

“The Return Home” by grayladyfalcon

Chapter 1

Hawk went straight to his quarters after he arrived back on board the Searcher. He placed his bag on his bed, walked over to the portal and gazed out into space. “How can I just leave them there?” he thought to himself. He turned and walked back to his bed and opened up his bag. As he was about ready to put his things away, he found something in his bag that he did not pack, a note. He opened it and started to read.

“My dearest love, when you find this you will most likely be back on your ship. I wanted to tell you so many things before you left. How much I love you, and how much I’m going to miss you. Please my love, come home as soon as you can, so we can start our new life together. Love Aslana.”

Hawk’s eyes started to swell with tears. He closed them for a moment and thought of Aslana. He opened them again and walked back to the portal. He stood there and watched as Acklon got smaller and smaller. Soon it was gone completely. He finished unpacking and made his way up to the bridge.

“Welcome back Hawk. How was your vacation?” the Admiral asked.

Hawk just smiled and walked over to Buck.

“Have you told the Admiral yet?” Hawk asked.

“No. I figured you would want to tell him,” Buck replied.

“Admiral? What’s our next destination?” Buck asked.

“We’re returning to Septor 205,” the Admiral replied.

Hawk and Buck had a confused look on their faces.

“While we were picking you two up, we also picked up a couple of other guests to take there. They’re going to prepare Septor 205 for repopulation,” Asimov said.

“Who’s on board Admiral?” Hawk asked with excitement in his voice.

“There’s an elder, and a few other people,” Admiral Asimov replied with a smile.

Hawk looked over at Buck and Wilma.

“Do you know who the elder is?” he asked.

“No Hawk. We just found out about it ourselves,” Wilma replied.

Hawk turned to the Admiral.

“Admiral? Is it Kalee?” Hawk asked.

"I don't think so Hawk. I think it's another elder. I'm not positive though," he replied.
"Would you like to go and find out?" the Admiral asked.

Hawk stood there for a moment. He gazed over at Buck and Wilma.

"No sir," he replied.

The Admiral was a little confused about Hawk's reply. "Hawk, what's wrong?" Asimov asked.

Hawk looked at him with a blank gaze on his face.

"Nothing sir," he replied as he turned to watch the front screen.

Just then the bridge doors opened, in walked a security guard escorting Black Hawk onto the bridge. Hawk turned, smiled then lowered his head. Black Hawk smiled and walked directly over to Hawk.

"How are you Hawk?" he asked.

"I'm fine sir. I didn't know you were going to be on board. I would have escorted you myself," Hawk replied.

"Admiral, this is elder Black Hawk; elder Black Hawk, this is Admiral Asimov."

"It's an honor to meet you sir," Asimov said extending his hand to Black Hawk.

"It's nice to meet you Admiral Asimov," Black Hawk replied reaching out to shake Asimov's hand.

"About how long before we arrive at Septor 205?" Black Hawk asked.

"We should arrive there in about 3 days sir," the Admiral replied.

Black Hawk nodded his head in approval.

"Hawk? Would it be possible for you to show me around the Searcher?" he asked.

Hawk glanced over at the Admiral.

"Go ahead Hawk. After you're done showing elder Black Hawk the Searcher, you could show him back to his quarters. Then report back to me for your flight patrol hours," Asimov said.

"Yes Admiral," Hawk replied.

Hawk extended his arm and motioned the elder to the bridge door.

"After you sir," Hawk said lowering his head again.

Black Hawk and Hawk left the bridge. The Admiral looked over at Buck and Wilma.

“Why is Hawk lowering his head to the elder?”

“Sir, Hawk is showing his respects to the elder when he lowers his head,” Buck said.

Asimov glanced over at Buck.

“How did you know about that?” the Admiral asked.

“Hawk told me about it while I was with him and the girls on the planet,” Buck replied.

“How are Saleena and Karri doing?” Asimov asked.

“They are doing just fine sir. They’re working in a clinic during the day, and going to medical school at night,” Buck said.

“That’s wonderful. I know those girls will exceed in anything they do. I wonder if Dr. Goodfellow knows about that yet?” the Admiral asked as if hinting to Buck.

“I don’t think he does sir. Hawk hasn’t talked to anyone since he came back on board,” Buck replied.

“Maybe it would be better if we let Hawk tell him. He’s so proud of them, I wouldn’t want to take that away from him. He’s lost enough as it is right now,” Buck said.

“What do you mean? What has Hawk lost?” Admiral Asimov asked with a concerned look on his face.

“I think I said too much as it is Admiral. I think it would be better if you heard it from Hawk,” Buck said as he turned to leave the bridge.

“Freeze mister,” the Admiral yelled.

“What do you mean by Hawk lost enough?” the Admiral said again.

“Admiral, I shouldn’t say anything. It will be better coming from Hawk... sir,” Buck replied as he left the bridge.

“Wilma? Do you know anything about what Buck is talking about?”

“No sir,” Wilma replied.

By this time Hawk was showing Black Hawk the sickbay.

“Sir, this is Dr. Goodfellow. He is the one that saved Kalee,” Hawk said introducing Black Hawk to the good doctor.

Black Hawk extended his hand to shake Dr. Goodfellow’s hand.

"I'm very grateful to you doctor. You saved a very special person," Black Hawk said.

"Oh sir, it was a complete honor," Goodfellow replied. "She is one very special person. How is the dear girl doing?" Goodfellow asked.

"She is doing very well. Thanks to you," Black Hawk said smiling at the doctor. "You knew she was different, didn't you?" he asked.

Goodfellow smiled. "My dear friend, I found out when I examined her."

Black Hawk grinned at Goodfellow.

"I heard you also gave Karri and Saleena some medical training?" Black Hawk asked.

"I taught them a little. Most of it they learned from the books in our archives. How did you know about that?" Goodfellow asked.

"They told us on Acklon. They said that you are a wonderful teacher, strict but fair," Black Hawk said smiling.

"How are the dear girls?" he asked.

Black Hawk turned to Hawk.

"Maybe you should inform him," he said.

Hawk nodded. "Karri and Saleena are working in a clinic during the day and taking medical classes at night. They want to be doctors," Hawk said with a big smile on his face. "And it's all thanks to you doctor."

"Aww my dear boy, I'm so happy to hear that. Those two have a wonderful gift and I was hoping they would use it in that way," Goodfellow said smiling and clapping his hands together.

Hawk and Black Hawk laughed.

"We must be leaving now doctor. I wanted elder Black Hawk to meet you," Hawk said.

"My dear boy, I'm so happy things are working out for the girls. Now I wish they would work out for you," Goodfellow said with a sad look on his face.

Hawk just smiled. He and Black Hawk turned to walk out of sickbay when the door opened. In walked Wilma.

Chapter 2

Black Hawk smiled. "I don't believe I've had the pleasure of meeting this beautiful woman," he said smiling at Wilma.

"I'm sorry sir. This is Colonel Wilma Deering; she's head of security. Wilma, this is elder Black Hawk," Hawk said.

Black Hawk gently took Wilma's hand. "It's an honor to meet you Wilma. Such a beautiful woman with such a powerful title. You must be remarkable in what you do," Black Hawk said with his gaze locked on Wilma.

Wilma blushed. "Thank you," she replied.

"Would you care to join us?" Black Hawk asked.

"Oh no thank you sir. I didn't mean to interrupt, but the Admiral wanted me to inform Hawk that his patrol starts in one hour," Wilma replied.

"Well perhaps later then," Black Hawk said still holding Wilma's hand.

"Perhaps dinner?" Black Hawk asked.

Wilma was still blushing. "I'd like that," she replied.

"Good. My quarters at...let's say five o'clock?" Black Hawk asked.

"Five o'clock will be fine," Wilma said smiling.

Black Hawk raised Wilma's hand to his lips and gently kissed it.

"Until then, Colonel," he said.

"Wilma, could you tell the Admiral I'll be there shortly?" Hawk asked.

"Of course Hawk. Sir, it was an honor to meet you," Wilma said as she turned to leave.

Black Hawk turned to Hawk.

"That is one beautiful woman. Why haven't you taken her for your mate?" he asked.

Hawk gazed at Black Hawk.

"Wilma is a good friend. She would risk her life for mine, yours or any other person. And I for her. But I cannot see myself with her as a mate. She is more like a sister," Hawk said. "Sir, I'll take you to your quarters. I have to get ready for patrol," Hawk said.

As they walked back to Black Hawk's quarters Black Hawk stopped and turned to Hawk.

"Hawk? Is it true you have a fighter in the shape of a bird?" Black Hawk asked.

“Yes sir,” Hawk replied.

“Is there a chance I could see it before you take me back to my quarters?” Black Hawk asked.

Hawk smiled.

“Of course; it’s on the way back to your quarters, so we can stop and I’ll show it to you,” Hawk said with a smile.

They walked a little way past Black Hawk’s quarters and walked into the landing bay. There was Hawk’s ship sitting close to the door.

“It’s magnificent,” Black Hawk said as he gazed at it.

Hawk smiled.

“If you’d like, when I return from patrol I’ll take you out in it,” Hawk said.

Black Hawk smiled.

“I’d like that very much,” he said.

Black Hawk was smiling like a child in a candy store, gently touching it as they walked around it. He turned to Hawk, smiled and continued walking around it. Hawk noticed that there was a tear forming in his eye.

“Sir? Are you all right?” Hawk asked.

Black Hawk quickly whipped the tear away and looked at Hawk.

“I’m fine. I think you better take me to my quarters. I don’t want the Admiral to be mad at me for keeping you from doing your patrol,” he said as he turned to walk towards the landing bay doors.

Hawk watched Black Hawk leave with a concerned look on his face.

“Something’s wrong, but what?” Hawk thought to himself.

He escorted Black Hawk back to his quarters. “I’ll be back in about eight to ten hours. I’ll make the arrangements with the Admiral to take you out in the War Hawk before I leave,” Hawk said as he lowered his head to Black Hawk.

Black Hawk smiled and patted Hawk on his shoulder. “I’ll be waiting,” he said with a smile as he entered his quarters.

Hawk turned and went back up to the bridge. The Admiral was standing by the control panel when he arrived.

“How did Black Hawk like the tour?” he asked.

“He enjoyed it sir. Sir? I’d like permission to take Black Hawk out in the War Hawk after I return from patrol,” Hawk said.

“Permission granted. I heard he has an eye for Wilma?” Asimov asked.

Hawk chuckled. “Yes sir. He couldn’t take his eyes off her all the while she was with us,” Hawk said smiling. Hawk lowered his head for a moment, then raised his head and looked at the Admiral again. “Sir? Is something wrong with Black Hawk? He doesn’t seem to be the same as he was on Acklon,” Hawk asked with concern.

“Come into the conference room, Hawk,” Asimov replied.

Hawk followed him into the room and the door closed.

“Please be seated. From what I understand, this is a one-way trip for Black Hawk. He won’t be returning to Acklon,” the Admiral replied.

Hawk stared at the Admiral for a moment. “Did he say why Admiral?” Hawk asked.

“Hawk, he’s dying. He wants to return home to Throm. He’ll be taken the rest of the way by another ship,” Admiral said lowering his head.

Hawk lowered his head again. “How long?” he asked.

“Soon. We’d take him back to Throm, but our orders carry us in another direction,” Asimov said.

“Is that why they wanted Kalee to become an elder so fast?”

“I believe so, Hawk.”

“Did the other elders know?” Hawk asked.

“Yes,” Asimov replied.

Hawk walked over to the portal and stared out into space. “Thank you for telling me sir,” he said as he turned to walk out of the room.

“Hawk? Are you going to be all right?”

Hawk turned and smiled a forced smile. “I’ll be fine sir,” was all he said as he walked out.

Hawk walked down to the hangar bay to get ready for his patrol. Buck walked up to him.

“Are you okay? You look like you just lost your best friend,” Buck said.

Hawk just glanced over at him and climbed into his ship. Buck, not sure what was wrong with his friend, tried to get him to tell him what he was thinking.

“Come on Hawk, what’s wrong?” Buck asked.

“Nothing,” was all Hawk said.

Buck walked over to his ship and climbed in. With a confused look still on his face he started the fighter engines. “I wonder why Hawk is acting this way? There must be something wrong with one of the girls. But, he would have told me. No, there must be something else wrong,” Buck thought to himself.

Hawk and Buck left the Searcher to begin their patrol. Several hours later the silence was getting to Buck.

“Hawk? Are you going to tell me what’s wrong or not? You’ve been quiet for a couple of hours now. That’s not like you. You haven’t talked to me, you haven’t said one word. Damn it Hawk... What’s wrong?” Buck yelled.

“He’s dying,” was all Hawk said.

“Who’s dying? The Admiral?” Buck asked.

Chapter 3

“No, Black Hawk,” Hawk replied.

“I’m sorry to hear that my friend. So he’s going to Septor 205 to die?” Buck asked.

“No, we’re taking him to Septor 205, then another ship will take him back home to Throm,” Hawk said.

Buck was silent after that. Neither one said a word the rest of the patrol. At the end of their shift they landed safely back on board the Searcher. Hawk climbed out of the War Hawk and headed straight for Black Hawk’s quarters. He gently knocked on the door, knowing that it was possible that Black Hawk was asleep. A moment later, just as Hawk was about to leave the door opened.

“Hawk? You’re back from patrol already?” Black Hawk asked.

“I’m sorry sir. Did I wake you?” Hawk asked.

“Oh no. I’ve just been talking to Wilma,” he replied.

A moment later Hawk heard Wilma’s voice. Hawk started to blush.

“I’m sorry sir. I can come back later,” Hawk said.

Black Hawk looked at Hawk with a shocked look on his face.

“Hawk, there’s nothing going on. We had a late dinner, and we’ve been sitting here talking about Throm and Earth,” Black Hawk said.

Hawk smiled.

“Come in Hawk,” Black Hawk said.

