them both at the same time.

"Good night my dear. It really is nice to have you home again, safe and sound," Judy said.

Kestrel walked over to Hawk and extended his hand.

“Good night Hawk.”

“Good night Kestrel,” Hawk replied shaking his hand.

“It was a pleasure to meet both of you, Karri, Saleena,” Kestrel said smiling at them.

“Good night uncle Kestrel,” Karri said with a smile.

“Good night Karri, good night Saleena,” Kestrel said.

Kestrel turned and gazed at Kalee.

“I’m really glad you’re home.”

He leaned towards her as if he was going to kiss her. But she backed away. He backed up and started to leave.

“Good night,” he said as he turned to walk out the door.

Hawk watched as they walked down the cobblestone street. He turned and closed the door, and walked back into the dining room.

“Well girls, it’s time to leave. No doubt Kalee is tired. Remember what I promised the doctor, that we won’t let Kalee overdo it for a few days,” Hawk said.

“All right uncle.” The girls walked over and embraced Kalee.

“Thank you for the wonderful dinner, Kalee.”

Kalee embraced them back. “You are so very welcome. But you don’t have to leave right now,” she said gazing at Hawk.

Hawk smiled.

“I think it would be best if we did. You need your rest. Besides, remember what the doctor said. I’m afraid you already overdid it. I don’t want you to end up back on the Searcher,” Hawk said with concern.

Kalee nodded.

“I suppose you’re right. Doctor Goodfellow would be very upset if I had a relapse.”

Hawk smiled.

“I’ll be back tomorrow morning to see you. If that’s all right?” he asked.

“I’d like that very much,” Kalee replied.

“Well, good night,” Hawk said as he and the girls were about ready to walk out the door.

“Good night,” Kalee said as she closed the door.

On their way to the house Karri stopped and looked at Hawk.

“Uncle, why did you back away from Kalee?” she asked.

“What do you mean?” he replied.

“When uncle Kestrel started to look at Kalee in an affectionate way, you backed away,” Karri explained.

“Kestrel and Kalee belong together. They always have,” Hawk replied.

“I thought you loved her?”

“I do, but there is another man involved. That man is a family member. If it was another, I would challenge him for Kalee,” Hawk said as he started to walk away.

“But uncle, they’re not mates. That means Kalee is available to take any mate she desires.”

Hawk turned and looked at Karri and smiled.

“How is it you know so much about our customs?” Hawk asked smiling.

“I read a lot about it on the Searcher. Dr. Goodfellow let me read some of his books in the archives on our people,” she said.

As they rounded the corner to the house, Karri stopped suddenly.

Hawk turned to her.

“What is it? What’s wrong?”

“Look,” she said pointing out in the street.

There in the street was a small child. Karri ran over to the child and looked around for the parents. The child started to cry and held his arms out to her. Hawk swiftly walked over to Karri and the child.

“Uncle, we can’t leave him out here alone,” Karri said.

“Take the child to the house. I’m going to see if I can find his mother or father,” Hawk said as he walked away.

Karri and Saleena picked up the little boy and started to walk towards the house. By the time they got there, he had fallen asleep. Saleena opened the front door. Karri gently put him down on the long sofa, and went to find a blanket. Hawk was going door to door, searching for anyone that might be missing a boy child. Everyone that he talked to said no, that they were not missing a little boy.

Chapter 32

After he had gone to all the houses Hawk started on the houses on the next two streets over. He knocked on one door and a woman answered.

“May I help you?” she asked in a friendly voice.

“I’m sorry to bother you, but my nieces and I found a small human child in the middle of the street. Do you have a human child that might have gotten out?” Hawk asked.

The woman smiled again.

“I’m sorry, but no. I don’t have any children,” she replied.

“Thank you for your time, good night,” Hawk said as he turned to walk away.

Hawk went to the next house, then the next, with no luck finding the child’s parents. “I better check with Kalee. Maybe she knows where this child belongs,” Hawk said to himself.

As he started down the street that Kalee lives on he started to smile to himself. “Any man would be proud to have Kalee as a mate. It’s not everyday that a woman uses her strength to protect a human child, the way she protected Koora on Septor 205,” he thought to himself. He was about to knock on Kalee’s door when it opened.

“Hawk? what are you doing here? Are the girls all right?” Kalee asked.

“They’re fine. I do have a little problem though. I was hoping you might be able to help me with it,” Hawk said.

“Of course. What is it?”

Hawk explained about how Karri found the child and how he had gone to all most every house, trying to find the parents.

“Where is he now?” Kalee asked.

“Karri and Saleena took him to the house,” Hawk replied.

“It’s a little late to do anything now. First thing in the morning we’ll take him to the elders,” Kalee said.

“Where do you think he might have come from?” Hawk asked.

“I really don’t know. We can also check the stores in the morning. Sometimes the owners live above their store. He might have wandered out and lost his way. Did you knock on any of the store doors?” Kalee asked.

Hawk nodded. “No, I didn’t do that. I just knocked on the house doors,” Hawk replied.

“It’s all right. We’ll find out in the morning,” Kalee said.

“Well, I’m sorry to have bothered you at this late of hour. I’ll see you in the morning,” Hawk said as he turned to walk away.

“Good night Hawk,” Kalee said in a soft warm voice.

Hawk made his way back to the house. Inside Karri and Saleena were waiting up for him.

“Did you have any luck finding his mother or father?” Saleena asked.

“No. I stopped by to see Kalee to see if she might know of anybody. She said that some of the store owners live above the stores that they own. Maybe he might have wandered out by accident and got lost. So first thing in the morning we’ll go store to store, door to door. We’ll find out where the little guy lives. How is he?” Hawk asked.

“He’s sound asleep right now. As soon as we covered him up, and he got nice and warm, he was out like a light. He must have been tired and cold more than anything else,” Karri replied.

“You girls better get some sleep yourselves. You have to be at the clinic pretty early in the morning. I’ll take the little guy around in the morning. We’ll find his mother and father,” Hawk said.

“All right uncle. Good night,” Karri and Saleena said while they embraced Hawk.

“Good night girls. I’ll see you in the morning,” Hawk said embracing them in return.

Morning came fast. It seemed as if Hawk had just laid down when the girls were lightly tapping on his door.

“Uncle, it’s time to get up. We’re going to go ahead and leave for the clinic. Uncle? Are you awake?” they asked through the door.

“Yes, I’m awake. I’ll see you girls later. Is the little boy awake or is he still sleeping?” Hawk asked.

“He’s still sleeping,” Karri replied.

“Remember, be home by 5 pm,” Hawk reminded them.

“We will uncle. Bye,” Karri and Saleena said as they walked out the door.

Hawk walked out into the living room and found the little boy still sound asleep.

“He must have been really tired,” Hawk thought to himself. He was just about to wake the child up when a knock came on the door. He swiftly walked over and opened the door. Standing there were Kalee and Koora.

“Good morning, come on in. I was just getting ready to wake the child up when you knocked,” Hawk said.

Kalee and Koorra walked over to the child to see if they could recognize him. Kalee started to smile.

“I know where the child belongs,” Kalee said softly. “He lives with an older couple above the bakery. His real mother and father died a couple of years ago. They’ve been trying their hardest to care for the child, but with their age against them. He probably walked out of the store shortly after they went to bed, and got lost,” Kalee said.

Hawk smiled. “Well, at least we know where he belongs now,” Hawk said with relief.

“We’ll take him to the store on our way to the clinic. They are probably worried sick about him right now,” Kalee said.

“Have they ever thought of placing the child up for adoption?” Hawk asked.

“They said they would never do that. The child is the only thing they have left that reminds them of their daughter. I think you could understand that, couldn’t you Hawk?” Kalee asked.

Hawk nodded and lowered his head.

“Yes, I know how they would feel,” Hawk replied. He raised his head and looked at Kalee again. “There’s got to be a way where they can still care and keep the child safe, but not wear themselves out in the process,” Hawk said.

“I’ve been trying to figure something out for a long time now. Please, if you think of something, let me know,” Kalee said with a smile.

Hawk nodded. Just then there was a light whimper from the small boy.

“I think he’s about ready to wake up. Could you give me a hand at getting him ready?” Hawk asked.

“Of course. Besides, since he doesn’t know you he might be a little frightened. He knows me, so he might feel a little more comfortable,” Kalee said.

“That’s what I was hoping. He knows Karri and Saleena. I was only with them for a few moments last night when they first found him,” Hawk said.

Kalee walked over to the little boy and started to wake him.

“Come on little one, it’s time to wake up,” Kalee said softly to the boy.

The little boy opened his eyes. He started to fuss a little then he smiled. Holding his arms out to her. “Kalee,” he said in a muffled voice.

Kalee reached for him and picked him up.

“Time to go home,” she said softly.

The boy smiled. He then turned and saw Hawk. At first he had a frightened look on his face, then he seemed to recognize Hawk and soon started to smile at him also. They left the house and headed for the bakery. The old man was just opening the doors when Kalee, Hawk and Koora walked up. He saw that Kalee was carrying their grandson.

“Oh thank you Kalee, you found him. We woke up this morning and we couldn’t find him anywhere. Where did you find him?” the old man asked reaching for his grandson.

“Hawk and his nieces found him last night. Hawk went from door to door last night trying to find out where he lived. He didn’t know you lived above the store,” Kalee replied.

“Thank you so much Hawk. I’m so ashamed,” the old man said hanging his head in shame.

“There’s nothing to be ashamed about. Accidents happen. I’m just glad we could help,” Hawk replied reaching out to shake the old man’s hand.

The old man reached out and shook Hawk’s hand with appreciation.

“If there’s anything I can do to help, please let me know,” Hawk said.

The old man shook his head, and took the boy from Kalee’s arms. Kalee and Hawk nodded to the old man, then walked off. Hawk turned to Kalee.

“He loves the boy very much, doesn’t he?” Hawk asked.

“Yes, he and his wife are pretty well up in age, but they love the boy with all their heart and soul. They would never give him up. But I think if the right person came along and offered to take care of the child for them, then they might consider it,” Kalee said with a smile on her face as she turned to face Hawk.

They proceeded to walk towards the clinic. “I wonder how the girls are doing? I hope they remember they need to be back at the house by 5 pm,” Hawk said.

“I’m sure they remember,” Kalee replied.

Kalee stopped and turned to Hawk. “Do you know why the elders want to see me and the girls there?” she asked.

“I don’t know. Maybe to welcome the girls properly, and since you’re the one that invited us. They wanted to say thank you. To tell you the truth, I don’t know,” Hawk said shifting his gaze across the street to cover his knowledge of anything.

“Maybe,” Kalee replied.

The rest of the day, Hawk, Koora and Kalee shopped at the different stores buying different foods for dinner, some human and some traditional. Before long it was early evening.

“I think we better start heading home. I didn’t realize it was getting late. The girls will be home in about thirty minutes or so,” Kalee said.

Hawk nodded in agreement. As they were about to turn down the street where Kalee's house was on, they heard voices coming from behind them.

"Uncle?... Kalee?"

Hawk turned to see Karri and Saleena running towards them.

"Sorry we're late. We got busy right at the last minute," Karri said.

"You're not late. It's only about 4:20," Kalee replied.

"We're not late? The clock at the clinic must be off," Karri said.

"It's all right. You girls can get cleaned up before we go meet with the elders," Hawk said.

Kalee and Koora stopped at their house.

"We'll be over in about thirty minutes. That will give you and the girls time to freshen up before we get there," Kalee said.

Hawk smiled.

"We'll see you soon," he said as they started to walk away.

They walked around the corner, down the street and into the house. The girls went into their room and started to clean up. Hawk started to put the food away that he had purchased. It seemed like only ten minutes had passed when there was a knock at the door. Karri ran out of her room and yelled, "I'll get it."