Hawk entered his quarters and saw that Wilma was sitting on the sofa. In front of her was a dinner plate half filled with food. Next to her was another plate also filled halfway with food.

“Wilma was just telling me about Falcon and Kala. They sound like they’re very special people in your life. I hope I’ll be able to see and meet them before we arrive at Septor 205?” Black Hawk asked.

“It would be my honor to introduce you to them,” Hawk said.

“Well, if you two gentlemen would excuse me. I have duties I need to tend to,” Wilma said as she stood up.

She walked over to Black Hawk and Hawk and shook Black Hawk’s hand.

“I enjoyed talking to you sir. I hope we can do this again before we arrive at Septor 205,” Wilma said smiling.

"I enjoyed your company, Wilma. Thank you for telling me all about Earth. I too hope we can do this again," Black Hawk said with a smile on his face.

"Good night sir. Good night Hawk," Wilma said as she left Black Hawk's quarters.

"Good night Wilma," Black Hawk said.

"Good night. Wilma, if you're going up to the bridge, could you tell the Admiral I'm on my way up for the debriefing?" Hawk asked.

"Of course Hawk," Wilma replied.

The door closed and Black Hawk walked back over to the sofa and seated himself. He motioned for Hawk to join him. Hawk quickly walked over and sat down next to him.

"Sir, I'm really sorry I interrupted your dinner with Wilma," Hawk said.

"It's all right Hawk. How long will it take for your debriefing?" Black Hawk asked .

"Not long sir."

"Good. I was hoping you could take me to meet Falcon and Kala. That is, if it's not too late," Black Hawk said.

"I'll stop by their quarters on the way up to the bridge and find out if they're sleeping or if they're awake sir," Hawk replied.

"Very good. You had better get up to the bridge. The Admiral is probably waiting for you. I'll speak with you again soon," Black Hawk said.

Hawk stood and lowered his head. He turned to walk out the door when Black Hawk called out to him.

"Hawk?"

Hawk turned around. "Yes sir?" Hawk answered.

Black Hawk looked into Hawk's eyes.

"Never mind. I'll talk to you again soon," Black Hawk said as he turned to gaze out the portal.

Hawk lowered his head again and walked out the door. As he was walking to Steve and Karen's quarters thoughts started to run through his mind.

"Why does he want to meet Falcon and Kala? And why did he call me back only to change his mind about asking or wanting to talk to me about something?" Hawk stopped at the quarters of Steve and Karen. He gently knocked. Soon the door opened.

"Hawk? When did you get back?" Steve asked with a smile on his face.

"I got back a while ago. But I had to go out on patrol."

Hawk lowered his eyes to the floor then raised them again and looked into Steve's eyes. "I was wondering if the twins were still awake or not?" he asked.

"You know better than to ask that. They haven't been going to bed till about the time we do," Steve replied smiling.

"I was wondering if it would be all right if I brought Black Hawk to meet them? I would really appreciate it," Hawk said.

"Hawk, you're their godparent. You'll always be welcome to see them whenever you like," Steve replied.

"Thank you Steve. I have to report to the Admiral first, then I'll go get Black Hawk, and then we'll be over," Hawk said.

"That's fine Hawk. Both of us will be here. Besides, we'd like to find out how Karri and Saleena are doing. Come back when you're ready," Steve said.

Hawk shook Steve's hand and walked out of their quarters and headed for the bridge. Asimov was standing looking over the control panel when Hawk walked on to the bridge.

"Is Black Hawk all right?" the Admiral asked.

"I really don't know sir. On Acklon, he was just fine. But here on the ship I'm not sure what to think. When I was leaving his quarters to come here he called me back. Then he told me he'd talk to me later. Admiral, he's never done that before. It looked like he forgot what he was going to say," Hawk said with concern.

"Hmm, I really don't know what to say Hawk. He's only been around you and Wilma. I've offered to bring him up here to the bridge, but he refused. Said he was quite comfortable in his quarters," the Admiral replied.

"Sir, are you ready for the debriefing?" Hawk asked.

"Did you have any problems on your patrol?"

"No sir."

"Debriefing over. Thank you, Hawk. You're dismissed," Asimov said.

"Thank you sir," Hawk said with a smile.

Hawk left the bridge and headed back to Black Hawk's quarters. He knocked softly on the door. There was no answer. He knocked again only a little harder. Still no answer.

"Sir, are you awake?" Hawk asked loudly. He knocked even harder. "Sir, are you awake?" he repeated.

Hawk walked over to the main intercom and called for the Admiral.

“Yes Hawk. What is it?” he asked.

“Admiral, I’m down at Black Hawk’s quarters. Sir, he won’t answer the door.”

“Have you tried knocking?”

“Yes sir. I’ve knocked on the door harder and harder each time I knocked while I called out his name,” Hawk replied with a very concerned voice.

“Hawk, try one more time. If he still doesn’t answer, we’ll use the door override to open it,” the Admiral said.

“Yes sir,” Hawk said.

“Black Hawk? Are you awake?” Hawk said even louder while he knocked on the door again.

“Sir, still no response,” Hawk said.

The Admiral turned to Wilma. “Get down there and assist Hawk. We’ll open the door.”

Wilma nodded her head and walked very quickly to Black Hawk’s quarters.

“Override the door lock,” the Admiral ordered.

A moment later the door opened.

Chapter 4

Hawk and Wilma rushed into Black Hawk's quarters followed by two security guards. There, sitting in the chair that he had placed close to the portal earlier, was Black Hawk. Hawk and Wilma approached him slowly.

"Black Hawk?" Hawk said.

There was no answer. Hawk turned and looked at Wilma. Wilma walked up next to Hawk and glanced down at Black Hawk.

"Is he dead?" she asked softly.

Hawk knelt down next to him and gently placed his finger on the jugular to see if he could feel a pulse.

"He still has a pulse," Hawk said as he stood up.

Just then Black Hawk opened his eyes.

"Hawk? What's wrong?" he asked not knowing why all these people are in his quarters.

"Sir? Are you all right?" Hawk asked.

"Of course I'm all right. Why are all these guards in my quarters?" he asked.

"Sir? Didn't you hear me knocking earlier?" Hawk asked.

Black Hawk looked at Hawk with a confused look on his face.

"I must have fallen asleep," Black Hawk said as he stood up.

"Sir, I knocked and knocked on your door. I even called out to you," Hawk said in a worried tone.

"I'm sorry if I frightened you. I must have really been enjoying that dream I was having. So much that I didn't even hear you knock," Black Hawk replied.

Wilma walked up next to Black Hawk and took his hand in hers.

"Are you sure you're all right?" she asked.

Black Hawk looked at Wilma and smiled.

"Yes my dear. I'm fine. Thank you for being so worried about me," he said gently patting her hand in reassurance.

Wilma sighed a big sigh of relief.

“Sir, I came by to see if you’d like to go meet Falcon and Kala now. But if you’re too tired we can do it tomorrow,” Hawk said.

“Nonsense. I’m wide awake. Then maybe if the Admiral approves it, you could take me for a ride in your ship?” he asked with a smile.

“Of course. I’m sure the Admiral would approve it. But first, are you sure you’re okay?” Hawk asked again with concern.

“I’m just fine. Now let’s go see Falcon and Kala. On our way there, you can tell me how they came to be on the Searcher and what happened to their real parents,” Black Hawk said as he stood up.

Wilma stood next to him as did Hawk just in case he fell. They walked out of his quarters. At first he moved very slowly, but as they walked more his walk became more steady and sure. Wilma parted company with them about halfway to Karen and Steve’s quarters. Hawk turned his head once in a while to watch if Black Hawk was having any trouble walking. As they got closer to Karen’s and Steve’s, Black Hawk stopped and turned to face Hawk.

“Humans killed their own kind?” he asked.

“Yes sir. The man that had ordered all our people killed on Throm and there on Serenity was after Karri and Saleena. He didn’t care who he killed. He wanted a trophy or a set of trophies, namely Karri and Saleena,” Hawk said.

“And you killed this human?” he asked.

“No sir. While I was chasing him, he slipped and fell off a mountainside. I tried to reach him and pull him up, but I couldn’t reach him. When he was falling he had his eyes fixed on me and mine were fixed on him,” Hawk said with his eyes looking down.

“You tried to save him even after knowing he just murdered Karri and Saleena’s parents?”

“Yes sir.”

Black Hawk turned and started walking again.

“I’m proud of you Hawk. Though he murdered your niece’s parents, you still wanted to save him,” Black Hawk said as they walked.

Hawk raised his head.

“Sir, I don’t know if I really wanted to save him. I wanted to kill him, but I also wanted to save him.” Hawk turned to face Black Hawk. “Does that make any sense?” he asked.

Black Hawk smiled.

“Yes, it makes perfect sense. You had hatred for this human that had murdered so many of our people, plus many of his own. But, you still had the heart to try to save him,” Black Hawk replied.

They arrived at Karen and Steve's door. Hawk knocked softly. The door opened.

Karen was standing there with Falcon in her arms.

"Hawk, please come in," she said with a smile.

Hawk and Black Hawk entered. Karen escorted them into the living room where Steve was holding Kala. Hawk introduced them to each other.

"Steve, Karen...This is Black Hawk, he's one of the elders on Acklon. Sir, this is Karen and Steve," Hawk said.

"It's very nice to meet you sir," Karen said reaching out to shake Black Hawk's hand.

"Please, won't you sit down?" she asked.

Black Hawk and Hawk sat on the sofa next to Steve. Steve looked at Black Hawk and smiled.

"Would you like to hold her, sir?" he asked.

Black Hawk glanced over at Hawk. Hawk nodded gently.

"I would love to," he replied.

He reached out and gently took Kala in his arms. Kala, knowing her uncle Hawk, started to laugh and play with Black Hawk's head feathers.

"Oh, be careful Kala," Karen said.

Black Hawk looked at Karen. "It's quite all right," he said smiling.

Falcon was the next to go over to Black Hawk. At first he was a little hesitant, not knowing this stranger. But after watching Kala, he worked up enough courage to walk over to Black Hawk. Black Hawk picked him up and placed him on the other side of his lap. Kala was having a blast playing with the head feathers on Black Hawk's head when Falcon reached over and pushed her hands away.

"Falcon, that's not nice. Why did you push your sister like that?" Steve asked.

Falcon looked at Steve and gave him a look of defiance.

"I'm sorry. He's been acting like this for over a month now," Karen said hanging her head.

"He's trying to show his dominance over Kala," Black Hawk replied.

"But why? She's his sister. He should want to protect her, not harm her," Karen said.

"I don't think he's trying to harm her. It's more like, you shouldn't be playing with this strange man's head," Black Hawk said.

“Sir, he has been doing this for over a month.” Karen stopped and turned to Hawk.

“He started it shortly after you left, Hawk,” she said.

“Do you think it’s possible he’s doing this because you left him?” Steve asked.

Hawk stood up and started to walk towards the door. The next thing he heard was Falcon screaming and holding his arms out to Hawk running towards him.

“Hawk, your face and arms were the first thing these children seen and felt. Falcon considers you his father, not Steve,” Black Hawk said.

Black Hawk turned to Karen and Steve.

“How long ago did you take custody of the children?” Black Hawk asked.

“Just before Hawk and the girls left for Acklon,” Karen replied.

Black Hawk lowered his head then raised it again looking over at Hawk.

“Did you tell the children goodbye before you left?” he asked.

Hawk stood there for a moment then lowered his head.

“No. I didn’t,” Hawk replied looking down towards the floor.

“Falcon thinks you abandoned him and Kala. He doesn’t want her to get hurt again by getting to close to another bird person,” Black Hawk said. “That’s why he’s acting this way.”

“But I’ve seen the way they held onto Karen and Steve they loved them. I figured they were happy with them,” Hawk said.

“No Hawk. They were happy with you and the girls. It’s true they love Steve and Karen and they think of them as their parents. But, you and the girls are a special part of their life,” Black Hawk said.

Hawk looked over at Steve and Karen.

“I’m so sorry,” Hawk said lowering his head.

“Hawk, it’s not your fault. How were you to know how they would react,” Karen said.

“Hawk, I did not say that to make you feel bad. I think if you spend more time with them and tell them when you are leaving and why, it would help them a lot more adjusting to having to depend on Steve and Karen more without the mishaps with Falcon,” Black Hawk said as he stood.

“Do you think that will really help?” Karen asked.

“Yes. I do,” Black Hawk replied.

“Why don’t you try it now. Explain to Falcon and Kala that we are leaving, but you’ll be back soon. Tell them where you’re going. They might be young, but they do understand,” Black Hawk said.

Hawk turned to Black Hawk.

“Where should I tell them we’re going?” Hawk asked.

“Tell them you are taking me for a ride in the War Hawk. That you will not be gone too long and that when you get back you will come here to see them. They have to be made to feel that they can trust you again,” Black Hawk said.

Hawk looked at Black Hawk with a strange expression on his face.

“Why are you looking at me like that? Didn’t you tell Karri and Saleena when you had to leave on patrol or on a mission for the Admiral?” Black Hawk asked.

“Well, yes. I always did tell them where I was going and when I was leaving,” Hawk replied.

“What makes Falcon and Kala any different?” Black Hawk asked.

Hawk walked back over and picked up Falcon and Kala and placed them on his lap. He began to explain to them that he had to leave for a little while, but that he would be back and he would play with them for a while. Falcon and Kala wrapped their arms around Hawk’s neck and embraced him. Karen and Steve stood there next to Black Hawk and smiled. Hawk placed Falcon and Kala back on the floor and walked over to Black Hawk, Karen and Steve. Falcon put his arms around Kala and hugged her.

“They’ll be all right now,” Black Hawk said as he turned to walk out the door.

He turned around and looked at Hawk, Steve and Karen.

“They just needed to be treated like people. With love and respect,” he said with a smile as he walked out the door.

Chapter 5

Hawk and Black Hawk started to walk towards the bridge.

“Where are we going?” Black Hawk asked.

“I need to go to the bridge and ask the Admiral if I could take you out in the War Hawk, sir,” Hawk said.

“Good. I’d love to see what the bridge looks like. I was up there for a short time when we were still at Acklon, but I haven’t been up there since,” Black Hawk said with a smile.

Hawk smiled.

Black Hawk turned to Hawk.

“Do you think Wilma will be up there?” he asked.

“Yes sir. She’ll be there,” Hawk replied.

As they entered the bridge Admiral Asimov turned and smiled at Black Hawk.

“Welcome sir,” he said.

“Thank you Admiral,” Black Hawk said looking at Wilma smiling.

“Admiral? I was wondering if it would be permissible if Hawk took me out in the War Hawk?” he asked.

“Of course. Permission granted,” Asimov replied.

“Thank you Admiral,” Black Hawk said as he and Hawk left the bridge.

They headed for the hangar. Along the way they ran into Buck.

“Buck,” Hawk said.

“Hawk, where have you been the past few hours?” Buck asked glancing at Black Hawk.

“I’ve been over at Karen’s and Steve’s introducing Black Hawk to the twins,” Hawk replied.

“Oh, so this is Buck?” Black Hawk asked.

“Oh, I’m sorry sir. Black Hawk, this is Buck Rogers. Buck, this is elder Black Hawk from Acklon,” Hawk said.

Buck reached out to shake Black Hawk’s hand. But this time Black Hawk didn’t reach his hand out. He just looked at Buck. Buck feeling a little awkward withdrew his hand and stood there.

“Is this the human you told me about?” Black Hawk asked.

“Yes sir,” Hawk replied.

A few moments later Black Hawk smiled and reached out his hand to Buck. Buck, still feeling a little unsure, reached his hand back out to Black Hawk.

“It’s an honor to meet you sir,” Buck said.

“No Captain. It’s a great honor to meet you,” Black Hawk replied.

Buck stood there with a confused look on his face. Black Hawk started to laugh out loud.

“I can see you’re a little confused. Please walk with us, and I’ll explain.”

Buck walked next to Black Hawk on the way to the hangar.

“Hawk told me everything about you Buck. From when you and he first met to now. He informed me that you are over 500 years old. I must say that is impressive,” Black Hawk said.

Buck smiled.

“Well sir. I really didn’t have anything to do about the age factor. But as for meeting Hawk, that was more like a destiny,” Buck replied.

Black Hawk nodded. They soon arrived at the hangar.

“Well, I’ll leave you two to go on your way. I have to report to the Admiral,” Buck said as he shook Black Hawk’s hand again. “It was nice meeting you sir.”

“Goodbye Buck,” Black Hawk said as they entered the hangar.

Hawk escorted Black Hawk over to the War Hawk and helped him in. He then climbed in, reached back and helped Black Hawk to hook up his harness. He then hooked up his.

“Hawk to bridge.”

“Go ahead Hawk.”

“Request opening of hangar 5 doors.”

“Request approved... bridge out.”

“Hawk out.”

The doors to hangar bay 5 started to open wider and wider. Hawk glanced over his shoulder.

“You should hang on sir. The take off from the ship is very quick,” Hawk said.

“I’ll be fine Hawk, thank you,” Black Hawk replied.

Within a few seconds the War Hawk was on the outside of the Searcher. Hawk turned around and saw that Black Hawk had a smile on his face.

“Are you all right sir?” Hawk asked.

“Oh yes Hawk. I couldn’t be better,” he replied.

Hawk was gentle on the controls at first, allowing Black Hawk to get use to the feel of flying.

“Can it go faster?” Black Hawk asked.

“Yes sir.” Hawk lay on the throttle more. He turned around to see Black Hawk laughing.

Hawk smiled. It gave Hawk great pleasure to see Black Hawk smiling, knowing that when they arrived at Septor 205, he would never see Black Hawk again. They spent hours flying alongside the Searcher. Finally it was time to return.

“I’m sorry sir. But we have to return to the Searcher. We’re low on fuel and I must get some rest before my next patrol,” Hawk said.

“I understand Hawk. Thank you for taking me out in your ship. I really enjoyed it,” Black Hawk replied.

They returned to the Searcher. Hawk climbed out first and helped Black Hawk out of the War Hawk.

“I’ll take you back to your quarters sir,” Hawk said.

Black Hawk nodded. “Thank you.”

Hawk escorted him back to his quarters, then returned to the War Hawk to get it fueled.

Several hours had passed. Hawk was up and ready for his next duty of patrol. With the ship all fueled and ready, he went up to the bridge and talked to the Admiral.

“Sir? How long before we arrive at Septor 205?” Hawk asked.

“About twelve hours. Why?” Asimov asked.

“I was going to request permission to take Black Hawk back out for another ride in my ship. He really seemed to enjoy it,” Hawk replied.

“I don’t see why not,” the Admiral replied.

“Thank you sir.”

Hawk joined Buck in the landing bay. They left and started their shift on patrol. About six hours later, Buck and Hawk returned from their patrol. They walked up to the bridge and had the debriefing with the Admiral. Hawk then made his way back down to Black Hawk’s

quarters. He knocked on the door. No answer. He knocked again. Still no answer. Hawk walked across the hall and got on the intercom.

“Hawk to bridge.”

“Go ahead Hawk.”

“Admiral? Have you seen or heard from Black Hawk since I left on patrol?” Hawk asked.

“No, I’m afraid I haven’t. Why?” he asked.

“I just knocked on the door several times and I don’t get an answer. I think he might be sleeping. But he should have opened the door or acknowledged me,” Hawk replied.

“I’ll go ahead and by-pass the lock. Let me know if he’s all right,” Asimov said.

“Yes sir.”

The door started to open, slowly at first. Then with a sudden whoosh, it was open all the way. Hawk walked inside and saw that Black Hawk was sitting in the chair that he had placed by the window before. Hawk smiled and walked around to the front of the chair. He reached down and shook Black Hawk gently. He got no response. He tried it again. Still no response. Hawk knelt down and felt for a pulse. This time there was none. Hawk jumped up and ran quickly over to the intercom.

“I need medical in Black Hawk’s quarters right away,” he ordered.

He swiftly walked back to Black Hawk, trying everything possible to wake him. The medical team arrived within seconds. Dr. Goodfellow knelt down next to Black Hawk. He stood up and looked Hawk in the eyes.

“I’m sorry my dear boy, he’s gone,” Goodfellow said.

Hawk stood next to Black Hawk for a short time before he glanced out the portal and saw Septor 205 right outside the portal.

“He almost made it home,” Hawk said softly.

The intercom started to crackle. “Bridge to Hawk.”

Hawk slowly walked over to the intercom. “Hawk here.”

“Hawk? Is everything all right with Black Hawk?” the Admiral asked.

“Sir, elder Black Hawk is dead,” Hawk said then he walked out of the room.

Admiral Asimov hung his head. Wilma’s eyes started to swell with tears. Buck walked onto the bridge, walked over to Wilma.

“Wilma? What’s wrong?” he asked.

Wilma looked at Buck and wept even more. She placed her arms around Buck's neck and sobbed deeply. "Black Hawk is dead," she cried.

"What?" Buck said.

"Hawk just found him. He was going to take him for another ride in the War Hawk. Black Hawk didn't answer the door so the Admiral ordered the override of his quarters. That's when Hawk found him," Wilma said crying.

Buck embraced her. "Where's Hawk now?" he asked with concern.

Wilma glanced up at Buck. "I don't know. The last time we heard from him he was in Black Hawk's quarters," Wilma replied.

Buck broke away from Wilma's embrace. "I have to find him," Buck said leaving the bridge.

Admiral Asimov looked over at communications. "Send a message to Acklon. Inform them that elder Black Hawk had passed away, upon the arrival to Septor 205," the Admiral ordered.

"Yes sir," communications replied.

Chapter 6

Buck rushed to Black Hawk's quarters, hoping Hawk was still there. When he arrived he found the door open and no one inside. He hurried to sickbay, thinking Hawk might have gone with the doctor. The door opened and Buck quickly walked inside. Looking around and not seeing Hawk, he walked over to Dr. Goodfellow.

"Have you seen Hawk?" Buck asked in a concerned voice.

"No my dear boy. I haven't seen Hawk since he called for us to come to Black Hawk's quarters. I remember he was there for a few moments after I informed him that Black Hawk was dead. After that, I don't know where he might have gone," Goodfellow replied.

"Thank you doctor," Buck said as he headed for the door.

"Buck? If you find him, let him know he can come and talk to me any time he needs to," Goodfellow said with a concerned look on his face.

Buck nodded and left sickbay. Thinking of where he might have gone, Buck headed for Hawk's quarters next. He knocked on the door, no answer. He knocked again and called out Hawk's name, still no answer. Thinking that he might not be in, Buck headed for the next place he could think of, the hangar bay. Buck entered and started to look around, asking all of the crewmembers if they had seen Hawk. They all answered no. Buck left the hangar and stood outside the doors for a moment. Then he remembered one place Hawk loved to go, the galactic gardens. Hawk enjoyed going there because some of the flowers reminded him of Throm. Buck started to walk even faster hoping to find his friend. Buck arrived at the gardens and walked in. At first he didn't see Hawk, so he walked around all the paths. He soon found Hawk, sitting on a bench with his head in his hands. Buck slowly walked up to him and placed his hand on Hawk's shoulder. Hawk raised his head and looked at Buck with a faraway look in his

"I'm sorry my friend," Buck said softly.

Hawk placed his head back down in his hands and started to sob softly. Buck sat down next to him and tried to comfort his friend. He sat there for hours with Hawk.

"Why?" was all Hawk said.

"I don't know, my friend," Buck replied.

"He seemed so happy and full of life when he was out in the War Hawk," Hawk said as he turned to face Buck.

"Hawk, you knew and I knew that he was dying. That's why he wanted to return to Throm. To die in his homeland," Buck replied.

Hawk gazed at Buck.

"I know, but still. He was a gentle man. He cared for people. Both human and bird people alike," Hawk said with tears in his eyes.

"I didn't really get to know him. But from the way you and Wilma reacted about his death, he must have been very special," Buck said.

Hawk turned away for a moment then turned to face Buck once again.

"He was a very special man," Hawk said as he stood up and started to walk towards the door.

"Where are you going?" Buck asked with concern.

Hawk turned and gazed at his friend. "I'd like to talk to the Admiral for a moment," Hawk replied.

Buck nodded. "I'll talk to you later?" Buck asked.

Hawk smiled, then left the galactic garden. He slowly made his way to the bridge. The Admiral turned and looked at Hawk.

"Are you all right?" he asked with concern.

"Yes Admiral. Admiral? May I speak to you in private," Hawk asked.

The Admiral nodded and walked into the meeting room, followed closely by Hawk. The door closed.

"What can I do for you Hawk?" the Admiral asked.

"Sir, I'm requesting permission to take Black Hawk to T hrom myself," Hawk said.

"Hawk, I understand why you are asking this. But it's not up to me. I can put your request through to the Galactic Council if you'd like?" Asimov asked.

"Thank you sir."

Hawk hesitated for a moment.

"Sir, I'm also requesting m y release from the Searcher. Sir, I've abided by the rules and regulations of the Galactic Council since I came to be here on the Searcher. I've done a lot of thinking and I'd like to request my release," Hawk said looking at the Admiral.

"Hawk? Do you me an you want to leave the Searcher for good?" the Admiral asked.

Hawk lowered his head. "Yes sir."

The Admiral sat down in his chair and gazed at Hawk. The Admiral reached into his desk drawer and pulled out a folder and started to read through it.

"It s ays you've been on the Searcher now for about two and a half years. There's never been any problems or trouble with you. You're a valued member of the crew. Are you sure this is what you want, Hawk?" the Admiral asked.

Hawk looked into the eyes of the Admiral. "Yes sir. I think it's time for me to go home. To be with my family," Hawk said.

The Admiral started to write something down in the log. He gazed up at Hawk and turned the folder around and pasted it over to Hawk.

"You need to sign this. It's a request for dismissal from the Searcher. I've already signed it," the Admiral said with a smile.

Hawk looked at the form then looked up at the Admiral again. He picked up the pen and signed his name. He then gently slid it back over to the Admiral.

"Is that all there is to it?" Hawk asked.

Asimov smiled. "I'm afraid not Hawk. I have to send in your request to the Galactic Council. They will contact a few members of the Searcher to check up on your behavior. They will then check your record with other planets, like Serenity and Acklon. If they all vouch for your behavior and conduct they will send a message back to me with a time for the court hearing. At that time you may speak to the Council yourself or be represented by a crewmember. It will be entirely up to you," Asimov replied.

"Then I'll be able to return home?" Hawk asked.

"Hawk, we might be able to get you permission to take Black Hawk home. But for your release from the Searcher, that might take some time," the Admiral said.

"How much time sir?" Hawk asked.

"I can't say right off. But maybe in about one to two years."

The Admiral turned his eyes to the floor. "I'm sorry it couldn't be sooner," he replied.

Hawk nodded.

"Thank you sir," he said as he turned to leave.

"Hawk? I'm going to put this through as a priority one request," Asimov said.

Hawk smiled and left the room. He walked out into the bridge area and was greeted by Wilma.

"I'm sorry to hear about Black Hawk's passing. Is there anything I can do?" she asked.

Hawk embraced Wilma for the first time.

"No, but thank you for your friendship with him. He talked about you a lot on the War Hawk," Hawk said.

He released Wilma and walked off the bridge. Wilma stood there in a daze. The Admiral emerged from the meeting room and walked over to Wilma.

“Wilma? What’s wrong?” he asked with concern.

“That’s the first time Hawk has ever embraced me. Admiral? Is Hawk all right?” Wilma asked.