She opened the door and saw Kalee standing there with the bird people's traditional clothing on. Her bangs braided on both sides, and the rest of her long raven black hair flowing loose. Hawk came around the corner and stopped, gazing at this beautiful woman standing in the door way. He took a deep breath. "You look beautiful," he said.

Kalee smiled, lowered her head and started to blush. "Thank you," she said softly.

Karri and Saleena, both wearing the traditional clothing, smiled. They had never heard Hawk say anything like that to Kalee before.

"Shall we go?" Kalee asked in a soft voice.

Hawk, Kalee, Karri, Koora and Saleena walked out of the house and headed for the meeting hall to meet with the elders. It only took them about fifteen minutes to get there. They were met outside by three security guards. They were then escorted in to the meeting hall and were seated. A few moments later, the elders entered. Hawk, Kalee and the girls stood and lowered their heads in respect.

"Please, be seated," one of the elders said motioning for them to sit.

They seated themselves and gazed at the elders.

“Welcome Hawk , Karri, Saleena and Koora. And a very special welcome to you, Kalee,” Black Hawk said smiling. “Before we start, we’d like to welcome Karri and Saleena to Acklon. We’d also like to extend our welcome to Hawk,” White Eagle said.

Hawk and the girls stood and lowered their heads.

“Thank you,” Karri and Saleena replied.

“Thank you,” Hawk also replied.

“Kalee, we would like to talk to you about something very important. You’re probably wondering why we asked Hawk to bring you,” White Eagle said.

“Yes sir, I was wondering,” Kalee replied softly.

“We have a story we’d like to tell you. But first, Kalee? Did you know your real father?” Grey Falcon asked.

“No, I didn’t get to know him. I remember a little about him, but not much,” Kalee said.

“Your father was a very special man. He was one of the first bird people to take a human female as a mate,” White Eagle said.

Kalee sat there for a moment with a puzzled look on her face. She stood up and faced the elders.

“My father was a bird person?” she asked with a shocked look on her face.

“Yes. He was,” the elder replied. “Sit down child. We have a lot to tell you about your father,” White Eagle said.

Chapter 33

Kalee sat down and gazed over at Hawk.

“Kalee, many years ago, some of our people left their home on Throm to find a new home. Your father was one of them. After they got to their new planet, a lot of our females died. We believe it might have been a disease. So being short on females of our own kind, some of the men took human females as mates. Your father was one of them. He found a very beautiful, kind, and understanding human. At first her parents were against the marriage. She had told them that she was going to marry him no matter what, that she loved him deeply. But after getting to know your father, they realized that he was just as kind and loving as she was. They were married shortly after that. Some of our other men found human females also to take as mates. But of all the human females only one conceived, your mother. Shortly after you were born, your mother died. Why, we don't know. Your father was devastated; he lost his mate, and he now had a child to raise alone. After a few months, he returned to Throm with you. He knew he had to find a mate to help raise you. He soon met a birdwoman, and they fell in love and were married before your first birthday. After some time had passed, she gave birth to two children. A son and a daughter,” the elder stopped after seeing the confusion on Kalee's face.

“I have a half brother and half sister?” she asked.

“I'm sorry to say, your half brother was killed on Throm. But your half sister is still alive,” White Eagle replied.

“Please tell me. Is she here on Acklon?” Kalee begged as she started to weep softly.

“All in good time Kalee, all in good time,” White Eagle replied.

Kalee turned to Hawk with tears in her eyes. “I have a half sister,” she said softly.

All Hawk could do was smile and embrace her.

White Eagle and the other elders looked at one another. White Eagle stood up, and walked over to Kalee.

“Do you remember when you were little, how Peregrine used to tell you how special you were?” White Eagle asked, putting his hand on Kalee's shoulder.

Kalee nodded. “Yes, I remember,” she replied softly.

“The reason why he kept telling you that was because you are very special. You are half human and half bird person. You look human on the outside, but inside you are a bird person. The ancestral ways of our people are imprinted into your heart, mind and soul,” White Eagle said.

Kalee started to weep even harder. White Eagle pulled Kalee to her feet and embraced her. “Don't cry child. There is one more thing you need to know,” White Eagle said as he motioned for the other elders to come over.

The other elders stood and walked over to White Eagle and Kalee, Black Hawk carrying a beautifully engraved wooden case in his hands. They stood in a half circle around Kalee. Black Hawk handed the wooden case to White Eagle.

Kalee looked at the case. "I've seen that case before," she said.

White Eagle smiled. "This case belonged to your father," he replied.

Kalee with a confused look on her face. "But why did my adopted father have it?" she asked.

"Your adopted father was your real father's brother," White Eagle replied.

Kalee dropped to her knees. Covering her face with her hands she started to weep harder. Hawk, wanting to go her, but knowing it was not his place sat quietly, waiting for her to compose herself. He had to restrain himself several times from going to her. Gray Falcon and Black Hawk helped Kalee to her feet.

"Inside this case is the emblem worn by your father. Usually it would be given to the first born son, but seeing your father has no living sons, it will be given to you," White Eagle said as he opened the case.

Inside was a round engraved medallion. Kalee smiled, and then noticed it was like the engraved medallions that the elders were wearing. She took a few steps back with a puzzled look on her face.

"That looks like the medallions you're wearing," she said pointing at the emblems the elders were wearing.

"It is just like ours. Kalee, your real father was an elder," White Eagle said in a proud, strong voice.

Kalee just stood there, not knowing what to do next.

"My father was an elder?" was all she could say.

"Yes. Now, Kalee, you must take your father's place as an elder," White Eagle said.

"But I'm a female. Females are not allowed to be elders, are they?" she asked.

"Normally, no. But you are a special female. You are the offspring of a human and a birdman. Therefore, the rules do not apply to you. You have the culture of two worlds inside you," Black Hawk replied.

Gray Falcon removed the medallion from the case, walked up to Kalee and slipped the medallion around her neck.

"From this moment on, Kalee will no longer be known as Kalee, adopted daughter of Peregrine. You will now be known as Kalee, daughter of Snow Hawk," White Eagle said proudly.

“My father’s name was Snow Hawk?” she asked softly.

“Yes, and your mother’s name was Cora,” White Eagle said.

Kalee turned to Hawk, Karri and Saleena and smiled. Hawk, Karri and Saleena stood and lowered their heads.

Koorra walked up to Kalee. “Mother? Do I have to lower my head to you also?” she asked.

“No, you are my daughter. In fact, I don’t want anyone to lower their head to me,” Kalee said looking at Hawk and the girls.

But Hawk and the girls still kept their heads lowered.

Kalee turned to the elders.

“Does everyone have to lower their heads to me?” she asked.

“It is something you will have to get used to. There is only one way people don’t lower their heads to an elder,” Gray Falcon said.

“How is that?” Kalee asked.

“They have to be related to the elder,” White Eagle replied.

“Oh,” Kalee said softly.

“Let’s say, you had an adopted brother, or sister or even a half brother or half sister. They would not have to lower their heads to you,” White Eagle said with a smile, glancing over at Hawk. “But they would still have to lower their heads to the other elders,” he added.

“But how can this happen? Everyone knows I’m an only child,” Kalee said.

“That’s what the elders decide,” Black Hawk said smiling.

Kalee thought for a moment.

“In the beginning, you told me that I have a half sister. Does she live here on Acklon?” Kalee asked.

“Yes. She is the daughter of your father and his second mate. She is related by blood,” Black Hawk replied.

“Please, tell me who and where she is,” Kalee pleaded.

“She is very close, turn around and you will see her,” White Eagle said.

Kalee turned around, all she saw was Hawk, Karri and Saleena.

Gray Falcon walked over to Hawk and the girls. He held out his hand to.....

Chapter 34

Saleena looked at the elder with a very confused look on her face.

“Come with me... Saleena,” the elder asked in a soft, soothing voice.

Saleena looked at Hawk, then back at the elder, and slowly reached her hand out to him. Kalee stood and watched as the elder led Saleena back. Saleena, not sure, walked cautiously with the elder, turning around once in a while as if wanting to run back to the protection of Hawk.

“Don’t be afraid, Saleena,” White Eagle said as they drew closer.

He stopped next to Kalee.

“Kalee, I’d like you to meet your half sister,” White Eagle said with a smile.

Kalee and Saleena both stood there for a moment, looking at each other.

“Are you sure she’s my half sister?” Kalee asked.

“Yes, her mother was Wren, Snow Hawk’s second mate,” Grey Falcon replied.

Kalee started to smile. Saleena, still not sure she heard them right, asked them again.

“Are you sure I’m Kalee’s half sister?” she asked to make sure she heard them right.

Grey Falcon, White Eagle and Black Hawk laughed. “Yes, we’re sure,” White Eagle said with a smile.

Saleena started to smile along with Kalee. Soon they both started to cry. The elders walked back to the main meeting table, and seated themselves.

“You two have a lot of catching up to do. This meeting is over,” Grey Falcon said. The elders stood and started to walk out of the room.

Kalee, turned to look at them. “Please wait,” she called out.

“We have so many questions to ask you,” she said holding Saleena’s hand tightly.

“It’s getting late. Come back tomorrow night at 6 pm. We’ll tell you whatever you want to know. Until then, go home and get to know your sister more,” White Eagle said as they left the room.

Hawk, Karri and Koorra walked over to Kalee and Saleena.

“Hawk, you knew about this, didn’t you?” Kalee asked.

“I knew about you being half human and half birdwoman, but I didn’t know you and Saleena were related,” Hawk replied.

“I’m so happy for you,” Karri said embracing them both.

“I can’t believe I have a sister,” Saleena said.

“I know, I’ve always wanted a sister, now I have one,” Kalee replied.

“Mother? Does this mean I have an aunt?” Koorra asked.

Kalee giggled. “Yes, this means you have an aunt,” she said smiling.

Hawk, Kalee, Koorra and the girls walked out of the great meeting hall and started to walk towards the house. Passing people on the street, no one was lowering their heads.

“Looks like no one knows,” Kalee said smiling.

“Not yet. But they’ll know shortly. The elders will inform them,” Hawk replied.

All the way home Saleena and Kalee held each other’s hand tightly, as if not wanting to lose each other again. As they got closer to the house Kalee stopped.

“Hawk, would it be all right if Saleena stayed with me?” she asked.

“Of course. You just found each other. I wouldn’t have it any other way,” Hawk replied.

Kalee and Saleena smiled.

Karri walked up to them and wrapped her arms around them.

“This turned out to be a wonderful planet. I have two uncles, and Saleena and Kalee found out they are sisters. Plus, Kalee is the first ever female elder,” Karri said with excitement in her voice.

“Will we see you for breakfast in the morning?” Kalee asked.

“Yes, we’ll be there bright and early. But in the mean time, you two need some time to yourselves like the elder said,” Hawk said.

“Uncle? I have to come home. I need my clothes,” Saleena said.

“We can stop by there first, then come back home,” Kalee replied.

Saleena smiled.

Kalee gazed over at Hawk. “Are you sure it’s all right for her to stay with me?” Kalee asked.

Hawk smiled at Kalee. “Like I said, I wouldn’t have it any other way. You are family. You belong together,” Hawk replied.

“Are you still going to work at the clinic?” Karri asked .

Saleena smiled. "Of course. Nothing can keep me away from there," she replied.

As they got closer to the house, they saw Aslana and Ashla walking towards them.

"Where are you going?" Kalee asked.

"There's a big meeting at the great hall tonight. Didn't you get the message?" Aslana asked.

"No, we didn't hear about it. Do you know what it's about?"

"Something about a new elder. Are you coming?" Aslana asked.

"No, I think we'll stay home. We'll find out later," Kalee said with a nervous look on her face.

Aslana noticed something was different with Kalee, the way she was carrying herself.

"Is everything all right?" she asked gazing at Hawk then back to Kalee.

Hawk looked at Kalee.

"You should tell her. She's going to find out anyway. It would be better coming from you, her friend," Hawk said.

"Tell me what? Are you all right?" Aslana asked with concern.

"I'm fine. I have something to tell you. Why don't you and Ashla come over to the house? I have a lot to tell you," Kalee said in a nervous voice.

Aslana agreed. They walked back to the house together. Hawk and Karri were about ready to walk on over to the house which they were living in.

"We'll be back shortly. I want to pick up some clothes for Saleena," Hawk said as he and Karri walked off. Kalee nodded as she, Aslana, Ashla, Koora and Saleena entered the house.

"What is going on? Kalee, you're getting me very worried," Aslana said as she sat down in the living room.

"I'll explain everything when Hawk gets back. And everything is fine. I just have a few surprises to tell you about," she said with a smile.

They sat down in the living room waiting for Hawk and Karri to return.

"I'm sorry, can I get you anything?" Kalee asked.

"No, thank you," Aslana replied.

They sat there in silence for about thirty minutes when there came a knock on the door.

“I’ll be right back. It must be Hawk and Karri,” Kalee said walking swiftly towards the door. She opened the door and in walked Hawk and Karri carrying Saleena’s bag full of clothes.

“Sorry it took so long. I didn’t know what clothes Saleena wanted so we just packed everything,” Hawk said.

“It’s all right. Please, come in. Aslana is in the living room.”

Hawk and Karri entered the living room, and Hawk handed the bag to Saleena. “I just packed everything, I didn’t know what you wanted,” Hawk said.

“Thank you uncle,” Saleena replied with a smile.

“Now, would you please tell me what is going on? Why are you acting so strange? And why didn’t you want to go to the meeting hall? Do you know something I don’t?” Aslana asked.

Kalee sat down next to her.

“Aslana, something happened tonight. Something very wonderful, but scary at the same time,” Kalee said glancing over at Hawk.

Hawk nodded. “Go on, tell her,” he said softly.

Kalee turned to look at Aslana again.

“First off, we just found out tonight that Saleena is my half sister. Her father was my father also. My mother’s name was Cora. And her mother’s name was Wren,” she said.

Aslana looked at her and nodded. “Okay, how did he have two mates?” Aslana asked with a puzzled look on her face.

Kalee started to explain everything to Aslana. What happened when her father and other bird people went to another planet. Why they thought the females of their kind died. And that he and some of the other men took a female human as mates. She told her that out of all the couples, only her father and mother had a child. She continued telling her the story that she was part human and part birdwoman. Aslana sat and listened to every word she said.

“I knew there was something different about you,” she said with excitement in her voice. She embraced Kalee. “But what happened? Why did your father take another mate?” she asked.

“My mother died shortly after having me. My father couldn’t raise a female child by himself. So he went back to Throm, and there he met and married Wren, Saleena’s mother. I also had a brother, but he died on Throm a few years ago,” Kalee replied.

“Oh, I’m so sorry Kalee,” she said as she gazed over at Saleena.

“Saleena, I’m so sorry you lost your brother. Did you know him?” Aslana asked.

“No, I don’t remember anything about my brother. I do know he was older than I am,” Saleena replied.

Hawk walked over to Kalee. "You need to tell her the rest," Hawk whispered.

"Tell me the rest? The rest of what?" Aslana asked.

Kalee turned back around and faced Aslana again.

"I do have something else to tell you, but I don't really know how," Kalee said.

"Just tell me. You are my dearest and closest friend. You can tell me anything. What is it?" Aslana asked.

Kalee glanced over at Hawk and Karri.

"Mine and Saleena's father was an elder," she said quickly.

Aslana looked at her for a moment. "Your father was an elder?"

Kalee nodded.

"That's wonderful," Aslana replied.

Hawk leaned over to Kalee once again. "You have to tell her all of it."

Kalee took a deep breath. "There is one more thing I need to tell you."

She gazed at Hawk again for encouragement. He nodded. "Go ahead."

Aslana sat and watched how nervous Kalee was getting. She moved closer to Kalee on the sofa. "You're frightened, aren't you?" she asked.

Kalee took Aslana's hand. "Aslana, I'm an elder," Kalee said.

Aslana looked at Kalee for a moment. "You're kidding me, right? You can't be an elder. Women are not allowed to become elders," Aslana said.

Kalee stood, and walked over to the dining room table. She picked up the wooden box and took it back over to Aslana. She slowly opened it. Inside was the medallion of an elder. Aslana looked at it. She jumped up. "Where did you get that?" she asked.

"White Eagle, Black Hawk and Grey Falcon gave it to me," Kalee replied.

Aslana stood there in shock.

"But how? Why?" she asked.

"I told you, mine and Saleena's father was an elder. Since our father had no sons, it fell on me to fill in our father's place," Kalee replied.

"But you're a female. Females are not allowed," Aslana said again.

“I told them that also. They told me, I’m only half human and half birdwoman. Therefore the law does not apply to me,” Kalee replied.

Aslana turned to face Hawk. “Is it true?”

Hawk nodded. “Yes, it’s true,” he replied.

“We think that’s what the meeting is about tonight. To inform everyone that I’m the new elder,” Kalee said.

Chapter 35

Aslana looked at Kalee. "I always knew there was something special about you. Now I know I was right," she said.

"I'm only worried that everyone will start to treat me differently," Kalee said.

"Why shouldn't they? You are the first female ever to be given the title elder. That is a wonderful gift. You should be proud," Aslana said with a cheerful voice.

"Oh, I am proud. But I'm also frightened," Kalee replied.

"Why?" Aslana asked.

"I don't want people to treat me differently. I'm still Kalee, but with this title now. That will change the way people treat me. I don't think I'll be able to handle that. I love our people with all my heart and soul," Kalee said hanging her head.

Hawk walked over to Kalee. He gently placed his fingers under her chin and lifted her head.

"I'm very proud of you. It's not everyday that the elders choose a person with a heart of gold. You'll make a great elder. You have love for everyone, bird people and humans alike. That's what will make you a great elder," Hawk said smiling.

"Do you really think so?" Kalee asked looking into Hawk's eyes.

"I know so. As for the people treating you different, if they were truly your friends in the beginning, they will be happy for you and treat you the same," Hawk replied.

Kalee smiled. "Thank you Hawk. Coming from you that means a lot."

"Tell me the whole story. I'd really want to know everything that happened," Aslana said.

Kalee nodded. "All right."

They sat down and Kalee started to tell Aslana everything. She told her about her real father and mother, and about learning about Saleena, and her brother.

"We have to go back to talk to the elders again tomorrow night. They're going to tell us more about our family," Kalee said.

Hawk and Karri stood.

"I think we better leave. You have a lot to talk about. We'll be over in the morning, so Karri and Saleena can head for the clinic. That's if you are still going to work in the clinic?" Hawk asked Saleena.

"I'll be ready. Nothing is going to stop me from working in the clinic, uncle. I love it there," Saleena replied with a smile. She stood up and walked over to Hawk and Karri and embraced them.

“I love you, uncle. I love you too, Karri. You’ll always be my uncle and sister,” Saleena said.

Hawk and Karri returned the embrace.

“I love you too, Saleena. Though you are Kalee’s half sister, you’ll always be my niece, ” Hawk replied.

“I love you too. Just like uncle said, even though you have a half sister, you’ll always be my sister,” Karri said.

“Good night everyone,” Hawk said as he and Karri started to walk out the door.

“Good night Hawk. Good night Karri. We’ll see you in the morning,” Kalee said.

Kalee, Aslana and Saleena sat and started talking again.

Hawk and Karri made their way to the house, entered and went to bed.

Meanwhile, The Searcher was just arriving at the planet of Septor 205.

Buck and Wilma had been summoned to the bridge. As they entered the bridge the Admiral greeted them.

“Buck, Wilma. We’re just arriving at Septor 205. I’m getting ready to run a scan on the planet to see if any of those creatures has survived. I thought maybe you’d like to be up here for it,” the Admiral said.

“Thank you Admiral,” Buck said.

“Please run a complete scan of that planet. Let me know if you find any life signs,” Admiral Asimov ordered.

“Yes sir.”

“I wonder if Hawk is enjoying his vacation?” Buck asked.

“You miss him, don’t you?” Wilma asked.

“Yes. It’s not the same around here without him,” Buck replied.

“Well, he’s probably having the time of his life on Acklon. All those other bird people. And not to mention Kalee,” Wilma replied smiling.

Buck nodded.

Admiral Asimov walked over to Buck.

“What would you do if Hawk decided to stay on Acklon?” he asked.

Buck looked at the Admiral.

“I don’t think Hawk would stay on Acklon. He might want to return for a visit, but he’s still trying to find the rest of his people,” Buck replied.

“Sir, the scan is completed. There are no life signs at all on Septor 205.”

“Very well. Buck, Wilma, I would like you two to take a shuttle down and run a complete test on the soil and water. I want to make sure the poison did not contaminate it,” the Admiral said.

“Yes Admiral,” Wilma replied.

She and Buck left the bridge and headed for the hanger.

“Buck? Why do you think that Hawk would come back to the Searcher, rather than to stay on Acklon with Karri and Saleena?” Wilma asked as they boarded the shuttle.

Buck could just look at Wilma, not answering her. He just shrugged his shoulders. “I think he’d rather be looking for more of his people, that’s all,” Buck said.

The shuttle launched and they headed for the planet surface. As they got close enough to the surface they started to run an air test.

“Looks like the air is breathable,” Wilma said.

They continued to a clearing close to the stream not far from where they found Kalee and Koora.

“This looks like a good spot to land,” Buck said.

“I agree,” Wilma replied.

They landed the shuttle and shut off the engines. They opened the door and exited the shuttle. Walking over to the stream first, they gathered a sample of the water.

“I hope the water was not contaminated,” Wilma said.

“We’ll find out in a few minutes,” Buck replied, handing the sample to Wilma.

Wilma put a few drops of water into the tester. A moment later, “The water is clean, no contamination,” Wilma said with a smile.

“Good. Let’s check the soil now,” Buck said.

As with the water, Buck scooped up some soil and gave the sample to Wilma. Wilma smiled.

“It’s clean. No contamination in the soil either,” she said.

“Looks like the Galactic Council will be able to start re-inhabiting this planet,” Buck said.

Wilma smiled. "That's good. This is a beautiful planet. Maybe we should check the fish also. Just to be on the safe side," Wilma suggested.

"Good idea. The water was clean, but we don't know if the fish have been contaminated," Buck replied.

They found a narrow part of the stream and Buck waded out to the middle. Buck stood there for a few minutes, looking and waiting.

"What are you waiting for?" Wilma asked.

Buck smiled, then without a word he reached down and grabbed a fish and threw it up to Wilma.

"I had to wait for a fish to come close enough for me to grab it," he replied. "Now, I got the fish, you do the testing," Buck said with a grin on his face.

Wilma looked over at Buck with a surprised look on her face. "Where did you learn that?" she asked .

"In my time, we did a lot of fishing. We fished with poles but sometimes we had to fish with our bare hands," Buck replied.

Wilma did the testing on the fish. "Well, it looks like the fish are all right also," she said. "Now, what do we do with this fish?" she asked.

Buck walked over to her, picked up the fish and walked back over to the stream. He gently placed the fish back into the water, moving it back and forth to get the water flowing through its gills. Within seconds the fish swam off.