“I don’t know,” he replied.

Hawk walked down to the hangar and over to the War Hawk. He slowly walked around it running his hand over the hull. “It is magnificent,” he thought to himself. He turned to walk out of the hangar and saw that a few of the hangar crewmembers were walking towards him.

“Hawk, we’re sorry to hear about Black Hawk,” the head crewmember said.

Hawk nodded. “Thank you,” he replied as he left the hangar.

He made his way to his quarters. Just outside of his door stood Buck.

“I’m sorry Buck. Can we talk later? I need some rest,” Hawk said.

Buck, not sure how to react to his friend’s request, nodded.

Hawk entered his quarters and the door closed. Buck walked off and headed for the bridge. The door to the bridge opened and Buck walked in. Seeing the Admiral and Wilma talking, he made his way over to them. Just as Buck was about to say something the communications officer called to the Admiral. Asimov quickly walked over to the communications officer and was talking to him softly. He stood up with a smile on his face.

“Set a course for Throm,” he ordered.

“Yes sir.”

Buck and Wilma quickly walked over to the Admiral.

“Sir? Why are we going to Throm?” Buck asked.

“Hawk’s request was approved. Where is he now?” Asimov asked.

“The last time I’ve seen him he was entering his quarters,” Buck replied.

Asimov walked over to communications again and ordered that Hawk report to the bridge.

“Yes sir.”

“Hawk, report to the bridge.”

About five minutes had passed when the door to the bridge opened and in walked Hawk.

“Did you call for me sir?” Hawk asked.

“Yes Hawk. We should arrive at Throm in about one and a half days. Until then you are ordered to get some rest,” the Admiral said smiling.

Hawk gazed at him for a moment.

“You got a reply from the Galactic Council already?” Hawk asked.

“Yes Hawk. But only the part for you to go to Throm to put Black Hawk to rest. I haven’t heard about anything else yet,” Asimov replied.

“Thank you sir,” Hawk said with tears swelling in his eyes.

Chapter 7

Back on Acklon, Karri and Saleena were working hard to get their medical degree. Karri sensed sadness in Hawk through her telepathy with him. After work she made her way over to Kalee's house. She knocked on the door and a moment later the door opened.

"Karri? What's wrong?" Kalee asked.

"I sensed something is wrong with uncle Hawk. Do you know anything?" she asked as she entered Kalee's home.

"I know that Black Hawk passed away just as they approached Septor 205. Your uncle was granted permission to take Black Hawk to Throm for his burial. In fact, the Searcher is on its way there right now," Kalee replied. Kalee looked into Karri's eyes and could see the sadness.

"You miss your uncle, don't you?" she asked.

Karri nodded.

"Yes, I miss him very much, and I'm very worried about him as well. I hope he'll be able to come back soon," Karri replied with tears forming.

"I know, little one. He probably feels the same way," Kalee replied reaching her arms out to Karri to comfort her.

Karri walked into the open arms and started to sob softly.

"Why did he have to leave? It's not fair!" Karri said crying.

"I have a feeling you uncle will be home soon," Kalee said.

Karri pulled herself back from Kalee's arms and gazed into Kalee's eyes.

"How do you know? Uncle told Saleena and myself that it would probably be a few years before he can return," Karri said.

"I'll talk to the other elders. I'll see what I can do to bring your uncle back home," Kalee replied.

Karri wrapped her arms around Kalee again. "Thank you Kalee," Karri said with a smile.

Just then Karri heard a voice come out of the kitchen.

"Who was that?" Karri said backing away from Kalee. "I'm sorry Kalee, I didn't mean to interrupt your meeting," Karri said.

"Oh you didn't interrupt a meeting. That's Quill, he's the son of one of the elders. He just got back today. He came over to help me some work around the house." Kalee looked at Karri and smiled. "Would you like to meet him? He's about your age," Kalee said.

Karri smiled, not knowing if she should.

“Come on. I’ll introduce you to him,” Kalee said reaching her hand out to Karri.

Karri took Kalee’s hand and followed her into the kitchen. There standing up on the counter busy replacing a cupboard door was a slender but well built birdman. He had a few dark colored feathers on his head showing he was an adult male. His lean body pressed snug against the cupboard, his arms muscular and strong. He turned his head slightly to see Kalee and a young but very attractive female walk in. He stopped and hopped down off the counter, brushed himself off and smiled.

“Quill, this is Karri. Karri is the niece of Hawk and Kestrel. Karri, this is Quill. He’s the son of Black Hawk,” Kalee said with a smile.

“It’s nice to meet you Karri,” he said reaching his hand out.

Karri extended her hand to shake his hand. But to her surprise, instead of shaking it he gently kissed it. Karri started to turn a light shade of red.

“It’s nice to meet you too Quill,” Karri said smiling and blushing.

“You’re the niece of Hawk and Kestrel? I’ve heard so much about Hawk. I’m just sorry I missed him. Will he be coming back soon?” Quill asked.

“I really don’t know. He said that he was hoping to be back within two years. Saleena and I really miss him,” Karri replied.

“Who’s Saleena? Is she your sister?” he asked.

“Hawk found Karri and Saleena on Serenity. Saleena is another orphan,” Kalee explained.

“Oh... I’m sorry. I didn’t know,” Quill said.

Karri glanced at Kalee then at Quill.

“Saleena is my adopted sister. Not by blood, just by a deep friendship and love for each other,” Karri said.

“Do you and Saleena live here on Acklon?” Quill asked.

“Yes. We live in the other house that Kalee owns. We attend school at night and we work during the day at the clinic,” Karri said still smiling at Quill.

“What are you going to school for? If I may ask?” Quill asked.

“Saleena and myself are attending school to get our doctors degree,” Karri replied.

“Really? That’s great. I’ve always been fascinated in the medical field. But I never had the patience for the schooling. I guess I need to keep busy at all times. I’m not the kind to sit in a class room for hours,” he said.

“Oh, we don’t sit in a class room. We meet four times a week for about 4 hours a day. Two nights a week at Dr. Hanson’s house, then two nights a week at Dennis’s house. I guess you can say they home school us,” Karri replied smiling.

“Oh, so you’re pretty busy all week? Do you have time to go out?” Quill asked with a smile on his face.

Kalee turned and walked out of the kitchen so they could talk a little more in private. Karri stood there for a moment gently swaying her slender body from side to side.

“I do get a few nights off a week,” she said blushing.

“Would you like to go out and... Well maybe get some dinner sometime?” Quill asked.

Still smiling, Karri replied, “I’d like that.”

“I have a brother about a year older than myself. Do you think your sister would like to join us?” he asked politely.

“I’ll ask her tonight. What’s your brother’s name?” Karri asked.

“His name is Kree,” Quill replied.

Kalee peeked around the corner of the kitchen. “Is it all right to come back in?” she asked smiling.

“Of course,” Karri replied.

“So can I take it that you two are going to go out together?” Kalee asked.

Quill looked at Karri. Karri glanced over at Quill. Then they both looked at Kalee.

“I guess we are. That is, if you want too?” Quill asked.

“I’d like that. We can make it a double date. You, me, your brother Kree and my sister Saleena,” Karri replied still smiling.

“Sounds great. How about tomorrow night? Or do you have classes tomorrow night?” Quill asked.

Karri bite her tongue. “We have classes tomorrow night. How about day after tomorrow?” she asked.

“Day after tomorrow it is,” Quill replied with a smile.

“That reminds me. Where is your sister now?” Quill mentioned.

Karri stood there for a moment still in a daze from looking at this perfect male.

“Oh no, I left her at the clinic. She must think I went home and forgot to come back to work. I have to go. It was nice meeting you Quill. I’ll see you the day after tomorrow, right?” Karri asked while she was heading for the door.

“Right, it was nice meeting you too Karri,” Quill shouted as she went out the door.

Kalee started to laugh. Quill turned and looked at her with a confused look on his face.

“I’m sorry Quill. I don’t mean to laugh. It’s just that Karri is a high-energy woman. She likes to be kept busy. You’ll find that out later,” Kalee said walking back into the living room.

Chapter 8

Karri ran as fast as she could back to the clinic, running through the front door and right past the receptionist. She then changed to a fast pace walk into their office. There, sitting behind the desk was Saleena, doing her medical transcripts for each patient. Saleena looked up and smiled.

“Where have you been? I thought you said you were going over to Kalee’s because you had a feeling about uncle. That was almost two hours ago,” Saleena said.

“I am so sorry, Saleena. When I got to Kalee’s we started talking. While I was there, she introduced me to Quill. He’s one of the sons of an elder. He was the most handsome man I’d seen in a long time. Saleena, he has a brother. They want to take us out tomorrow night,” Karri said with a smile.

“He has a brother? What does he look like?” Saleena asked.

“He’s tall with strong arms, a lean body and a few dark feathers that show he’s a mature male. I couldn’t take my eyes off him,” Karri replied with a twinkle in her eye.

“I meant, what does his brother look like?” Saleena said giggling.

“Oh. I don’t know. I didn’t meet him. But Quill said he’s a year older than he is. His name is Kree,” Karri replied.

Saleena sat for a moment thinking. “I don’t know. What would uncle say if he found out we were seeing them without his consent?” Saleena replied.

Karri stood there for a moment looking into Saleena’s eyes, knowing she was right. She started to smile.

“What if we send a message to uncle telling him that we had met a couple of men. That they would like to take us out for dinner. We wouldn’t be hiding it from him. He won’t get it for a few days. But he can’t say we didn’t ask him, right?” Karri said gazing at Saleena waiting for a reply.

Saleena smiled. “That’s true. Besides, uncle is not my real uncle. So really he can’t tell me who I can see and who I can’t,” Saleena said.

“So, is it on for tomorrow night?” Karri asked.

Saleena nodded. “Yes, it’s on.”

Just then their office door opened and in walked Dennis.

“Girls, something has come up. We won’t be having class tonight,” Dennis said with a sad look on his face.

“Dennis? What’s wrong? Are you and Judy all right?” Karri and Saleena asked.

“Oh, we’re fine. Dr. Hanson had a heart attack about an hour ago; he passed away. I think he tried to hold on to finish your training. But his old heart just couldn’t go anymore. Classes will be canceled till after the funeral. I’m sorry, girls,” Dennis said as he walked out of the room with his head hung.

Karri and Saleena looked at each other with tears in their eyes.

“We can’t go out with Quill and Kree right now. Dennis and Judy will need us more now than ever before. I hope Quill and Kree understand?” Karri said.

Saleena nodded.

“Dennis and Dr. Hanson have been great friends since Acklon came to be.” Saleena stopped and thought for a moment. “What if we took over the clinic for a while, till Dennis can get his composure back?” Saleena asked.

“That’s a good idea. Let’s go talk to him about it right now. He’s going to have to have time to mend,” Karri replied.

Karri and Saleena left their office and headed for Dennis’s office. They gently knocked on the door.

“Come in,” Dennis replied in a low, soft voice.

Karri and Saleena entered his office only to find him sitting at his desk looking at a picture. He placed the picture back on his desk and glanced up at them. Then turned his gaze back to the picture. Karri and Saleena looked at the picture. It was a picture of two very young men, standing next to each other holding up a degree. Karri and Saleena looked at Dennis.

“You and Dr. Hanson graduated medical school together, didn’t you?” Saleena asked.

“Yes. That picture was taken on graduation day. After that picture was taken, he left to go to another planet. I didn’t see him again for almost thirty years. I found him here on Acklon. We were very good friends when we were in school. You know what happened on Throm. I was told that there was a doctor here that needed some help. So I packed up and came here. When I first walked into the clinic, I saw nobody there. The clinic hadn’t even opened yet. Then he came out from in the back. We stood there for the longest time, looking at each other. Then with one very quick move we were embracing each other and almost crying. I told him I was there to help the doctor. He smiled and replied that he was the doctor. We both laughed, then he took me on a tour of the clinic,” Dennis stopped and wiped the tears from his eyes. “Now, did you girls need something?” he asked.

Karri and Saleena were more determined than ever to get Dennis that time off that he would need to mend.

“Yes, we were going to ask you something. But now, I think we’re going to order you instead. Dennis, we are making a medical observation. You are in no shape to care for patients at this time. You are to go home and be with Judy till after the funeral. Saleena and I will take care of the patients. You need time to mend,” Karri said.

Dennis stared at Karri and Saleena with a surprised look on his face. The girls stood there, not moving waiting for Dennis to explode. But, he slowly stood up and walked over to them and wrapped his arms around both of them.

“Thank you girls. I really appreciate it. But what about your schooling?” he asked.

“We can wait till you are mended from the loss of your friend. If we don’t get our medical degree this year, no big deal. We’ll get it next year,” Karri replied.

“Are you sure you two can handle the clinic?” he asked with concern.

“Yes, we can handle it. If we need any help then we will call you. Now, go home and get your rest,” Saleena said.

Dennis smiled and started to walk out of his office. He stopped and walked back to his desk and picked up the picture of him and Dr. Hanson. He smiled, then he walked out of the room and into the waiting area. The receptionist smiled at him at first, then after noticing the sad look on his face she changed hers. He walked over to her and turned to look at the girls.

“The y’re in charge for a while. I’m taking a week off. If they need anything get it for them. I’ll be at home with my wife,” he said as he started to walk slowly out the door.

He stopped, turned and looked at Karri and Saleena.

“If you need anything, anything at all, call me,” he said smiling.

“We will. Now go home and relax,” Karri said smiling.

He walked out the door. The receptionist looked at the girls with a concerned look on her face. “Is he all right?” she asked.

“You didn’t hear? Dr. Hanson passed away a little while ago,” Karri said.

“Oh my!” was all she could say as the tears started forming.

“We decided it would be best if he went home to Judy and mend for a while after the funeral,” Karri said.

“You girls are the best thing that’s happened to him. Okay, you two are now my bosses. What can I do for you?” she asked smiling.