All Wilma could do was smile.

"I think that completes our scan of the planet. Shall we return to the Searcher?" she asked.

"No, not yet. I'd like to walk around to make sure all of those things are dead," Buck said.

Wilma nodded.

They started to walk towards the tree in which they found Kalee and Koora. Walking over to the bushes where the creatures were last seen, they moved some of the bushes aside and looked. Inside the bushes were about four dead creatures. Buck kicked one of them to make sure they were dead. It didn't move.

"I think we better check all of the caves. I want to make sure they are all dead," Buck said.

"We'd better notify the Admiral that so far the water, and soil are fine and that we want to check the caves for any surviving creatures," Wilma suggested.

“Good idea. Maybe have him send down the clean up crew to start cleaning up all these dead animals,” Buck replied.

Wilma agreed.

“Landing party to Searcher.”

“Go ahead Wilma. What did you find?”

“Admiral, the water, soil and the fish were unharmed by the poison. We’ve found a few of the creatures. They’re dead. Requesting a clean up crew, to come down and start removing the dead animals,” Wilma said.

“Finish making your sweep of the planet,” Admiral Asimov said.

“Understood, landing party out.”

“Did you hear what the Admiral said?” Wilma asked Buck.

“Yes. Let’s head for the caves, and hope that the poison killed every one of those things,” Buck replied.

Chapter 36

They climbed back into the shuttle and started the engines. Soon they were on their way to the cliff region of the planet. Looking out the window of the shuttle, Wilma pointed out a place to land at the base of the cliffs. Buck nodded in approval. They sat the shuttle down with a light thump. They again exited the shuttle and glanced up the side of the cliffs. They could see that there were several caves on this cliff section alone. They slowly made their way up to one of the caves. Drawing their weapons, they entered. They didn't have to go in too far when Buck grabbed Wilma's arm and pointed towards the side of the cavern. There were about nine adult creatures and about ten babies. Buck held out his arm as a signal for Wilma to stay back. He cautiously walked towards them. When he got to the creatures, he could tell they were all dead. He motioned for Wilma.

"There's so many," Wilma said looking at the dead creatures.

Buck nodded. "Let's go further in. We have to make sure all of them are dead. We can't leave one of them alive," Buck said.

They walked further into the cave, seeing more and more of the creatures, thankfully all dead.

"Looks like they're all dead in this cave. But we have a lot more caves to check," Buck said as he turned to leave the cave. "We'll also have to check the towns and villages. Some might have taken over some of the houses," Buck said as he and Wilma left the first cave.

They made their way along a narrow path to the next small cave. Again, they drew their weapons. They slowly entered, looking around, but they didn't see any creatures.

"Maybe the cave was too small?" Wilma said looking over at Buck.

"Could be, that or they survived and moved to a safer place," Buck replied.

They left the small cavern and headed for the next one. Buck was looking for any signs that showed that any creatures might have survived. They were just about to approach the next cave when Buck saw some tracks heading towards the cave. "I hope those are old tracks," Buck said as he and Wilma were about twenty feet from the opening of the next cave. They cautiously approached, listening for any sounds or movement. They slowly entered this cave as they did the others. This cave was much bigger.

"Looks like this cave goes on forever," Wilma said.

Buck nodded. "Be careful. We don't know how far back this goes, or if there are any hiding places," Buck said looking around.

As they walked they saw a few dead creatures lying close to the wall.

"Well, we know the poison reached them. Just hope it reached the rest in the rear of the cave," Wilma said.

"I agree. I'd hate to run into a live one right now. Not knowing this cave, we'd be in a lot of trouble," Buck replied.

They were about ready to enter the cave when Buck heard a noise coming up from behind them. Without any warning he reached behind him and pushed Wilma to the ground and raised his weapon and prepared to fire.

“Buck! Don’t shoot,” he heard a voice say.

Walking through the bushes and shrubs behind them was part of the clean up detail.

“I almost shot you!” Buck shouted. “Why didn’t you say something before you came sneaking up behind us like that?” Buck said in an upset voice helping Wilma to her feet.

“Sorry Captain Rogers. We didn’t know it was you. We thought it might have been one of those creatures,” Ensign Carlston replied.

“Have you seen any of them alive?” Wilma asked dusting herself off.

“No, Colonel Deering. We’ve been in sector 201 through sector 206. Nothing is alive. No deer, rabbits, cats, dogs. Nothing,” Ensign Carlston replied.

“Well, since you’re here, follow us in as back -up. We’ve already checked the other two caves. They are all dead,” Buck said.

“Yes sir,” he replied.

They started to slowly walk into the cave. About thirty feet in, they saw a few of the creatures. Dead, with their mouths agape as if they were gasping for air when they died.

“This cave looks a lot bigger than the others. Stay alert and be careful. They could be hiding anywhere, if any of them survived,” Buck said.

After several hours, they exited the cave. Finding all the creatures dead they continued to the next cave.

It was twenty days later when Buck and Wilma finally got to return to the Searcher. Being totally exhausted from only being able to sleep a few hours each night, they made their way slowly to the bridge. The Admiral met them at the door.

“What did you find?” he asked.

“Nothing, Admiral. Everything that was on that planet is dead. We heard what we thought might have been a bird of some kind, but we’re not sure. Has the rest of the clean up crew reported in yet?” Buck asked.

“We still have four crews down there. They’ve reported in about one hour ago. Why don’t you two get some rest? As soon as the other crews arrive, I’ll notify the Galactic Council to inform them that the planet Septor 205 has been cleaned up and they can go ahead and start re-populating it with animals and people,” Admiral Asimov said.

Buck and Wilma nodded their heads. They left the bridge. Buck walked Wilma to her quarters.

"I wonder how Hawk and the girls are doing?" he asked.

"They are probably enjoying themselves." Wilma looked at Buck. "You really miss him, don't you?" she asked.

Buck turned away. "What makes you say that? Hawk deserves this vacation. He finally found some of his people. I'm happy for him," Buck replied.

"I know you're happy for him, but you still miss him," Wilma said smiling.

"Yes, I do miss him. As I would miss you if you decided to leave," Buck replied.

"Buck, he'll be back soon. You'll see, he's probably missing us as much as we're missing him," Wilma said softly.

"You miss him too, don't you?" Buck asked turning to face Wilma again.

"Yes, I do." Wilma looked around at all the crew members watching and listening to them as they walked by. "Why don't you come in? We can talk in my quarters," Wilma said.

"No, thank you Wilma. You need to get some rest. We can talk later," Buck said as he turned to walk away.

Wilma stood there for a few moments, watching Buck walk away with his head hung. "I can only pray Hawk decides to return to the Searcher, for Buck's sake," she said to herself. Wilma entered her quarters.

It seemed like only thirty minutes had passed when the intercom went off. But it had been almost twelve hours.

"Captain Rogers... and Colonel Deering... report to the bridge."

Buck and Wilma met each other just outside of the bridge doors. As they entered the Admiral was smiling.

"What is it Admiral?" Wilma asked.

"Look at the screen, what do you see?" he asked.

Buck and Wilma looked up at the screen and couldn't believe their eyes.

"But how?" Buck asked.

"We don't know. The clean-up crew found them. Maybe they were up high enough that the cyanide didn't get to them. But, there they are," Asimov replied.

Buck and Wilma started to smile.

“Hawk would love to see this,” Buck said.

“Oh, that reminds me. We got a transmission from Hawk a few hours ago,” the Admiral said smiling.

“How is he?” Buck asked.

“Hawk and the girls are doing great. The girls are working in a clinic with a friend of Hawk’s. Oh, and get this, Kalee is the first ever female elder. It turned out her real father was an elder. And seeing that there were no sons, it fell to Kalee. He’s not really sure how she feels about it though,” Asimov said.

“Admiral, could we send a transmission back to Hawk and let him know what we found?” Buck asked.

“I don’t see why not. I think he would be happy to hear something survived.” The Admiral turned and looked at the screen one more time. “Send a transmission to Hawk. Tell him what we found that had survived the cyanide poison,” he ordered.

“Yes sir.”

They turned to gaze at the screen again, but they had lost the image.

“Contact the crew that sent that image, have them put it on the screen again,” he said.

“Yes sir.”

It took about two minutes for the crew that sent the first image to transmit another image to the Searcher.

“It is so beautiful,” Wilma said smiling.

“Yes, it sure is,” Buck replied.

Up on the screen was an image that would brighten up everyone’s day on the Searcher after all the deaths on this planet. Up on the screen was a pair of bald eagles, soaring high in the sky.

“This will be this planet’s new beginning,” Buck said.

Chapter 37

Meanwhile back on the peaceful planet of Acklon, Karri and Saleena had already started their training in medicine. During the day, they worked in the clinic with Dennis. Four times a week in the evening, they attended medical school under the watchful eye of Dennis and Doctor Hanson, the other elderly doctor there on Acklon, who himself was wanting to retire. Surprised at the knowledge the girls had, and the telepathic ability Karri possessed, he was amazed how fast they learned, while Karri and Saleena were busy studying for exams and working.

Hawk had been kept busy also, by his beautiful neighbor Aslana. They had been on long walks in the country, shopping, or just sitting together talking about Acklon and what they would like to do. Hawk was captivated by her beauty and her kind and gentle ways. One day while they were out for a walk in the countryside, they found a young orphaned deer. Aslana took it home with her and cared for it. When it was strong and old enough, she and Hawk returned it to the countryside where they found it. She reminded him so much of Koori. Her love for animals, her kindness, and her love for life. She even had the same head feather markings as Koori. They would be walking and talking down the main street of Acklon. Hawk never took his eyes off her. Several times he would trip or bump into something. Aslana would turn away and laugh softly to herself, then turn to face Hawk again with a smile on her face. Hawk had very strong feelings for Aslana and her daughter Ashla.

“Is she the one?” he thought to himself. “I enjoy being around her. I miss her terribly when we’re apart. Would she? No, could she be interested in me as a mate?” he thought looking at this beautiful woman walking next to him.

Over the following weeks, Hawk and Aslana had become very close. Soon it would be time for him to leave. He knew he would have to say goodbye to Aslana, Karri and Saleena.

“Kalee had her position as an elder. She had also been showing more than a passing interest in Kestrel. But, how would Aslana feel about him leaving?” he thought to himself. “Would she say, it’s been nice, but, or would she be heartbroken?”

At home that evening, he sat alone in the dark wondering. Wondering how he was going to tell her that his time on Acklon was almost up. Just then the front door opened, and in walked Karri and Saleena.

“How was work?” Hawk asked.

“It was a very long day, uncle,” Karri replied.

“I already have dinner ready, if you’re hun gry,” Hawk said looking at the two exhausted girls as they flopped down on the sofa.

“Thank you uncle. We’d like to go clean up first,” Saleena said after a deep yawn.

The girls stood up and walked towards their rooms. Half an hour later there was still no sign of them. Hawk walked down the hallway and gently knocked on Karri’s door. Not hearing a reply he slowly opened it. There laying across her bed was Karri, sound asleep. Hawk smiled and softly closed the door and went to Saleena’s room. He gently knocked and again not

getting a reply, opened the door only to find Saleena sound asleep also. He smiled again and closed the door.

Hawk quietly started to put the dinner away when he heard a knock at the front door. He walked swiftly over to the door to open it so the next knock would not waken the girls. There stood Aslana.

“I need to talk to you, Hawk. May I come in?” she asked.

“Of course,” he said motioning for her to enter.

She walked just inside the door and turned to Hawk.

“Kalee told me you will be leaving soon. Is that true?” she asked.

Hawk motioned for her to enter the living room. He then sat down and motioned her to sit next to him. She sat down and looked at Hawk with hurt in her eyes.

“Yes, I will be leaving soon. I was going to come over tonight and tell you about it. I want to ask you something that is very important,” Hawk said looking deep into her eyes.

Aslana reached over and took Hawk’s hand in hers.

“You can tell me anything. What is it?” she asked.

“I was wondering how you felt about me?” Hawk blushed a little.

Being a warrior for his people all those years. He found himself in an awkward position, not really knowing how to ask a woman to be his mate. With Koori it was different. They’d known each other all their lives. But with a woman he only met a few months ago, he was on strange ground.

Aslana smiled.

“I was wondering the same thing. I’m hoping you have feelings for me the same as I have for you,” she replied.

Hawk smiled. He turned sideways on the sofa to face Aslana. Holding her hand tightly, he looked deep into her eyes. She could see that he was very nervous about something, so she broke the ice for him.

“Hawk, I need to tell you something. I’ve been wanting to tell you this for a long time now.” She gazed into his eyes. “Hawk, I’ve fallen in love with you,” she said.

Hawk sat there for a moment, not sure how to react or what to say.

Aslana sat there and waited patiently for a reaction or something.

Hawk started to smile.

“I was going to tell you the same thing.” He moved closer to Aslana. “I was going to tell you that I’ll be leaving soon, and I wanted to find out how you felt about me. I know it’s not fair to tell you this now, seeing I’ll be leaving soon. But, I love you.” He stood up and pulled her to her feet.

Hawk looked into her eyes, stepped closer to her, put his arms around her small waist and pulled her even closer.

“I want you as my mate. If you say no, I’ll understand. It wouldn’t be fair to you having to wait for me to return,” he said.

Aslana smiled.

“Hawk, I’ve waited a long time for a man like you to come along. If I have to wait a few more years I will.” Aslana leaned into Hawk and kissed him ever so softly.

“I’ll wait for you to return before I give you my answer,” she replied.

Hawk pulled Aslana even closer to him and kissed her with a gentle but passionate kiss. With the result he was hoping for, she kissed him back. They parted from their kiss with a smile. They sat back down on the sofa and enjoyed each others embrace.

“Hawk? How much longer do you have on Acklon?” she asked leaning against his chest.

“About seven days,” he replied stroking her head feathers.

She lowered her head. He gently placed his fingers tips under her chin and lifted her head. Gazing lovingly into her eyes, he gently kissed her again.

They were so wrapped up with each other, they didn’t see a pair of eyes watching them from the hall. Karri and Saleena had awoken from their much needed nap. Seeing their uncle with Aslana, they softly retreated back into Karri’s room and started to giggle softly.

“I’m so happy that uncle found someone,” Karri said smiling.

“As am I. He was always so busy taking care of us, he never got to find someone for himself,” Saleena replied smiling also.

Back out in the living room, Hawk and Aslana had fallen asleep in each others arms. It was just a few minutes later Hawk woke up, he realized that Ashla was all alone at home. He gently woke Aslana.

“Is Ashla alone at home?” he asked in a worried voice.

Aslana jumped up and raced towards the door. Hawk was right behind her. She stopped and turned to face him.

“I love you, my love,” she said as she turned to leave.

“I love you,” Hawk replied back.

Aslana left. The girls, hearing the front door close, walked out rubbing their eyes as if they had just woke up.

“Uncle? is that you?” Karri asked.

“Shhhh, go back to bed. It’s late,” Hawk said softly.

Karri turned and started to walk back to her room. “Oh uncle? I love you,” she said giggling.

“You heard?” Hawk asked blushing.

“Saleena and Karri came running out from the hall.

“Oh uncle, we’re so happy for you,” they cried. “Does she love you too?” Saleena asked.

Hawk looked at the girls then lowered his head. He raised his head back up and gazed at these two beautiful young women that had been in his life for so long now.

“Please uncle, tell us,” Karri said in a pleading voice.

Hawk smiled.

“Yes, she loves me too,” he replied.

The girls squealed with delight.

“Now, go back to bed,” Hawk said.

Chapter 38

After the girls had gone back to bed, Hawk sat in the dark, thinking of Aslana. "Will she honestly wait for me to return? What will happen if I return with different feelings towards her?" Hawk thought to himself.

After several hours of thinking of Aslana he finally drifted off to sleep. But then his dream thoughts took over. He kept seeing his first true love's face. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't get her out of his dream.

"Oh my love, I'm lost without you. But I've found another whom I love very much," he said softly in his dream.

"I want to love her as I love you, but you're always on my mind. As long as you are there, there can be no other," he thought.

Hawk's mind took him to Throm again. There before him stood Koori.

"Oh my love. I will always be in your heart and soul. I want you to be happy. I've seen into this woman's heart, she loves you truly and deeply. I will always be here, but you will forget me in time," Koori said standing next to Hawk.

Hawk turned away for a moment then turned to face Koori once again.

"I don't want to forget you. You are my life," Hawk said.

"No Hawk. She is your life now. Aslana and her daughter Ashla. You must be with them. Remember what I told you before? I want you to stop mourning me and live again," Koori said kissing him softly on his cheek.

"But," was all Hawk got out, then Koori was gone.

He awoke from his sleep with tears in his eyes. He closed his eyes again trying to see Koori once more. But he only got darkness. Feeling a little comforted by what Koori had said to him about Aslana, he sat up and wiped the tears from his eyes. He stood and walked out into the kitchen and started to prepare the girls breakfast. About thirty minutes later, Karri and Saleena came out from their bedrooms only to smell a heavenly aroma coming from the kitchen.

"Uncle? What are you cooking?" Karri asked smelling the air as she got closer to the kitchen.

"I thought I would try my hand at baking some seed bread," Hawk replied.

Karri and Saleena both walked into the kitchen and stood close to the oven.

"It smells delicious," Saleena said.

"I don't know how it's going to taste. If you don't like it, you don't need to eat it. But let me know what you think," Hawk said as he took the bread out of the oven.

He began to slice it, but before he could slice the third slice the girls were already grabbing a slice. Karri was the first, followed by Saleena. Hawk stood there waiting for a comment or a wrinkled nose.

“Well? What do you think?” Hawk asked.

The girls didn’t say a word. They reached for another slice.

“I take that as it’s okay?” he remarked.

Karri and Saleena smiled and wrapped their arms around Hawk.

“Uncle, it is delicious. How did you learn to make it?” Saleena asked.

“I talked to the old man that owns the bakery. He gave me the recipe for it,” Hawk replied.

They took turns giving Hawk a kiss on the cheek. But as they did that, they reached around him and grabbed another slice of seed bread. As they ran off giggling, he caught on to what they did. A few minutes later they came out in to the living room.

“Uncle? Are you going to marry Aslana?” Karri asked.

Hawk smiled.

“If she’ll have me,” he replied.

“You two better get going. You know how Dennis doesn’t like you being late to work,” Hawk said.

Karri and Saleena headed for the door.

“I need to talk to you girls when you come home tonight,” Hawk said with sorrow in his voice.

“What’s wrong?” Saleena asked with concern.

“I’ll talk to you about it later. Now, go to work,” Hawk replied.

Karri and Saleena left to go to the clinic. Hawk sat back down and buried his face in his hands. “I have to go talk to Kalee,” he said to himself.

He stood up and walked out the door. He headed straight over to Kalee’s house. When he got there he hesitated knocking on the door.

“It’s been a long time since I’ve talked to her. I hope she’s home, and alone,” Hawk thought to himself.

He finally knocked. After a few moments had passed, the door finally opened.

“Hawk, how are you? Is something wrong?” Kalee asked with concern.

Hawk lowered his head out of respect. He stood before an elder.

“May I come in, I need to talk to you,” Hawk said.

“Of course, please come in,” she replied.

“Thank you.”

Hawk walked into the house and stood just inside the door.

“Please, come in and sit down,” Kalee said motioning him towards the living room.

Hawk followed her in and sat down in the chair.

“What is it?” she asked.

“Kalee, you know I’ll be leaving soon. I was wondering if it would be all right if Karri and Saleena stayed in the house? I hate asking you this, but I don’t know anywhere else they could stay,” Hawk said.

“Yes, they are more than welcome to stay at the house. Remember, Saleena is my sister. And Karri is like a sister. Don’t worry Hawk, they can stay there as long as they wish. When are you leaving?” she asked.

“In about a week. The Searcher should be about ready to return,” Hawk replied.

“Oh, I almost forgot. I got a message from one of the other elders. He would like you, Karri, Saleena and I to come to the main hall today at noon. He said he received a message from the Searcher the other day. He said that the Admiral wanted to show you something,” Kalee said.

“Did he say what it was?” Hawk asked.

“No, just for all of us to be there at noon.”

Hawk stood and started to walk towards the door. Kalee walked up behind him.

“How is Aslana?” she asked.

“She’s doing well,” he replied.

“I heard you and her are a couple now. Are you happy?” she asked.

Hawk stood there and gazed into Kalee’s eyes like he had done so many times before.

“Yes, we’re very happy. I’m going to ask her to be my mate when I return,” Hawk said in a soft voice.

“I’m so happy for you both. You belong together. I saw that as soon as you looked at her. The way you couldn’t keep your eyes off of her,” Kalee said.

Hawk started to blush.

“I better go. I have to stop by the clinic and tell Karri and Saleena about the meeting today at noon. Will you meet us there? Or shall we pick you up on the way?” he asked.

“I’ll be there. We have a meeting at ten. I’ll see you there,” Kalee said.

Hawk nodded and opened the front door.

“Kalee? Are you happy? I mean with Kestrel?” Hawk asked.

Kalee smiled.

“Yes Hawk. I’m very happy. He’s changed a lot, all for the good,” Kalee said with a smile on her face.

“I’m happy for you two.” Hawk hesitated for a moment. “I better go and talk to the girls. I’ll see you later,” he said as he walked out the door.

Kalee stood at the door watching Hawk. “I wish you and Aslana all the best,” she said to herself. She closed the door.

Hawk walked over to the clinic. But before he went inside the little old man from the bakery called to him. “Hawk!”

Hawk turned and smiled.

“Have you tried to make the seed bread yet?” he asked.

“Yes, I made some this morning for Karri and Saleena,” Hawk replied.

“How did it turn out?”

“Put it this way. The girls ate three slices each,” Hawk said.

“Three slices? You must have done a good job making it,” the old man said with a little laugh.

“I wouldn’t have been able to do it if it wasn’t for you showing me. Thank you my friend,” Hawk said with a smile. “Well, if you’d excuse me, I have to go talk to Karri and Saleena,” Hawk said shaking the little old man’s hand.

“Of course. And Hawk, if you want a job you can always come and work for me,” he said with a smile.

“I’ll think about that,” Hawk chuckled.

Hawk went inside the clinic and asked the office lady if he could please speak to Karri and Saleena.

“How are you today Hawk? One moment, I’ll let them know you’re here,” she said, then she quickly walked into the back.

Hawk stood there and waited. Looking around he saw a woman with a little girl, no older than two or three. Her mother was holding her close and rocking her in her arms. Hawk smiled and started to look at the other patients: an older woman with her two children and a few older people. The door opened up and the office lady came out.

“I’ll take you to them now,” she said extending her arm in the direction she wanted Hawk to go.

Hawk nodded and walked in. She took him into an examination room.

“They’ll be in shortly. They’re with patients right now.”

Hawk thanked the lady and sat down in the chair. Looking around in the exam room, Hawk noticed it had all sorts of kids pictures on the walls. He stood and started to look at them. He saw that they were drawn and signed by the kids that were patients. He started to read some of them. He soon noticed that they were all thank you notes. He saw one that had a picture of a mountain on it.