The girls stood there for a moment a little lost on what to say next.

“How about me sending in the next two patients?” the receptionist asked.

The girls smiled.

“Thank you,” Karri replied.

They swiftly walked into their office and started to put things together for the next patients. A few moments later, their office door opened and the receptionist stuck her head in and informed them that their next patients were in exam rooms 1 and 2. They walked into the exam room with a smile on their face. "Hello, what seems to be the problem?" they asked.

Dennis slowly made his way home. He opened the door and walked in. Judy heard the door open and walked over to meet her husband.

"Honey? What are you doing home so early?" she asked.

"I've got some bad news. You had better sit down," he said holding her hands.

He sat down next to his wife and told her what happened to Dr. Hanson. She started to cry. He embraced his wife with loving arms and they sat there together. She looked into his eyes.

"What about the clinic? What will the girls do?" she asked.

He smiled. "They kicked me out of the clinic. They said they could handle it. I was to come home and be with you and take a few days off to mend, as they call it," he replied forcing a small smile.

"Do you think they can do it?" she asked.

"They just proved to me that they can, by ordering me to come home. They gave no thought to themselves, or their fun time. I think they'll be very compassionate, hard working and dedicated doctors," Dennis replied.

Chapter 9

Meanwhile back up on the Searcher, Hawk had the sad duties of packing Black Hawk's belongings. He sat on the edge of the bed gently and carefully folding everything. He placed it into a black bag then sealed it. Hawk walked over to the portal after he was done and gazed out of the window. He was standing there when he got a feeling of sadness. "Karri must have received the word about Black Hawk," he thought to himself. He slowly turned with his head hanging he walked out of Black Hawk's quarters.

"Hawk... report to the bridge."

Hawk walked slowly up to the bridge. He entered to find Asimov standing in front of the monitor.

"Hawk, we just received some grave news from Acklon," he informed Hawk.

The first thing Hawk thought was something terrible had happened to Karri or Saleena. He rushed over to the Admiral.

"What is it? Are Saleena and Karri all right?" he asked with concern.

"Karri and Saleena are doing fine. The bad news is that Dr. Hanson passed away a few days ago. Kalee wanted me to inform you about it," the Admiral said placing his hand on Hawk's shoulder. "I'm sorry Hawk."

Hawk turned around and walked off the bridge. The Admiral looked over at Wilma and Buck.

"Hawk is really upset about Black Hawk's death, isn't he?" Asimov asked watching Hawk as he left the bridge.

Wilma and Buck glanced at each other then turned their gaze back to the Admiral.

"Admiral, did Hawk tell you anything about Acklon?" Buck asked.

"No. Why?"

Buck looked over at Wilma and forced a small smile. "He should know," Buck said with hesitation.

"Buck, if something happened on Acklon, I should know about it. Did Hawk get into any trouble?" the Admiral asked with concern.

"No sir. Nothing like that. Admiral? May I speak to you in private?" Buck asked.

The Admiral motioned for Buck to follow him into the meeting room. The doors closed and the Admiral motioned for Buck to sit.

"Buck, what is wrong?" the Admiral asked with concern.

“Admiral, Hawk has a lot on his mind. He gave up the twins. He left Karri and Saleena on a strange planet. He met and fell in love with a very beautiful woman. Black Hawk passes away. Now he was just informed that one of the doctors that were training Karri and Saleena had passed away. If I were him, I’d be very confused also,” Buck said.

“Wait a minute. Did you say Hawk has fallen in love? With whom?” Asimov asked.

“Her name is Aslana. She has a daughter by the name of Ashla. She’s a bird woman. Admiral, you should see how Hawk’s eyes and his spirit light up when he is with her. He finally found someone, and he had to leave her again. Admiral, it’s not right. Is there anything you can do?” Buck pleaded.

The Admiral sat back in his chair for a moment, looking at Buck. He reached over to the intercom and hit the button. “Patch me through to the Galactic Council... priority one,” the Admiral ordered.

“Yes sir,” communications replied.

Buck looked at the Admiral with a confused look on his face.

“Sir?” he asked.

“I believe that falls under a hardship discharge. Now, I can’t promise anything. But I’ll see what I can do,” the Admiral replied.

“Sir, how long before we arrive at Throm?” Buck asked.

“Two days,” Asimov said.

“Sir, requesting permission to assist Hawk with the burial of Black Hawk?” Buck asked.

“Permission granted. Oh, and Buck. Don’t say anything to Hawk about what I’m trying to do. I don’t want to get his hopes up only to have them crash down on him,” Admiral Asimov said.

“I understand sir,” Buck said as he left the meeting room.

Outside Wilma was waiting. “What did you tell the Admiral?” she asked.

“I told him everything. The way Hawk was feeling after he gave the twins to Karen and Steve, to meeting Aslana and having to leave the girls on Acklon. Now, the death of Black Hawk and one of the doctors that were training Karri and Saleena. I think he’s dying inside. Everyone that has meant something to him is being taken away, one way or another,” Buck replied.

“I didn’t realize Hawk was so unhappy,” Wilma replied.

“He needs to go home,” Buck said.

“You mean back to Throm?” Wilma asked.

“No, back to Acklon. That’s where he belongs, not here. He needs his family,” Buck said.

Wilma nodded in agreement. Buck turned to walk away.

“Where are you going?” she asked.

Buck just kept walking without a reply. He headed for Hawk’s quarters. He gently knocked on the door.

“Enter,” came a voice from inside.

The door opened and Hawk was standing at the door.

“Buck? I thought it was the Admiral,” Hawk said in a disappointed voice. He turned, walked back into his quarters and sat down in the chair next to the portal. He started to stare out into space again.

“Hawk, is there anything I can do?” Buck asked with a concerned voice.

“No, thank you my friend,” Hawk replied.

Buck was just about to leave when the intercom started to crackle.

“Hawk... report to the bridge.”

Hawk stood up and slowly walked towards the door. He turned and looked at Buck. “Are you coming?” he asked.

Buck nodded and followed his friend out of his quarters and up to the bridge. They entered the bridge and the Admiral glanced over at Hawk.

“Hawk, Buck. I want to speak to both of you in the meeting room. I’ll be in momentarily, please go in and seat yourselves,” the Admiral requested.

Hawk and Buck entered, sat down and waited for the Admiral. Hawk turned to Buck.

“What’s all this about?” he asked.

“I really don’t know, Hawk,” Buck replied.

The Admiral entered the room and the doors closed with a whoosh. He walked behind his desk and seated himself.

“Hawk, Buck. I called you both in here for a reason. I received a message from the Galactic Council a few moments ago.”

Hawk sat straight up in his seat, as did Buck.

“What did they say Admiral? Did they grant my request?” Hawk asked.

The Admiral noticed Hawk’s hands and arms tensing up.

“I’m sorry Hawk, no. I didn’t get an approval for your request,” the Admiral replied.

Hawk sunk deep into his chair and closed his eyes.

“Hawk, I did receive an approval for my request though,” Asimo v said with a smile.

Chapter 10

Hawk gazed at the Admiral with a very confused look on his face. "What request was that, Admiral?" he asked.

"Hawk, Buck informed me of everything that happened on Acklon. Don't be mad at him. The way you've been acting since you returned from your leave has had me worried. So I had a nice long talk with Buck and a few other crewmembers about your behavior. They all say the same thing. Then when Black Hawk passed away, you became even more withdrawn. Hawk, it isn't like you to hide your feelings. You've always been outspoken. Then all of a sudden, you withdrew from all of us completely. So I made a priority one call this morning to the Galactic Council. I didn't think they would respond this fast, but they did. So after you and Buck take Black Hawk's body down to Throm, and give him his proper burial, you will return to the Searcher, do your duty as you've always done before for the next six months. After that time we will be returning you to Acklon. You have been granted a hardship discharge," Asimov said watching Hawk's expression.

Hawk, still a little confused, looked into the eyes of the Admiral.

"Sir, are you telling me I'll be able to go home soon?" Hawk asked.

"Yes Hawk. After six months you will be released from your duties on the Searcher permanently. You'll be returning to Acklon, for good," the Admiral replied with a smile.

Hawk stood up and walked around the Admiral's desk.

"Thank you Admiral. You don't know how much I appreciate this," Hawk said reaching his hand out to the Admiral.

"On the contrary Hawk, I think I do," Asimov replied shaking Hawk's hand.

Hawk smiled and walked back around the desk and shook Buck's hand as well. Buck could only smile. He knew in another six months he would be losing his best friend. But he also knew Hawk would be happier. Hawk had found some of his people, a mate and a family. He was happy for Hawk, but deep down inside Buck knew he would most likely never see his friend again. Hawk left the meeting room with a big smile on his face. He went directly over to Wilma and embraced her. She wrapped her arms around him as well.

"What's the occasion Hawk?" she asked.

"I'm going home!" was all he could say as he left the bridge.

Buck and the Admiral exited the meeting room. Wilma walked over to them with a confused look on her face.

"What's this about Hawk going home?" she asked.

"The Galactic Council has granted Hawk a hardship discharge. He'll be with us for a few more months. But at the end of his six months, we will be taking him back to Acklon, for good," the Admiral replied.

Wilma glanced over at Buck who had a lost look on his face.

“Buck? What’s wrong?” she asked.

Buck turned to Wilma and forced a smile.

“I’m just happy Hawk will be going home soon,” he replied.

Wilma knew better than that. She knew Buck would be losing his best friend and companion. “You know Buck, we can still visit Hawk when we’re in the area,” Wilma said.

“I know. But it won’t be the same,” Buck replied.

Hawk made his way down to the Galactic Gardens. He sat and was looking out the small portal when he suddenly got a chill. At first he figured it was from the great news. But after a few moments the chill was still there. Hawk rubbed his arms as if trying to warm himself. He stood and started to walk around trying to get warm. By now he was almost freezing. He was on his way to the garden doors when the cold took its toll. Hawk dropped to his knees, then soon onto his back. He lay there looking up at the ceiling.

“Hawk! ... I need medical down at the Galactic Gardens,” a voice called out on the intercom behind him.

Not being able to see who it was, Hawk could only lie there. Within a few minutes, the medical team was there, along with Dr. Goodfellow.

“Hawk? What’s wrong my boy?” he asked.

“I don’t know. I’m freezing.” Hawk replied.

“Take him to sickbay. Don’t worry Hawk, they’ll take care of you,” that voice said again from behind him.

This time Hawk strained to find out who called for the medical team. He turned and tried to sit up, but it was no use. He lay back down, and the medical team covered him in blankets.

“Dr. Goodfellow? Who made the call for you to come down here?” Hawk asked.

“I don’t know dear boy. When we came in you were by yourself,” Goodfellow replied.

Hawk lay there a little confused. “It had to have been Buck or a crew member. But I know they wouldn’t have left me there,” Hawk thought to himself.

Just then a condition red alert came over the intercom.

“Shut all outer doors to level 31.”

Hawk tried again to sit up. “That’s where the Galactic Garden is,” Hawk said.

Dr. Goodfellow walked over to the intercom and called the Admiral.

“Admiral, I have Hawk in sickbay. What is the problem with level 31?” he asked.

“We have a small vapor hole in the Galactic Garden. Is Hawk all right?” the Admiral asked.

“Yes, we got to him in time. Thanks to whoever called us,” Goodfellow replied.

The Admiral stood there with a puzzled look on his face. Buck and Wilma both were up on the bridge and had been there for some time.

“Doctor? Do you know who called you?” Asimov asked.

“No. But I’m glad whoever it was did. Another few minutes and Hawk would have died,” Goodfellow replied.

“Understood.... Bridge out.”

Goodfellow walked back over to Hawk who was still trying to sit up.

“Lie back down, you need to rest after your ordeal. I’ll check in on you again in a while. Until then, stay in bed. That’s an order,” Goodfellow said in a serious voice.

Hawk knew he meant it when he got that tone in his voice.

“I will doctor, thank you,” Hawk said lying back down.

The doctor went to tend to a few of his other patients. Hawk closed his eyes and tried to get some rest, but his mind kept going back to the Galactic Garden.

“Who was it that called for help?” Hawk lay there thinking of anyone that would do that. He knew deep down inside that no one on the Searcher would just leave him in there. “They’re family. You don’t leave family behind,” he thought.

Then as before, he started to get that cool feeling. But this one was different. It seemed like an arm being wrapped around his shoulder trying to warm him. Hawk sat up and looked around. There was no one there. He lay back down and it started again almost immediately. Hawk closed his eyes, and slid down further under the blankets. Soon he heard a voice. “Are you all right?” the voice asked. Hawk opened his eyes, thinking to see the nurse or the doctor standing there. But there was no one.

He closed his eyes again. He felt a cool touch on his arm. He opened his eyes again to see....

Chapter 11

Black Hawk standing next to him. At first Hawk couldn't believe what he was seeing. He closed his eyes again, then opened them. Black Hawk was still standing there.

"Hawk, are you all right?" he asked.

"Yes, but how?" Hawk thought for a moment. "It was you who called for help, wasn't it?" Hawk asked.

"Yes Hawk. It was not your time to leave. You have so many people who care very deeply for you, both here and on Acklon. Plus you must fulfill your destiny," Black Hawk said.

"What is my destiny?" Hawk asked.

"You'll find out soon," Black Hawk replied.

Hawk closed his eyes again. He still couldn't believe what he was seeing or hearing. He opened his eyes again and Black Hawk was gone.

A moment later Goodfellow came walking over to him.

"Hawk? Are you okay? Where you talking to yourself or having a dream?" Goodfellow asked.

"Didn't you see him?" Hawk asked.

"See who, my dear boy?"

"Black Hawk? He was just here. He's the one that called for help," Hawk said not believing what he was saying.

"Hawk, Black Hawk has been gone for over a week now. It couldn't have been him," the doctor replied.

Hawk gazed at Goodfellow with a confused look. Goodfellow, knowing some of the ways of the bird people, sat down next to Hawk and gently touched his shoulder.

"Hawk? Did you really see Black Hawk?" he asked with concern.

"Yes doctor. You do believe me, don't you?" Hawk asked with a worried look.

"My dear boy, do you remember when you had your Dreamscape a few years ago?" he asked.

"Yes, I remember. You were the only one that understood what I was going through. But doctor, this was different. I was awake when he came. He was standing right where you're sitting. He asked me if I was all right. He told me it wasn't my time to go, that I still had to fulfill my destiny," Hawk said.

"Do you know what your destiny is, Hawk?" Goodfellow asked in a soothing voice.

“No, he didn’t tell me,” Hawk replied.

Goodfellow lightly patted Hawk’s shoulder then stood up.

“I’ll be right back,” he said then he turned and walked over to the intercom. “Admiral, could you please come down to sickbay?” he asked.

“I’ll be right there,” the Admiral replied.

A few minutes later the Admiral walked into the sickbay and walked directly over to Hawk.

“How are you feeling?” he asked.

Hawk gave a little smile. “I’m not sure, Admiral. I think I’m losing my mind,” Hawk replied.

The doctor walked over and joined them.

“Admiral, may I speak to you in private? Hawk, try to get some rest. I’ll be back in a moment,” the doctor said as he walked away with the Admiral.

“Is Hawk all right, doctor?” the Admiral asked.

“I’m not sure. Just before I called you, Hawk told me that it was Black Hawk that called for help. And that he was in here talking to him a few minutes before I called you, telling him that it wasn’t his time to go because he still had to fulfill his destiny. Admiral, I don’t know that much about Hawk’s people, but I believe him,” Goodfellow said.

“What do you recommend, doctor?” Asimov asked.

“I know Hawk is supposed to be released in six months. I’m sure he really did talk to Black Hawk. And I believe him when he said that it was Black Hawk that called for help. Admiral, no one was in the Galactic Gardens when this happened. The bridge didn’t even know of the leak till almost five minutes after it happened. Who’s to say that Black Hawk’s spirit didn’t save Hawk’s life? Admiral, we don’t know what his destiny is. I believe Hawk must fulfill his destiny on Acklon. For some reason, I think something is going to happen there, and only Hawk will be able to stop it,” Goodfellow said.

The Admiral lowered his head for a moment, then looked back up at the good doctor, then turned to look at Hawk. “I’ll see what I can do,” he replied as he started to walk back over to Hawk.

“Hawk, I want to ask you a few questions. Do you think Black Hawk called for help?” the Admiral asked.

Hawk looked at him then nodded his head. “Yes sir. I believe he did,” Hawk replied.

“Okay, one more question then I’ll leave you to rest. Do you think something is going to happen on Acklon that only you can stop?” Asimov asked.

Hawk lowered his head, then looked into the Admiral's eyes.

"Yes sir. I think something is going to happen. What and when, I don't know. But I have a feeling that it will be soon," Hawk replied with a sure voice.

The Admiral nodded. "All right Hawk, you get some rest. I'll talk to you later," the Admiral replied as he turned to leave the sickbay.

Dr. Goodfellow stood next to Hawk.

"How did you know what I said to the Admiral?" he asked.

Hawk smiled.

"Let's just say a bird told me in my dream," Hawk replied.

"Is something going to happen on Acklon?" Goodfellow asked.

Hawk looked into the doctor's eyes. "Yes," Hawk replied with a strong voice.

Goodfellow nodded. "You get some rest," he said patting Hawk on his shoulder.

Hawk watched Dr. Goodfellow's face.

"Doctor? You don't think I'm crazy, do you?" Hawk asked.

"No dear boy, I don't think you're crazy. True, I don't know all about your people and their ways and their capabilities. But, after Dreamscape the way you changed, your dedication to the Searcher, and to find more of your own kind showed me there is something very special about your kind. And if you say Black Hawk told you of something that was going to happen on Acklon, I believe you," Goodfellow replied.

"Thank you, doctor," Hawk said.

"Now Hawk, get some rest. I have to go speak to the Admiral. If you need anything, call one of the nurses," the doctor said.

Hawk nodded and lay back down. After only a few minutes, he drifted off to sleep. The nurse checked on him frequently.

Up on the bridge the Admiral and Dr. Goodfellow were in the meeting room talking on what to do about Hawk and his premonition of what might happen on Acklon.

"Tell me doctor, is there a possibility Hawk's dream could be right? Could something be getting ready to happen on Acklon that only Hawk could stop?" the Admiral asked.

"Admiral, you and I both know Hawk and his people have many ways to communicate, from telepathy to Dreamscape. I believe Hawk. He has never let us down before, why ignore his dream now? Admiral, remember Hawk is a protector. He protected Throm, protects us and I believe he's to protect Acklon."

Just then the intercom went off. "I'm sorry Admiral, we are approaching Throm."

"Understood," Asimov replied.

The Admiral looked at Goodfellow. "Do you think Hawk is well enough to perform Black Hawk's funeral?" he asked.

"I think he'd carry Black Hawk's body alone, if you asked him. But to tell you the truth, I don't think we'd be able to stop him from doing it," Goodfellow replied.

The Admiral started to turn on the intercom. Goodfellow reached over and placed his hand over the Admiral's hand.

"I'll go talk to Hawk. I'll let him know we've reached Throm and that it's time for Black Hawk's funeral," the doctor said.

The Admiral nodded his head in approval.

Goodfellow left the meeting room and the bridge and headed for the sickbay. The door opened and Hawk was on his feet, heading for the door.

"Where are you going?" the doctor asked.

Hawk gazed at the doctor.

"We've arrived at Throm, it's time to bury Black Hawk," Hawk replied.

"Hawk? How did you know we arrived at Throm?" Goodfellow asked.

"Doctor, I know my home. Besides, I looked out the portal," Hawk said with a chuckle.

Goodfellow laughed.

"All right, are you sure you feel up to this?" he asked.

Hawk placed his hand on Goodfellow's shoulder. "Yes," Hawk replied.

Goodfellow walked over to the intercom. "Admiral, Hawk is ready for Black Hawk's burial detail. Could you please notify Buck, inform him that Hawk will meet him in the hangar bay," the doctor said.

"Understood. Thank you doctor... bridge out."

Hawk smiled and left the sickbay. He headed directly to the hangar where Buck was already there. A moment later, the medical crew carried in Black Hawk's body and gently placed it in the shuttle.

"How are you feeling?" Buck asked.

"I'm doing well. Are you ready?" Hawk asked.

Buck nodded and placed his hand on Hawk's shoulder.

"I'm sorry I wasn't there to help you, my friend," Buck said with sadness in his voice.

Hawk looked at Buck.

"I know. Maybe it was supposed to happen that way," Hawk replied.

"Maybe," Buck answered.

They walked into the shuttle and the door closed. Before long they were on their way down to Throm.

Chapter 12

Back on Acklon, Karri and Saleena were working seven days a week, and about 20 hours a day. They'd delivered four babies and had 27 emergencies on top of their daily duties at the clinic in a week's time. By the time they got home every night they were so exhausted they could barely see, or eat. Quill would sometimes stop by the clinic to see if Karri would like to go out after work. She would tell him that she would love to, but she would have to be home early to get some sleep for the next day. He would tell her that it was all right. After about three weeks he stopped coming to the clinic. Karri was hurt, but she understood. Who wants to date a woman that did nothing but work almost 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and on her time off, sleep. It was about two weeks later when Dennis returned to work. He walked into the clinic and past the receptionist. He walked to his office and saw Saleena writing the medical updates for each patient. He walked down the hall to one of the exam rooms.

"Come in," Karri said.

He opened the door and peeked in. Karri looked at him and let out a very loud squeal. Saleena, not knowing what was going on jumped out of the chair and ran into the exam room. She looked at Karri with a concerned look on her face.

"Karri! What's wrong?" she asked.

Karri pointed to Dennis, who was hiding behind the door. Saleena started to close the door when Dennis jumped out. First she screamed, then realizing who it was let out a very loud squeal. They both ran over to him and embraced him.

"How are you?" Saleena asked.

"I'm doing all right. How are you two doing? It looks like you're busy today," Dennis replied.

Karri, who had forgotten about the patient for a moment, turned and apologized.

"I'm so sorry. I'll need to see you again in three days. I'll have the results by then," Karri said.

"Thank you Karri. I'll make an appointment with Edna," the lady replied smiling.

Karri and Saleena walked with Dennis back to the office.

"How is Judy?" Saleena asked with concern.

"She's doing well. I think I was driving her crazy most of the time. She wasn't used to having me at home for so long," Dennis replied laughing.

"When do you think you'll be able to come back?" Karri asked.

"I was thinking...maybe tomorrow?" he asked.

Karri and Saleena smiled.

“That would be great. We didn’t realize how many people could get ill at one time. It seemed as if just as we got it under control, it would start up again. We don’t know how you do it. Working seven days a week and all those hours by yourself,” Karri said.

“Have you girls been working together everyday?” Dennis asked.

“Yes. I’d take one side of the exam rooms and Saleena would take the other side. Why? Is there an easier way?” Karri asked.

Dennis chuckled.

“I guess I should have told you before I left that it would be a lot easier if Karri worked one day, then Saleena worked the next, and so on. That way you wouldn’t wear yourselves out,” Dennis replied.

Karri and Saleena looked at each other.

“You mean we could have taken turns working?” Saleena asked.

Dennis nodded. “Yes,” he replied.

“Dennis, is there a chance I can take some of tomorrow off? I’ve met someone and I haven’t been able to see him at all. Just a few hours.... please?” Karri begged.

Dennis smiled.

“I’ve got a better idea. Why don’t both of you girls take the weekend off? You certainly deserve it,” Dennis replied.

“Really? That would be wonderful, thank you so much. Are you sure you’re up to working by yourself?” Karri asked.

Dennis smiled.

“I think I can handle it. You’ll just need to give me the update of what’s going on. Like, are there any pregnancies I should know about, any serious illnesses. Stuff like that,” Dennis replied.

“Since the day is almost over, how about if we come in first thing in the morning? We can go through things with you,” Karri said.

“That would be fine. But I only want you girls here for no more than an hour. This is your weekend off,” Dennis said.

Saleena looked at Karri.

“Are you going to see Quill?” she asked.

Karri smiled. “Yes. I haven’t seen him for so long.” She thought for a moment. “What if he’s seeing someone already? Or he left Acklon?” Karri replied.

Dennis looked at Karri and Saleena.

“Who is this Quill? Do your uncles know about him?” Dennis asked.

“Uncles? We forgot to tell uncle Kestrel about Quill. Oh, we’re going to be in a lot of trouble,” Karri said with guilt written all over her face.

Dennis started laughing. He sat down in the chair and looked at the expressions on the girls’ faces. Then he laughed even harder.

“What’s so funny Dennis? Uncle Kestrel is going to be furious with us. We didn’t ask for his permission to see either one of these males,” Karri said.

“What do you mean, either one of these males? You’re seeing two males?” Dennis asked.

“No. I’d like to see Quill, and Saleena would like to meet Kree,” Karri replied.

Dennis gazed at the girls for a moment.

“You’re telling me that you met someone and you haven’t gone out with him yet?” he asked.

“We haven’t had a chance. We’ve worked everyday since you went to be with Judy and to see your friend buried.” Karri lowered her head.

“Saleena never got to meet Kree, and I never got to go out for dinner with Quill,” she said.

Dennis started to chuckle again.

“Oh my dear Karri and Saleena. Since you never went out with these males, you don’t have to inform either one of your uncles, you never went out with them,” Dennis said with a smile.

“Really?” Saleena asked.

“That’s right. You girls never went out with these males, so therefore they are just friends,” Dennis replied.

Just then there was a light tapping on the door.

“Come in,” Dennis replied.

Edna opened the door and peeked inside.

“You’re back. But how did you get past me without me seeing you?” she asked.

Dennis laughed. “You were busy. So I just walked on in,” he said with a smile. “Do you need anything?” Dennis asked.

“No doctor. I’ve locked the door. I wanted to see if the girls needed me for anything else?” Edna asked.

“No, thank you Edna. We’ll see you in a couple of days. We get to take the week end off,” Karri said.

“I’m happy to hear that. You two have worked every day for the past two weeks. So does that mean you’ll be working this weekend?” she asked Dennis.

“Yes, you’re stuck with me for the weekend,” he replied smiling.

Edna laughed. “I think I can put up with you that long,” she said smiling.

“Well, good night girls. I’ll see you next Monday,” Edna said as she was beginning to shut the door.

“Good night Edna. Thank you,” Saleena said.

“Now, who are these Quill and Kree you two were talking about? Do I know them?” Dennis asked.

“Quill and Kree are the sons of one of the elders. Kalee introduced me to Quill a few weeks ago. He used to come and visit me, but he stopped about four days ago,” Karri said.

“Quill and Kree? I know those names from somew here. You say they are the sons of one of the elders?” Dennis asked.

“Yes. Which elder, I don’t know,” Karri replied.

Dennis stood up and walked over to his file cabinet. He stood there for a moment then opened one of the drawers. He started to thumb through the files; then he stopped and pulled out a file that was marked with a black tab. He turned and walked back over to his desk and sat back down. He started to go through all the papers. He stopped about halfway through it and pulled out the paper. He slid it over to the girls.

“I think these are the males you two are taking about,” he said.

Karri and Saleena looked at each other with a concerned look. Not sure whether they should look at the paper or not.

“Is something wrong with them?” Karri asked.

Dennis chuckled.

“No, nothing is wrong with them,” he replied.

Karri slowly slid the paper over to herself and picked it up. There was all the information on Quill, Kree, their father and mother. Saleena and Karri started to read it. Karri looked up at Dennis and smiled.