“That mountain looks like the mountain on Throm,” he said softly to himself. Just then Karri and Saleena came in.

“Uncle?”

Hawk turned to see Karri and Saleena with their white doctor’s coat on.

“I hope I’m not taking you away from something important?” he asked.

“No, we’re between patients right now.” Saleena said.

Hawk nodded.

“I’ll only be a minute. I need you girls to meet me and Kalee at the meeting hall today at noon. Something about a message from the Searcher,” Hawk said.

“Is the Searcher okay? Is everyone all right?” Karri asked.

“I’m sure everything is fine. Can you meet us there at noon?”

“Yes, we’ll tell Dennis that we have to meet you and Kalee there,” Saleena said.

“Good. Okay, I’m going to leave so you girls can see more of your patients and have them draw you more pictures,” Hawk smiled and pointed towards the wall.

Karri and Saleena smiled.

“They must really like you,” Hawk said as he was walking out of the exam room.

Just as the girls was about to answer, Dennis came out from an exam room down the hall.

“Hawk? What are you doing here? Are you okay?” he asked.

“I’m fine. I had to stop and ask the girls to meet me at the meeting hall at noon today. Do you think you can spare them for a while?” Hawk asked.

“It must be important, By all means yes.” Dennis looked over at Karri and Saleena. “ You girls take your time coming back. If the elders want to see all of you, it might take a while,” Dennis told them.

Hawk reached out and shook Dennis’s hand and thanked him.

“I’ll pick you girls up about fifteen minutes till noon,” Hawk said.

“All right uncle. See you then,” Karri said as they headed for their next patient.

“Dennis, how are they doing in their schooling?” Hawk asked.

“Hawk, those two girls are doing excellent. They study hard and are passing in everything,” Dennis said.

“I’m not trying to be nosy, but what do the elders want with you and the girls?”

“I really don’t know. Something about the Searcher,” Hawk replied. Hawk was about to leave when he looked into the exam room that he waited for the girls in.

“Dennis? There is a picture on the wall in this exam room. It looks like a mountain on Throm,” Hawk said with a puzzled look on his face.

Dennis laughed.

“That’s because it is a picture of the mountain on Throm. The one that drew that is one of the children I was able to get out of there before the attack,” Dennis replied with a smile.

“You mean that child made it all the way here?” Hawk asked with a surprised voice.

“Yes, several of them are here. They were either adopted by humans or other bird people.”

Hawk smiled.

“Thank you my dear friend,” Hawk said.

Dennis a little confused why he was being thanked stood there and cocked his head to one side. “Why are you thanking me?”

Hawk placed his hand on Dennis’s shoulder.

“Because, if it wasn’t for you, that picture would not be on that wall today,” Hawk replied with a smile.

Dennis started to blush.

Hawk turned and started to walk away.

“Hawk, would you like to meet one of those kids?”

Hawk turned back around. He shook his head in an approval motion.

Dennis motioned for Hawk to follow him. Hawk followed him into an exam room. There sitting on the exam table was a very beautiful young girl.

“Wren, this is Hawk. Hawk I’d like you to meet Wren.”

The girl smiled and reached her hand out to shake Hawk’s hand.

“It’s nice to meet you Hawk,” she said.

Hawk reached out to shake her hand, and smiled.

“It’s very nice to meet you also, Wren,” Hawk replied.

“Wren? Do you recognize this man?” Dennis asked.

“In a way he reminds me of a man on Throm. But that’s not possible is it?” she said hanging her head.

Hawk walked over to her and placed his finger tips under her chin and lifted gently.

“Wren, I am a survivor from Throm. The day our people were attacked, my mate and I were up at the soaring place,” Hawk said.

“Your mate was Ko ori?” she asked with tears forming in her eyes.

“Yes.”

She reached out and grabbed onto Hawk like she’s known him all her life and cried.

Hawk wrapped his arms around her to comfort her.

“Thank you Hawk,” Dennis said.

Hawk a little confused on why Dennis was thanking him.

“She has not been able to cry since she got here. We’ve talked about Throm and her friends and family, but she just wouldn’t cry. She needed to get it out,” Dennis said.

Hawk nodded.

“Wren, I’m going to be here for about another week. I’d like you to come and spend some time with me,” Hawk said in a comforting voice.

Wren looked up at Hawk.

“You’re leaving?” she asked with tears running down her cheek.

“I’m afraid I have to. The ship that I work on is coming back to pick me up soon, but I will be back. I promise. Wren, would you like to meet my nieces?” Hawk asked.

“Oh yes, please.”

Hawk walked out of the room and asked the office lady to find and send Karri and Saleena to the exam room. It didn’t take long before the door opened and in walked Karri and Saleena. They ran over to Hawk.

“Uncle, are you all right?”

Hawk nodded. “I’m fine. I wanted you two to meet someone.”

“Wren, this is Karri and Saleena, my nieces. Karri, Saleena this is Wren. Wren is from Throm. She is one of the survivors that Dennis saved.”

Wren smiled and reached out to shake their hands. “I’m happy to meet you,” she said.

“It’s very nice to meet you too, Wren.”

“I would like you girls to get to know each other while I’m gone,” Hawk said.

“Gone? Where are you going uncle?”

“Karri, you know the Searcher is probably on its way back to get me. I’ll have to leave when she gets here,” Hawk replied.

“But I thought since you girls always wanted to know what Throm is like, you and Wren could get together and talk.”

Dennis look at the clock on the wall.

“Huh, Hawk. It’s 11:45. You and the girls better get going.”

“He’s right. We’d better go. I’ll have them back as soon as possible. Wren, it was nice meeting you. Remember, come over to my house later and we can talk. Dennis, could you tell her where I live?” Hawk said as he and the girls ran out of the clinic.

They got to the meeting hall with a few minutes to spare.

“Uncle? Why did you want us to meet Wren?” Karri asked.

"I want you two to get to know her. Her parents were killed on Throm. She has an adopted family now, but now she knows you're my nieces, she might open up more. She really needs to cry." Hawk explained as they went inside the meeting hall.

The elders were sitting at the table waiting for them to arrive.

"I'm sorry we're late," Hawk said lowering his head. Karri and Saleena also lowered their heads.

"Please, sit."

Hawk and the girls sat in the chairs across from the elders.

"We asked you here because we received this message from your ship, the Searcher. They asked us to relay the picture to you," Black Hawk said.

Hawk and the girls sat quietly while the elders left the room. Kalee walked down and seated herself next to Saleena. Within minutes the large screen came to life. On it was Buck.

"Hawk, my friend. I hope this finds its way. We just finished cleaning up Septor 205. All the creatures are dead, but sorry to say, so is the wildlife. But just a few hours ago, one of the clean up crew members saw this and he recorded it for you."

Buck pointed to the control panel personnel, and a few seconds later an image came on the screen. There up in the sky soaring were two majestic bald eagles.

Hawk grabbed onto Karri's and Saleena's hands.

"But how?" he asked.

Buck came back on the screen.

"If I know you, you're probably wondering how. Well, the good doctor said it was a good possibility that the birds were up high enough to where the cyanide poison didn't reach them. We did find a few more birds, but all ground creatures are gone. I wanted to show you that not all things were destroyed. I'll be seeing you soon... Buck out."

The screen went dark again.

"Those birds survived?" Kalee asked.

"Yes, not all the birds were destroyed."

The elders walked back in. Hawk and the girls stood up. Kalee walked back up to the large table, and they all seated themselves again. Hawk and the girls waited for them to tell them to sit. But it didn't happen.

"We understand you'll be leaving us soon," Black Hawk said.

"Yes sir. The Searcher is most likely on its way back," Hawk said.

“We are going to hate to see you go. We just want you to remember, you will always be welcome here.”

“Thank you. I’m hoping to come back. I met a wonderful woman and I want to ask her to be my mate,” Hawk said.

“You know the rules; we elders must approve the marriage first,” White Eagle said.

“I understand,” Hawk replied.

“You all may leave,” Grey Falcon said.

Hawk turned to look at Karri and Saleena.

“You girls better get back to work. I have to go do some shopping for dinner tonight,” Hawk said.

Karri and Saleena looked at Hawk with a surprised look on their faces.

“Uncle? Did you hear what you just said?” Karri asked.

Hawk thought for a moment.

“Yes, I said I had to go do some shopping...” Hawk said starting to laugh .

“I’m glad Buck was not around to hear that,” he said still laughing.

The girls giggled.

“We’ll see you tonight uncle,” Saleena said.

Both girls walked out the door and headed back to the clinic.

Hawk slowly walked outside and looked around at all the people, both bird people and humans.

“I’m truly going to miss this place,” he said as he started to walk back to the house.

Chapter 39

When Hawk returned to the house he had a guest waiting at the door step.

“Wren? Are you looking for me or my niece s?” Hawk asked.

“I was going to leave you a note, but I didn’t have any paper. I was going to ask if I could come over later this evening? I know Karri and Saleena won’t be home till late. But I wanted to talk to you about Throm and what happened,” she said.

Hawk smiled.

“You can come over whenever you like. In fact, how about coming over for dinner tonight? If it’s all right with your parents,” Hawk said.

Wren smiled.

“I’ll go ask them right now.” She started to run off when she stopped and turned to face Hawk again. “I forgot to ask, what time will you be eating?”

Hawk laughed.

“Around 6 pm. I hope you like seed bread?” Hawk asked.

“I love seed bread. My adoptive parents don’t know how to make it so they buy it from the bakery,” she said.

“I used to buy ours there also, but the baker showed me how to make it. Tell your parents that if they would like to come over also, they are more than welcome too,” Hawk said.

Wren smiled as she turned and walked away.

Hawk walked into the house and found another guest sitting in the living room. Only this one he knew very well.

“It’s about time you came home. Where have you been?” Buck asked.

Hawk smiled.

“I had to go see the elders. How long have you been here?” Hawk asked with a smile.

“About an hour. Have you been staying out of trouble? Where are Karri and Saleena?” he asked.

“They’re at work in the clinic. And yes, I have been staying out of trouble, unlike you my friend,” Hawk said with a smile on his face.

Buck stood and walked over and shook Hawk’s hand. “It’s good to see you Hawk. It wasn’t the same after you left. So did you get to see the eagles?” Buck asked.

“Yes. I couldn’t believe it. What other birds did the clean up crew see?” Hawk asked.

“The crew said they’ve seen about four or five eagles and a variety of other kinds of birds,” Buck replied.

“I thought the Searcher wouldn’t be back for about another week,” Hawk said.

“The Admiral wanted to return to see what Acklon was really like. I see now why you wanted to stay here for your vacation. Where is Kalee? I thought you and the girls would be staying with her?” Buck asked.

“Kalee is at the meeting hall, with the elders. She won’t be home till later,” Hawk replied.

“So my friend, how are you two getting along?”

Hawk turned and walked into the kitchen.

“Kalee and I are just friends now. She is back together with Kestrel. And I have met another woman. Her name is Aslana. She lives next door. We have grown very fond of each other,” Hawk said.

“Fond of each other? Hawk, where did you pick up that word? You never used it before,” Buck asked with a puzzled look on his face. “How fond are you of this Aslana?”

Hawk turned and looked at Buck.

“I’m very fond of her. I’m going to marry her when I return to Acklon,” Hawk said.

Buck stood there in a daze for a few minutes. “You’re going to marry her?” he repeated.

“Yes.”

Buck started to smile. “I’m very happy for you my friend,” Buck said.

Hawk smiled.

“I thought you would try to talk me out of it?” Hawk said.

“Why? You need happiness in your life, just like everyone else. Will I get to meet Aslana?” Buck asked.

“Depends on how much time I have left. When does the Admiral want me to return to the Searcher?” Hawk asked.