“He has a sister also?” she asked.

Dennis nodded with a sad look on his face. "Read on," he said.

Karri and Saleena turned their attention back to the paper.

Their eyes started to swell with tears.

"Their sister was killed on Serenity?" Saleena asked.

"Yes, as was their mother," he replied.

Karri read on. "Their father was Black Hawk?" Karri asked.

"Yes, those two boys are the only ones left from that family," Dennis said with sorrow in his voice.

Chapter 13

Karri and Saleena looked over at Dennis.

“What’s the matter? You two have been approached by an elder’s sons. Saleena even though you haven’t got to meet Kree yet. That’s an honor. Karri, if I remember Quill, he’s a very strong and dedicated man. They both would make good mates for you two,” Dennis said.

Karri and Saleena blushed.

“Dennis, we hardly know them. They might even have found a mate by now,” Karri replied.

“Well, what are you sitting here for? Go out and find them,” Dennis said with a smile.

Karri and Saleena stood up and walked over to Dennis and wrapped their arms around his neck. “Thank you,” they said in harmony.

They walked towards the door turned, stopped and smiled at Dennis.

“We’ll see you Monday morning,” Saleena said.

“You girls have fun,” Dennis said.

They smiled and walked out the door. Outside they had barely closed the door to the clinic when they heard a voice yell to them. They turned to see Kalee across the street with Koora. They walked across and greeted them. Karri lowered her head and Saleena embraced her half sister, which was allowed by the rules seeing that Saleena was related by blood.

“It’s late, you two must have had a very busy day,” Kalee said.

“We stayed and talked with Dennis for a while. He’s coming back to work tomorrow,” Karri replied.

“That’s good. So do you two get a day off?” she asked.

Karri and Saleena smiled at one another, then smiled at Kalee.

“Dennis gave us the whole weekend off,” they replied.

“Oh? That’s wonderful. I’ve had a visitor come over every day for the past few weeks wanting to know if I’d heard from you,” Kalee said.

“What visitor?” Karri asked.

“Well, he’s tall, nice smile. And he worked on my cupboards,” Kalee said.

“Quill?”

Kalee nodded. “He’s been wondering if you’ll ever get a day off. He’s been bringing Kree over with him about every other day.”

“Has he been over today?” Karri asked.

Kalee smiled.

“It’s about time I got to see you out of that clinic,” a voice said behind her.

She turned to see Quill standing behind her and Saleena. With him was a tall and well-built friend. Karri smiled then blushed. Quill walked over to her and embraced her, then gave her a small kiss on her cheek.

“How have you been?” he asked.

“I’ve been busy. I’m sorry I haven’t been able to see you,” she replied .

“It’s all right, I understand. This must be Saleena?” Quill asked.

“Yes, this is my sister, Saleena. Saleena this is Quill.”

“It’s nice to finally meet you Saleena. This is my brother Kree,” Quill said.

Kree walked over to her and shook Saleena’s hand. “It’s nice to meet you,” he said.

“Quill? Karri and Saleena were just telling me that they got the whole weekend off,” Kalee said with a smile.

“Really? That’s great. I’d better ask something first. Saleena, do you have a mate?” Kree asked.

“No,” she replied.

Kree started to smile even more. “You were right brother. She is very beautiful,” he said.

Quill started to blush.

“Have you told your uncle that you’re seeing a male?” Kalee asked.

“No. Dennis explained that since we’re not seeing them as dates, we didn’t have to inform our uncles of it,” Karri replied.

“True. But that could change, right?” Kalee asked.

This time Karri and Saleena started to blush.

“When we start dating males, we will inform our uncles,” Karri replied.

Kree walked past his brother and stood next to Saleena.

“Are you two doing anything tonight?” he asked.

Karri and Saleena looked at each other.

“No. Why?” Karri asked.

“We were wondering if you would like to go out to dinner with us?” Quill asked.

“We’d like that, but...”

“I know, you just got off work and you’re tired,” Quill said. “We understand.”

“I was going to say, but we need time to go home and clean up a little,” Karri replied.

Quill smiled. “Really?”

“Can you give us about an hour?” Karri asked.

“Of course,” Kree said.

“We’ll come over and pick you up in about an hour,” Quill said.

“An hour it is,” Saleena replied as she grabbed Karri’s arm to leave.

“We’ll see you then.”

They turned and started to walk off when they suddenly stopped, and walked back to Kalee.

“I’m so sorry Kalee,” Karri said lowering her head.

Kalee smiled. “It’s all right. I know you had other things on your mind,” she said smiling.

Saleena embraced Kalee and they turned to walk away. They finally made it home about fifteen minutes later.

“You get cleaned up first,” Karri said.

“No you go first,” Saleena replied.

They both started to giggle. “I can’t believe we have a date tonight,” Saleena said.

“I know. I didn’t think Quill wanted to see me anymore,” Karri replied.

“Now, go in and get cleaned up. After you’re done, I’ll get cleaned up,” Karri said.

Saleena nodded and walked into the bedroom to retrieve some clean clothes. She came back out and looked at Karri.

“What should I wear?” she asked.

“Let’s wear our traditional clothes. I hope they’ll like that,” Karri replied.

After the girls cleaned up and changed they sat down and gazed at each other.

"I'm frightened," Saleena said.

Karri looked into her eyes.

"I'm frightened too. I've never been on a date before," Karri said.

"Neither have I. What are we supposed to do?" Saleena asked.

Karri glanced back over at Saleena.

"Let's go see if Kalee is home yet. She'll know what is proper and what's not," Karri said.

They got up and out the door they went. When they got over to Kalee's house, Karri knocked on the door. They waited a few moments then knocked again. Just as they were about to turn and leave the door opened.

"Karri, Saleena, what are you two doing here? Quill and Kree will be over at the house shortly to pick you up," Kalee said.

"Kalee? We have a question, may we come in for a moment?" Karri asked.

"Of course, come in," Kalee replied.

Karri lowered her head to Kalee before they entered the house. Saleena followed Karri in.

"Now, what's the question?" Kalee asked.

"We've never been on a date before. How are we supposed to act?" Karri asked.

Kalee smiled.

"Just be yourselves. Don't try to be somebody you're not," Kalee thought for a moment.

"Karri, do you remember how Hawk and I first treated each other?" Kalee asked.

"Yes, but that was different. This is a date with two men we don't really know. When you met Hawk, it was more of a friendship." Karri stopped and thought for a moment. "Treat it like a friendship... right?" she asked.

Kalee smiled and nodded her head. "Let them see who you really are. Tell them of your abilities to communicate through telepathy, to both human and animal. And Saleena, let Kree know who you really are also. Tell him about how at first you thought you didn't have any living relatives, and then tell him how you found out that we were related. But I want you two to remember one thing, the most important one of all, treat each other with respect," Kalee said.

Karri and Saleena stood and started for the door. Kalee lowered her head and they both embraced her, then they walked out the door.

"Thank you Kalee," Saleena said with a smile as she left.

“You two go out and have fun. You both deserve it,” Kalee said and she closed the door behind them.

Chapter 14

Karri and Saleena walked quickly back to the house. They had barely got into the house when there was a knock at the door. They glanced at each other, then Karri opened the door. There stood Quill and Kree dressed in the traditional clothing for the men. Loose gray pants with a gray tunic shirt. Kree looked at Saleena and smiled.

“You look beautiful,” he said without blushing.

Saleena smiled. “Thank you. You look nice also,” she replied.

Quill and Karri stood there and looked each other over for the longest time.

Karri looked over every inch of Quill’s masculine body, from his well-formed arms to his chest, where she could see just a little chest hair. Then her gaze followed downward to his sturdy legs. She walked over to him and gently wrapped her arm around his. He smiled and gently patted her hand.

“Are you two ready to go?” Quill asked.

Kree held out his arm to Saleena. She glanced over at Karri as if trying to find out if she should hold his arm or not. She noticed Karri had her arm wrapped around Quill’s arm a certain way. So Saleena wrapped her arm around Kree’s the same way. They left the house and walked slowly down the street towards town. Several people were still out and about when they came walking by. As they walked they heard people say, “Good Evening,” or “Nice night for a walk.”

They would smile and wave.

“Where are we going?” Karri asked.

“We’ve got something special planned for you two. We hope you’ll like it,” Quill replied. Karri and Saleena smiled. They walked through town to a small open field just on the outside of town. There they found a green grassy meadow with a large tree and a small stream flowing past it. They saw that there was a blanket laid out under the tree. On the blanket was a rather large basket. They smiled at Quill and Kree and walked over to it.

“We thought it would be nice if we sat and had a picnic dinner and got to know each other better,” Quill said gazing into Karri’s eyes.

“I think it’s a wonderful idea,” Karri replied smiling.

They walked over to the blanket and seated themselves, Karri and Quill on one side and Saleena and Kree on the other. The boys reached into the basket and pulled out two bouquets of flowers and handed them to the girls.

“How beautiful, thank you,” Saleena and Karri replied.

Kree moved a little closer to Saleena. He reached inside the basket again and pulled out some seed bread, cheese and a vase of juice. Karri sat and watched as Kree poured Saleena a glass

and handed it to her. She turned to see Quill was doing the same thing for her. Karri and Saleena waited till Quill and Kree had poured themselves a glass.

“Here’s to two of the most beautiful women here on Acklon,” Quill said raising his glass. Karri and Saleena started to blush.

“Quill, Kree, why don’t you tell us about yourselves,” Karri said.

Quill smiled.

“Well, you know who our father was. Our mother and sister died on Serenity.” Quill thought for a moment or two then looked back up at Karri. “We don’t really have much to say about ourselves. We both work. Kree works on a farm not far from town. I work doing carpentry,” he said.

Maybe you could tell us about yourselves?” Kree asked gazing at Saleena.

Saleena nodded.

“My real parents were killed on Serenity also. Probably by the same man that killed your mother and sister.” Saleena hung her head for a moment. Kree wrapped his arm around her shoulder.

“I’m sorry. You don’t have to say anything else about it if you don’t want to,” Kree said comforting Saleena.

Saleena looked up at Kree.

“No, I’m all right. It brings back a lot of memories. The man who killed my mother and father gave me to his sister. Well, she knew what kind of man he really was, so she hid me from him. She dressed me like a human. He never found out till Hawk found Karri. Hawk then took me under his wing and protected me. Then when we got here, I found out that I was related to Kalee. Our father married Kalee’s mother who was human. Then after Cora died, he brought Kalee back to Throm with him where he met and fell in love with my mother Wren,” Saleena said.

“So you are related to Kalee?” Kree asked.

“Yes. She’s my half sister,” Saleena replied.

“Karri, tell me about you,” Quill asked with his eyes fixed on Karri.

Karri smiled and took a drink of her juice. She placed it down next to her and gazed up into Quill’s eyes.

“My story is about the same as Saleena’s. My parents were killed also by this man. But I was lucky. My parents befriended a married human couple. They raised me. They had to dress me also as a human, but I knew it was for my own safety,” Karri said picking up her glass again.

“Could you tell us the whole story?” Quill asked.

She took another sip.

“Karri, tell them about your ability,” Saleena said.

“Your ability? What is it?” Quill asked.

Karri swallowed hard and glanced over at Saleena. Saleena gently nodded her head. Karri smiled and nodded back.

“All right. When I was hiding from Hawk and uncle Buck, I found that I have the ability to speak with and understand animals. I ran across this wolf pack that needed help. One of their young was trapped in a bear trap. So I helped it and they became my friends,” Karri said blushing.

“You can talk to animals?” Kree said chuckling.

“Yes, she can,” Saleena said loudly.

Kree turned and looked at Saleena. Saleena stood and faced Quill and Kree.

“My sister is a seer. Ask Kalee, or any of the people we work with. Or even better, wait till Hawk returns and ask him,” Saleena said in an angry voice.

Karri stood up and walked over to Saleena.

“It’s all right if they don’t believe us. We know who we are,” Karri said. She turned and looked at Quill and Kree. Kree was sitting there still chuckling. Quill stood up and walked over to Karri and Saleena.

“I believe you Karri. My brother never heard of the ability to talk to animals,” Quill said. “I can also look into a person’s soul and see what they are thinking,” Karri said looking at Quill. “My mother had that ability and I got it from her.”

Kree stood up and walked over to Quill.

“Come on. This is a waste of time with these females. There are other females in the town where I work that don’t make up lies to impress men,” Kree said as he grabbed Quill’s arm. Quill yanked his arm away from Kree.

“You go. I’m staying here with Karri and Saleena. I knew it was a mistake to introduce you to them. No wonder father never spoke your name,” Quill snapped back.

Kree laughed and walked off.

“I’m so sorry Saleena. I thought maybe meeting a beautiful woman here might change him, but I was wrong,” Quill said hanging his head.

Saleena walked over and placed her fingers under Quill’s head and gently lifted it. “Do you know what our uncle always says?” she asked smiling.

“No, what does he say?” Quill asked.

“He said to never lower your head. To be proud of who and what you are. Karri and I are very proud of who and what we are. You should be too,” Saleena said. “If people cannot accept us for who and what we are, it’s their loss.”

“I’m sorry. I was hoping you two would hit it off. That way Karri and I can be together,” Quill said.

“You two can still be together. When it’s time, I’ll find a man who cares for me,” Saleena said smiling.

“I do have a friend that isn’t dating anyone,” Quill said softly.

“It’s all right Quill. I think I’ll wait a while,” Saleena replied.

She started to walk back to town.

“Where are you going?” Karri asked.

“I’m going back to town. You two need to get to know each other better. You don’t need me hanging around,” Saleena said with a smile.

“But Saleena, you know the rules of our ancestors. A single female cannot be left alone with a male on their first date. She must have a companion with her,” Karri said.

“I never heard of that rule,” Saleena replied.

Karri nudged Quill.

“That’s right. There has to be a companion with her at all times on their date,” he said.