“Not for about a week. He told me to come down to let you know that we’re back, and he granted us some shore leave. I was hoping you could show me around Acklon?” Buck asked.

“When do you want to start?” Hawk asked with a smile.

“Is right now too soon?” Buck said chuckling.

“Could we do it tomorrow? I have to prepare dinner for the girls, and a new friend. Are you going back up to the Searcher tonight?” Hawk asked.

“I was hoping maybe I could stay here with you and the girls. That’s if you don’t mind?” Buck said.

Hawk smiled as he turned to start fixing dinner.

“Of course, we have plenty of room. And Karri and Saleena would love to see you.” Hawk turned to Buck with a confused look on his face. “By the way, how did you find out where I was living?” he asked.

“Oh, when we notified the elders we were back and asked permission to come down here, they sent someone to meet me and they showed me where you lived,” Buck replied.

Hawk stopped preparing dinner and turned back around to look at Buck.

“Why don’t I take you to see Karri and Saleena? We can surprise them,” Hawk said.

“Sounds great,” Buck replied.

They walked out the door and headed for the clinic. Buck was amazed at all the bird people and humans walking past and saying hello to Hawk.

“You’ve got to be well known here,” Buck said.

“Here everyone is a family, humans and bird people,” Hawk replied.

Buck studied Hawk’s body language. He was more comfortable and proud, but yet very protective of these people. They were just around the corner from the clinic when Buck caught a whiff of the freshly baked bread coming from the bakery.

“It smells like someone is baking bread. It smells pretty good too,” Buck said.

“That’s the bakery across the street. They make the best seed bread. Of course, they make human bread as well,” Hawk answered.

They were just about to the clinic door when Hawk heard someone call his name. He turned to see Aslana and Ashla walking across the street.

“Who is that beautiful woman?” Buck asked watching her.

Hawk smiled.

“That’s Aslana and her daughter Ashla. Looks like you get to meet her before dinner,” Hawk said.

Aslana and Ashla walked over to Hawk and Buck. Hawk embraced her and Ashla.

“Aslana, Ashla, this is Buck. Buck this is Aslana and her daughter Ashla,” Hawk said with his arms still around Aslana’s waist.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you Aslana, and Ashla,” Buck said with a smile.

“Is this your friend from your ship?” Aslana asked.

“Yes, they just got back,” Hawk said in a low voice.

Aslana turned to Hawk.

“Does that mean you have to leave now?” she asked.

“No, the Admiral said I can stay till my leave is up, another week. Buck will be staying with me and the girls for a while,” Hawk said smiling.

“Where were you going?” she asked.

“I was taking Buck to see his nieces. They haven’t seen him yet,” Hawk replied.

“Oh, well I’ll let you go, for now. I’ll see you both at dinner. It was nice meeting you, Buck,” she said reaching out to shake Buck’s hand.

“It was an honor to meet you Aslana. And you too, Ashla,” Buck said shaking her hand.

Aslana leaned over and kissed Hawk on the cheek.

“I’ll see you later,” she said softly.

She and Ashla walked back across the street and headed for the bakery.

Hawk stood there and watched as she walked away, forgetting Buck was standing there.

“You are one very lucky man Hawk. She is beautiful, and her daughter is very polite also,” Buck said.

“Yes, I’m a very lucky man,” Hawk replied.

“Now, shall we go in and see your nieces?”

Buck nodded.

They opened the door and walked inside. The receptionist looked at Hawk and smiled.

“Are you here for the girls, Hawk?” she asked in a friendly voice.

“If they are not too busy, I’d like to surprise them. This is their other uncle,” Hawk said.

The lady smiled.

“I’ll put you and your brother in one of the exam rooms and have them come in that way, if that’s all right with you?” she asked.

“That sounds great. If you don’t mind?” Hawk asked.

“I think they would love to see him,” she said.

She stood up and walked over to the door, opening it and escorted Hawk and Buck to one of the exam rooms and closing the door.

“I want you to stand behind the door, so when they come in they’ll only see me,” Hawk said smiling.

Buck nodded.

A few moments later, the door started to open and Buck rushed to stand behind it. Karri and Saleena entered and saw Hawk standing there with a smile on his face.

“Uncle, did you want to see us?” Karri asked.

“No, but someone else did.”

Just then Buck closed the door. The girls turned and saw their uncle standing there with a smile on his face.

“UNCLE!!!” they squealed as they embraced him.

“You girls have grown so much. Look at you, you’re grown women now,” Buck said.

“Uncle? When did you get here?”

All of a sudden they had a sad look on their faces. “Is it time for uncle to leave?” they asked.

“No, I just came down for a visit and to see this wonderful planet I keep hearing about. Your uncle still has some time left. I asked Hawk if it would be all right if I stayed down here with you for a few days. But after meeting Aslana, I think I’d better leave, and let your uncle have his time with her without me hanging around,” Buck said.

“Don’t be silly uncle. We have plenty of room. Besides, I can always go and stay at my sister’s house,” Saleena said.

“Your sister?” Buck asked in a surprised voice.

Buck glanced over at Hawk.

“It turns out that Kalee is Saleena’s half sister,” Hawk replied.

“That’s great to hear, Saleena. I’m very happy for you. Maybe I could stay down here for a while. I need to get caught up on everything. Like what are you girls doing working here?” Buck asked.

“We’ll tell you everything at dinner. You are staying for dinner?” Karri asked.

Buck looked over at Hawk.

“Of course he is,” Hawk said.

“Will you be home at the regular time?” Hawk asked.

“Yes, uncle. We had a light day today. And we won’t be having classes tonight. Mrs. Swensen went into labor, and so did Mrs. Kensington. Dennis and Doctor Hanson will be tending to them. They asked us if we wanted to help, but I don’t think we’re really ready for that yet,” Karri said.

Hawk and Buck both smiled.

“Okay, we’ll see you at the house later on,” Hawk said.

Hawk and Buck walked out of the exam room with the girls and headed for the front door. On the way out they smiled at the receptionist. She smiled back.

“I hope they liked your surprise visit?” she asked.

“They did. Thank you,” Hawk said as he and Buck walked out the door.

As they walked down the street, Hawk pointed out some of the different stores.

“You mean all the stores carry items for both humans and bird people?”

“Yes,” Hawk replied.

They were just walking up to the house when Wren came running up to Hawk.

“Hello Wren. What are you doing here?” Hawk asked.

“My mother and father said I could come over for dinner. But they would like it if you could come over there and talk to them first,” Wren said.

“Of course. Give me a minute and you can take us over there,” Hawk said with a smile.

Hawk and Buck walked into the house while Wren stood outside waiting. Hawk walked back to the front door and smiled at Wren.

“I’m sorry Wren, would you like to come in?”

“Thank you, I would,” she said as she walked in.

Buck turned to Hawk.

“What was that about?” Buck asked.

“My people don’t enter someone else’s home until they are invited,” Hawk replied.

Inside Wren walked around looking at all the ancestral items. She turned to see Buck watching her. She started to get nervous and quickly walked over to Hawk as if for protection. Hawk turned and walked right into her.

“Wren, what’s wrong? Why are you standing so close to me?” he asked.

Wren pointed at Buck.

“Who is he?” she asked in a shy voice.

Hawk glanced over at Buck.

“He is my brother. Wren, are you afraid of him?” Hawk asked.

Wren nodded.

“You have nothing to worry about, child. Buck would never harm you. In fact, I believe Buck would lay down his life for you if he had to,” Hawk said.

“He would?” she asked.

“Yes, I would. I would never harm you or any other bird person Wren,” Buck replied.

“Do you feel better about Buck now?” Hawk asked.

Wren shook her head. “Yes.”

“Good. Now let’s go talk to your parents. I’m going to have to get back so I can start making dinner,” Hawk said.

Buck looked at Hawk with a surprised look on his face.

“When did you learn how to cook?” Buck asked.

“Well, when you have nothing to do, on a planet you don’t really know, you have to do something. I learned how to cook, with help from Kalee and Aslana,” Hawk replied.

Buck just smiled.

“Let’s go,” Hawk said.

Hawk, Wren and Buck walked out the door and followed Wren to her home. She opened the door and walked in.

“Mother, Father,” she yelled.

“Wren, did you bring Hawk with you?” a voice came from the living room.

“Yes father.”

“Show him in here.”

Wren escorted Hawk and Buck into their living room. There sitting at a table was an older gentleman with grey feathers and very thin. He tried to stand but he couldn't.

“Please sir, stay seated,” Hawk said walking over to him.

Hawk introduced himself and Buck.

“I'm Hawk, this is Buck,” Hawk said.

“It's nice to see you again Hawk. You don't remember me, do you?”

Hawk stared at the man for a while.

“No, I'm sorry. Should I know you?” he asked.

“It's been a few years since I'd seen you last. I think it was on Throm,” the man said.

Hawk started at him for a long time.

“I'm sorry. I just can't remember,” Hawk said.

“My name is Issac. I was Koori's godfather,” he said with tears in his eyes.

“Issac? But how? When?” Hawk said with confusion in his voice.

Issac smiled.

“How is Koori?” he asked.

Hawk hung his head, as did Buck.

“Issac, Koori passed on almost three years ago. Shortly after our people were murdered,” Hawk said.

“How?” he asked.

Hawk and Buck sat down and told him everything that had happened.

Buck, figuring Issac would be mad at him, got up to leave.

“Buck? Please come back and sit down. It was an accident. I cannot blame you or Hawk for what happened to Koori,” Issac said.

“Now, you wanted to have Wren over for dinner, to see if you can get her to talk about what happened on Throm, right?” Issac asked.

“Yes, Dennis said it might help her if s he could open up to a person she didn’t really know,” Hawk said.

“I trust Dennis. If he thinks it will help her to talk about it and help her get through the memories, then yes, please take her and see if you can help,” Issac said.

“Wren? Come in here,” Issac said calling to her.

“Yes father?”

“You can go and have dinner with Hawk and Buck tonight, if you want.”

Wren smiled.

“Thank you father,” she said as she embraced him.

Chapter 40

Hawk turned to gaze at Wren.

“Wren, why don’t you come over about 5:30. That way I’ll have time to prepare dinner,” Hawk said.

“Hawk? Would it be all right if I came over earlier than that? I can help set the table or even help you cook,” Wren said.

Hawk looked at Issac. Issac smiled and nodded his head in approval.

“That would be fine, Wren. Do you know how to make a salad?” Hawk asked.

“Yes, I can even cook,” she said smiling.

“That’s great. You can help me fix dinner then, if you’d like?” Hawk said smiling.

“Oh yes. I’d really like that,” she said with delight .

“Okay, why don’t you come over in about an hour. If that’s all right with your father?” Hawk said glancing over at Issac.

“I think that’s a wonderful idea,” he replied.

Hawk looked over at Wren and smiled.

“I’ll see you in an hour,” Hawk said as he and Buck turned to leave.

As they left, Buck turned to Hawk.

“What is with Wren?” he asked.

“Wren is a survivor from Throm. She has seen almost everything that happened there. Ever since she has not been able to cry or talk about it. So Dennis asked if I could help and try to get her to talk about it, at least,” Hawk replied.

“I’m sorry. Is that why she was frightened of me at first?” Buck asked.

“Yes, she didn’t know you, and you are a human,” Hawk said.

“I feel so sorry for that poor girl. Having seen her friends and family killed. Not being able to cry or talk about it. I hope you’ll be able to get her to talk about it,” Buck said.

Hawk smiled and nodded.

They were all most at the house when Buck stopped.

“Hawk, maybe it would be better if I didn’t come to dinner tonight. She needs to be with people she knows and trusts. Not with a stranger,” Buck said.

Hawk looked at his friend.

“No, it would be better if you were there. She might feel a little uncomfortable at first, but she will relax after a while,” Hawk said.

Buck smiled.

“If you think it won’t stop her from talking?” Buck replied.

“It won’t. We’re not going to force her to talk about it. When she feels comfortable about talking about it, she’ll talk,” Hawk replied.

Buck smiled.

“So my friend. What are we having for dinner tonight?” Buck said with a grin.

Hawk laughed.

They got back to the house and entered. Hawk went right away to the kitchen and started to prepare dinner. Buck, feeling like a fifth wheel, stood there and watched as his friend was preparing the meat and vegetables. About an hour later there was a knock at the door. Buck went to open the door and found Wren standing there smiling.

“Hello Wren. Please, come in,” Buck said.

“Thank you,” she said.

She entered and headed straight to the kitchen.

Hawk smiled.

“Well, are you ready to make that salad?” he asked.

Wren grinned.

“Yes, I even brought some more things to put into it. If you don’t mind?”

“I don’t mind at all. I’ll get the salad bowl out for you and let you get started,” Hawk said.

Hawk got the bowl out for Wren and she started to make the salad.

It was about 5 pm when Karri and Saleena walked through the front door. About five minutes after them came Aslana and Ashla. By 5:30 everyone was sitting at the table. Wren carried in the salad, Buck carried in the vegetables and Hawk the main course. The evening went well. Hawk talked about having to leave Acklon. Hawk, seeing tears starting to swell with in Wren’s eyes, started to talk about Thom hoping it would get her to talk about what happened. Sure enough it did. Wren started to cry, and she got up from the table and ran into Karri’s room closing the door. Hawk followed.

“Wren? Are you all right?” he asked.

There was no answer. He opened the door slightly and asked her again.

“Wren? Are you all right?”

This time he got an answer.

“Why do you have to leave me?” she cried.

Hawk entered the bedroom. Seeing Wren sitting on the edge of the bed, walked over and sat down next to her.

“Wren, you have your parents here. You won’t be alone. Karri and Saleena will also be here, as will Aslana,” Hawk said in a soothing voice.

“But, you won’t be here,” she cried.

“I will be back. It might be a couple of years from now, but I will be back,” Hawk said.

Hawk gently placed his hand around her shoulders. She leaned into him and cried even harder.

“Wren, me leaving is only part of it, isn’t it?” Hawk asked.

Wren lifted her head and gazed into Hawk’s eyes.

“Wren? What did you see on Throm?” he asked softly.

She sat up and lowered her head.

“I remember everything just like it was yesterday. All of us were outside playing, when we heard some yelling coming from the north side of the village. Dennis came running up and told us to follow him quickly. At first we thought he wanted to play a game with us as he often did. But on his face he had a scared look. We followed him, as he grabbed more children along the way. Soon after that I heard shots being fired and screaming. Some of the kids didn’t want to leave their mothers and fathers. We went to his house on the far side of the village and sat there waiting. He went in the back of his house and kicked out the back of the house as if trying to make a door. He came back in and told us we had to run as fast as we could towards the trees, and for us not to look back, no matter what we heard. Some older people were there also. We all got out the small opening and started to run. I wanted to stop and see what was going on, but he pushed me and told me to keep running. I remember once I turned and he wasn’t behind me. I stopped to see him running back to help the older people. Just then I heard another shot ring out. One of the older people dropped to the ground. Dennis knelt down next to him and held his hand for a moment. Then I heard another shot and another. Dennis started to run to catch up with the other older people and as he got to them another one fell. I turned to see if the other children had gotten to the tree line. When I turned around again, Dennis was right next to me. He shouted at me to run as he grabbed my arm and pulled me. I turned around one last time and saw two more older people go down. I noticed they were running as fast as they could, but they were running in a line across, instead of in a

single file. I heard one of the older people say, “get the children to safety.” Just then another shot rang out and down he went,” Wren said as she started to cry even harder.

Hawk looked up and saw Karri and Saleena standing quietly at the door. He motioned for them to enter. They walked over to Wren and wrapped their arms around her.

Hawk moved over and sat there with them for the longest time. He finally got up and walked out of the room and into the living room. Everyone was still sitting at the table.

“Is she okay?” Buck asked.

“It’ll take some time, but yes. I think she’ll be fine now,” Hawk replied.

Aslana stood up and walked over to Hawk and embraced him. Needing comforting himself, he embraced her in return. Buck, feeling like a fifth wheel, stood and started to clear the table.

“What are you doing?” Hawk asked after he released Aslana.

“I’m going to clear the table, so you and Aslana could spend some time together,” Buck said with a smile.

“No, you are my guest. Guests do not clear the table. The host does that,” Hawk said.

Buck looked at Hawk.

“You have changed my friend. You’ve changed for the better,” Buck said glancing at Aslana.

Hawk smiled.

“I’ll be back soon. I want to take Wren back to her parents,” Hawk said.

He walked back into the bedroom and sat down next to Wren once more.

“Wren, I think it would be a good time to take you home so you and your parents can talk about what happened. They have been worried about you, because you have not cried for the deaths of our people. Don’t you think it’s time that you cried with them?” Hawk asked in a soft voice.

Wren looked up at Hawk.

“Yes, I think it is time. I need to tell them what happened, and what I saw,” she said.

Hawk nodded and reached out his hand to her. She placed her small hand into his and stood up. They walked out of the bedroom and into the living room together.

“I’m sorry I ruined everyone’s dinner,” she said hanging her head.

“Wren, you didn’t ruin anyone’s dinner. You had to get that out from inside you. Now you’ll be able to mend yourself with the help from family and friends,” Buck replied.

Wren smiled. "Thank you."

Hawk walked Wren back home, where she sat and told her parents everything.

Hawk returned to the house where Aslana, Buck, and the girls were waiting.

"How did it go?" Aslana asked.

"She started to tell them everything before I even left the house," Hawk said with a grin.

"Hawk, what you did for that poor girl is wonderful. I would like to talk to you in private, if that's all right?" Aslana asked looking at Buck and the girls.

Buck turned to Karri and Saleena.

"Would you two like to help me do the dishes? So your uncle can talk with Aslana?" he asked with a grin.

Karri and Saleena smiled.

"Sure, uncle Buck."

They went into the dining room and finished clearing the table. Then they went into the kitchen. Hawk and Aslana went outside.

"Hawk, I want to tell you something. I know it's not a good time to bring this up. Remember when you asked me about waiting for you? I told you that I would give you my answer after you returned? I changed my mind, I want to tell you now. I love you with all my heart and soul, but I don't know if I can wait till you return to tell you that I would love to be your mate," Aslana said loudly.

Hawk smiled.

"Really? I was going to ask you to be my mate, but I didn't know how you would feel about waiting till I returned to be married," Hawk said.

"I'd wait forever, if I had to," Aslana said.

Out from inside they heard a happy call out.

Hawk smiled.

"I guess we won't have to tell them. I have a feeling they already know," Hawk said laughing.

The night ended shortly after midnight. Buck had already gone to sleep and the girls had gone to bed hours ago. Hawk and Aslana sat in each other's arms, talking about where they would live, how many children they wanted, and who to have as the elder to marry them.

The week passed quickly. Now it was down to only a few hours. Buck informed Hawk that the shuttle would be there about noon. Hawk walked around the village saying goodbye to his new friends. Wren came running up and embraced him.

“I’ll miss you,” she said.

“I made a promise to you, remember? I’ll be back as soon as I can,” Hawk said with a smile.

Hawk walked over to the bakery.

“I must leave soon. When I return, if you still need a helper, let me know,” Hawk said smiling.

The old man reached out and shook Hawk’s hand.

“You will always be welcome here,” he said.

Next came the hardest part: saying goodbye to Karri and Saleena.

Hawk walked across the street to the clinic. He lowered his head for a moment, then he opened the door. Inside the receptionist smiled.

“Hello Hawk. How are you today?” she asked.

“I’m fine, and you?” he asked in return.

“I’m doing fine. Did you want to see the girls?” she asked.

“Yes, it’s rather important that I see them,” he said.

She looked into Hawk’s eyes.

“Is everything all right?” she asked with concern.

All Hawk could do was nod.

“I’ll get the girls right away,” she said.

She went into the back and soon came out. “Why don’t you come in here. I’ll put you in one of the exam rooms. That way you’ll have some privacy,” she said motioning for Hawk to follow her.

Hawk followed her into the back and into one of the exam rooms.

“Thank you for all you’ve done to help my nieces,” Hawk said in a soft voice.

“Hawk, is there something wrong?”

Hawk hung his head, then raised it to look at this kind woman who helped his nieces in every way possible.

“I will be leaving shortly,” was all he could say.

The receptionist looked at Hawk, whose eyes were swelling with tears.

“I’ll get the girls right away,” she said as she left the room quickly.

Hawk started to pace the room.

“How do I tell them that I’m leaving today? They know I’m only here for a few months. I’m truly going to miss them. I have to be strong for them,” Hawk said to himself, while trying to wipe away the tears.

The door opened and in walked Karri and Saleena.

“Uncle, what’s wrong? Edna said that you were upset and that you wanted to see us right away,” Karri said.

“Karri, Saleena, I have to leave today. The shuttle will be here at noon to pick up Buck and myself,” Hawk said.

“You’re leaving?” Karri asked.

“You girls knew I was only here for a few months. Well, it’s time for me to leave now. But I will return as soon as I can,” Hawk said.

The girls started to weep softly.

“But uncle, where are we going to stay and with whom?” Saleena cried out.

“Kalee said you two can stay at the house as long as you wish. She’ll make sure you two eat and get plenty of rest. I want you two to promise me that you will continue with your studies. When I come back, I want to see both of you as doctors. But I want you to remember one very important thing, I love you both very much. And no matter how long I’m gone or how far away I am, I will always love you. Remember this, you are Hawk’s nieces,” Hawk said raising his head proudly.

“We’ll remember, uncle,” Karri said holding her head high also.

“That’s my girls. Now come, embrace me one last time,” Hawk said reaching out to them.

They walked quickly over to Hawk and threw their arms around him to embrace him for the last time.

“Now, go back to work, I must leave,” Hawk said.

The girls turned and walked out of the exam room with tears in their eyes. Dennis was walking down the hall when they passed him.

“Karri? Saleena? What’s wrong?”

Hawk walked out of the exam room and bumped right into Dennis.

“Hawk? What’s going on? I just saw Karri and Saleena crying,” he asked.

He soon noticed the swelling in Hawk’s eyes also.

“It’s time, isn’t it?” he asked.

Hawk nodded.

“Don’t worry about the girls, my friend. I’ll take care of them while you’re gone.”

Hawk smiled and shook Dennis’s hand.

“Thank you. Please, make sure they continue with their studies,” Hawk said.

“I promise,” Dennis replied.

Hawk walked out the door and headed for the house. He started to pack up his things when a soft voice came from behind him. He turned to see Aslana. She ran quickly to his arms and started to cry.

“I don’t want you to leave!” she cried.

Hawk pushed her away gently.

“Hear me now, you are Hawk’s woman. I will return.”

Hawk embraced Aslana for the last time and walked out the door. He met Buck at the landing dock.

“How is everything?” Buck asked with concern.

“They’ll be fine. Everyone I know will be watching them and taking care of them for me till I return,” Hawk replied.

“No, my friend. I meant how are you doing?” Buck asked again.

Just then the shuttle appeared. It landed and they started to walk over to it.

Buck turned to Hawk once more. “Well?”

Hawk hung his head.

“I’ll survive. But, only when I return will I live again.”

The doors closed.

Watch for the ending story...’The Return Home”