“So if you go, I have to leave also,” Karri said.

“All right, I’ll stay. But I’m going to sit down there by the stream,” Saleena replied.

She walked down to the stream and sat down. She slipped off her shoes and placed her feet into the cool, slow rushing water. About an hour had gone by and she stood up to stretch. She turned and saw that they were still talking. She smiled.

“I hope one day I’ll meet a nice man like Quill,” she thought to herself. She started to walk further down stream. She came to a small bend and stopped. Turning around she could still see Quill and Karri, so she sat down again. A few moments later she heard a voice coming from around the bend. She stood up and looked around the rocks and small hill that separated them. There on the other side stood a man standing in the water with a fishing pole in his hand. She stood there and watched this stranger for a few minutes. Then as she was about ready to turn and walk away, she slipped on the rocks and fell into the stream. The strange male rushed over and helped Saleena out.

“Are you all right?” he asked.

“Yes, I’m fine. Thank you,” she replied.

She looked up and this stranger was smiling.

“What are you smiling about?” Saleena asked.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to look like I was laughing at you. You’re Saleena, aren’t you?” he asked.

Saleena backed away.

“Who are you?” she asked.

“My name is Tiercel,” he replied.

Chapter 15

“How did you know my name?” Saleena asked.

“A friend that I work with told me about you and your sister, Karri. He said that he was going to introduce you to his brother Kree. Did you meet him yet?” he asked.

“Yes, I met him and he’s not what I was hoping to meet. He insulted my sister on her ability to communicate with animals. He’s gone now. He went to the town where he works to see some other females,” Saleena said.

“He’s a fool. Where are Quill and your sister now?” Tiercel asked.

“They’re sitting over there talking. I wanted to go back to town, but our rules state that a companion must stay with the couple on their first date,” Saleena said.

“Well, why don’t we go join them?” he asked.

Saleena smiled. “All right,” she said.

They walked back over to Karri and Quill. Quill glanced up and saw Saleena walking back with Tiercel.

“Hey, what are you doing here?” Quill asked.

“I was around the bend when I heard a splash. I found this pretty young woman in the water. So, this is Karri huh?” he asked.

“Yes. I guess you’ve already met her sister Saleena. Karri, this is Tiercel. This is the one I told you about. Tiercel, this is Karri,” Quill said.

“It’s nice to meet you, Tiercel. I’m told you are a pretty good carpenter also?” Karri asked.

Saleena sat down next to Karri.

“You know him, Quill?” Saleena asked.

“Yes, he’s the one I wanted to introduce you to,” Quill replied.

Saleena started to blush.

“Why are you blushing Saleena?” Tiercel asked.

“After she met Kree, she said she would wait for the right man to come along. Well, I guess she made a splash with you,” Quill said jokingly.

“Would you like to join us?” Karri asked.

“I’d like that. But only if Saleena feels comfortable enough with that?” Tiercel replied.

Saleena smiled. 'I'd like that very much,' she said.

They all sat down on the blanket and started to talk.

'I was told you can communicate with animals. And that you also have the ability to see into one's soul, is that true?' Tiercel asked.

'Yes. My mother had it, as did my grandmother. I was told by our uncles that it ran in my mother's family, in all the females. But how did you find out about it? If I may ask?' Karri said.

'I heard it from a doctor that was out making a house call to my friend's mate,' Tiercel replied.

'Do you know what the doctor's name was?' Karri asked.

'I think it was Dennis, it was just this past week. Dr. Hanson had already passed away,' Tiercel replied.

'I thought he was on vacation?' Karri said.

'I know he said something about how busy you were. So when it was about time, my friend went to his house and told him that the baby was coming,' Tiercel said.

'Did your friend's mate have any problems with the delivery?' Saleena asked.

'Yes. But thanks to the doctor the baby and mother are doing fine,' Tiercel replied.

'Tiercel? How did you know we worked at the clinic?' Karri asked.

'Quill told me. He told me that you two were working long hours and that he didn't get to see you,' Tiercel replied.

'Well, we have the whole week end off, but we don't know what to do,' Saleena said with a smile.

Tiercel and Quill looked at each other and smiled.

'Let us worry about that. You two ladies are going to just relax and enjoy yourselves for the next two days.' Tiercel looked up and noticed that the sun was setting. 'I think we'd better get these two ladies home, the sun is setting,' Tiercel said.

Tiercel reached down and gently pulled Saleena to her feet. Quill also stood and pulled Karri to her feet as well.

'If it's all right, we'd love to see the sunset. We're usually still working when it goes down. So we never get the chance to,' Karri said.

'We'll get you home first, then we can sit and watch it from there,' Quill said.

They picked up the blanket and the basket and started to walk back home. They started to talk along the way about Karri's ability to communicate and see into the souls of people. They walked past the clinic and sure enough, Dennis was still there.

"I wonder if Dennis is all right?" Karri asked.

"Okay, we'll stop and check. But, no work," Quill said with a smile.

Karri and Saleena turned and walked quickly into the clinic. Edna was sitting at her desk. She glanced up and saw the girls standing there.

"What are you two doing here? You better leave before the doctor sees you. He didn't want you to set foot in the clinic till Monday," Edna said.

"We saw that the clinic was still open. Is he doing okay?" Saleena asked.

"He's doing fine. Now, you girls go home." She looked out the window and smiled. "Or those two gorgeous men might leave you here," she said smiling.

They laughed. "Are you sure he's okay?" Karri asked once more.

"Yes. We just had a slow day. So he wanted to get caught up on some paper work and supply orders," Edna replied.

"Okay. Well, we'll see you on Monday," Karri said as they left the clinic.

"Is everything all right?" Quill asked.

"Yes, everything is fine," Saleena replied.

Tiercel and Quill gently placed the girls' arms around theirs, patted their hands and started to walk the girls home. They were just about home when Tiercel stopped and turned.

"What's wrong?" Saleena asked.

"Look," he replied.

They turned around and looked up into the sky. The sun was just setting behind the mountain to the west of them. They stood there and watched it. Quill and Tiercel placed their arms around Saleena and Karri's shoulder.

"It's beautiful," Saleena and Karri said.

"Not half as beautiful as you are," Tiercel said looking at Saleena.

Saleena blushed.

"I'd like to see you again. That is, if it's all right with you and your uncle?" Tiercel said.

Just as Karri was about to tell them that their uncles were not on Acklon, they heard a voice that they knew well. They turned and saw Kalee walking towards them.

“Karri, Saleena, I have some great news for you,” Kalee said with a smile on her face.

“It took a while to get here. I was just told by one of the elders that the Galactic Council granted your uncle permission to leave the Searcher, for good. He’ll be home in a few months,” Kalee said joyfully.

Karri and Saleena first looked at each other, then they embraced each other.

“We have to tell Aslana,” Karri said.

“Who’s Aslana?” Tiercel asked.

“She is going to be our uncle’s mate when he returns,” Saleena said with excitement in her voice.

“They didn’t tell me exactly when he was coming, but I’m sure it will be in a couple of months,” Kalee said.

The girls ran over and embraced Kalee.

“Thank you so much Kalee. That really made our day,” Karri said smiling.

“I’d better go. I didn’t mean to interrupt your date.” Kalee stopped and looked at Tiercel. “This is not Kree. Who are you?” she asked with concern.

Saleena smiled. “This is Tiercel. He’s a friend of Quill’s. Kree turned out to be really awful. He laughed at Karri because she’s able to talk to animals and has the ability to see into someone’s soul. He left a while ago. And when I went to sit by the stream, I stood up and fell in,” Saleena said getting a little embarrassed. “Tiercel helped me out and it turned out that he was a friend of Quill’s.”

“Well, you two know the rules. I’m not saying this as an elder, but as a friend and a relative. You two cannot date either one of these men without your uncle’s permission. I know this is only the first date, but the law states that after the tenth date it will be considered as a permanent matching.”

Karri and Saleena looked at Kalee with a confused look on their face.

Kalee saw that they looked confused about what she had just said.

“That means, you and Tiercel, Karri and Quill will be considered as courting couples. Which cannot be till Hawk returns,” Kalee said with a stern voice.

Quill and Tiercel looked at Kalee.

“We would never go against the tradition of our people. Or against the wishes of their uncle,” Tiercel replied.

“I know you wouldn’t. I just don’t want the girls to get into trouble with their uncle or the other elders,” Kalee said.

“Do you know when our uncle might be home?” Karri asked.

“I believe the elder said within a few months, but he could be wrong. It could even be sooner than that,” Kalee replied.

Karri and Saleena glanced at one another and smiled.

“Uncle’s coming home!” they squealed together.

Chapter 16

“We know it’s late, but we would really like to go talk to Aslana. We want to tell her the great news,” Karri said looking at Quill and Tiercel.

“Well, what are we waiting for?” Quill replied.

Karri and Saleena embraced Kalee.

“Thank you Kalee, for letting us know about Hawk. And we promise, we will not go out with Quill and Tiercel more than nine times. Right now we’re just friends,” Karri said.

Kalee nodded. “Well, you better get going. I know you girls will do the right thing,” Kalee replied.

Quill, Tiercel and Karri lowered their heads as they turned to leave. They almost ran all the way over to Aslana’s house. Karri knocked on the door gently, not knowing if Aslana was in bed or not. The door opened, and Aslana looked at Karri and Saleena.

“What’s wrong? Is Hawk all right?” she asked.

The girls couldn’t restrain themselves. They grabbed and held Aslana.

“Aslana, Hawk is coming home!” Karri and Saleena said loudly.

Aslana backed up and gazed at them. “Are you sure?” she asked.

“Yes, Kalee just told us. She said that one of the elders got a message that the Galactic Council approved Hawk’s release from the Searcher. Aslana, he’s coming home,” Karri said with tears forming in her eyes.

Aslana stood there for a moment. Soon tears started forming in her eyes. “Did they say when he’ll be home?” she asked.

“Kalee said it could be any time really. The elder said within two to three months, but knowing the Admiral, he’ll try everything possible to get him home sooner,” Karri replied.

Aslana, with tears falling down her cheeks, wrapped her arms around the girls. Quill and Tiercel stood there with a smile on their faces and watched quietly as the females embraced each other. Aslana lightened up her embrace and glanced over at Quill and Tiercel.

“Are you going to introduce me to your friends?” she asked.

Karri and Saleena with tears in their eyes started to introduce Aslana to Quill and Tiercel.

“You’re the son of Black Hawk, aren’t you?” Aslana asked.

“Yes. I’m the youngest one. I have a brother who is a year older than I am,” Quill replied.

“It’s v ery nice to meet both of you. I’m sorry for the tears in front of people I haven’t met. But, the news the girls bring warms my heart,” Aslana said.

“It’s all right. Karri and Saleena told us that you will be their uncle’s mate when he returns. There’s nothing wrong shedding tears for a returning loved one,” Quill replied.

Aslana smiled.

“By the way, what are you two doing out so late? Usually you’re at home sleeping by this time,” she asked.

Karri smiled, as did Saleena.

“We’ve been on a date with Qui ll and Tiercel. We were just on our way home when Kalee told us about uncle Hawk. So we had to come over and tell you,” Saleena replied with a smile.

“You just delivered the happiest news anyone could receive. Thank you,” Aslana said.

“We’d better get ho me. It’s getting late and we are a little tired,” Karri said.

“I understand.” Aslana looked over at Quill and Tiercel. “It was very nice meeting you, Quill and Tiercel. I hope to see you again?” Aslana said.

“It was an honor to meet the soon to be mate o f Hawk. If you’d excuse us now, we must get these two beautiful women home. We don’t want to get into trouble with their uncle, not now,” Quill said.

Aslana smiled. “I understand. Going against one of the living male relatives is kind of foolish. Have you met their other uncle yet?” Aslana asked.

“No, they didn’t mention their other uncle,” Quill said with a surprised look on his face.

Karri and Saleena blushed.

“We forgot about uncle Kestrel,” Karri replied blushing.

“You should introduce them to Kes trel right away. That way your uncle Hawk might not be so upset that you’d gone out on a date without permission,” Aslana said.

“Is uncle Kestrel still on Acklon?” Karri asked.

“Why don’t you come in and find out,” Aslana said smiling.

Karri, Saleena, Quill and Tiercel followed Aslana into the house. There, sitting on the sofa was Kestrel.

“Do you two have something you wanted to ask me about?” Kestrel asked.

Karri and Saleena lowered their heads and walked slowly over to Kestrel.

“Uncle Kestrel, this is Quill and Tiercel. We were just out on a date with them,” Karri said with her head lowered.

Kestrel stood and walked slowly over to Quill and Tiercel.

“You two know the law. You must seek permission from the guardian or living male relative before going out on a date,” Kestrel said in a dominant voice.

“We’re sorry, uncle Kestrel,” Karri and Saleena replied with heads still lowered.

Kestrel started to smile, and then started to laugh.

The girls looked up.

“I’m happy to meet the son of Black Hawk and his friend,” Kestrel said reaching out to shake their hand.

“You mean you’re not mad?” Saleena asked.

“I knew about this date for about six hours now. I saw Kree coming back into town without you. I asked him where you were at and he informed me that he left you out by the stream on the outside of town. What happened with you and Kree, Saleena?” Kestrel asked.

“He turned out to be very rude, uncle. He laughed at Karri’s abilities to communicate with animals and to see into one’s soul,” Saleena replied .

“He did?” Kestrel asked with some anger in his voice.

“Yes, but that’s all right. If he hadn’t left, I wouldn’t have met Tiercel,” Saleena said with a smile on her face.

Kestrel smiled.

“All right. As far as your uncle Hawk is concerned, I gave you permission to go out with these men,” Kestrel said.

“Oh, thank you uncle,” Karri and Saleena said wrapping their arms around Kestrel’s neck.

Kestrel chuckled.

“Now what’s this news about you uncle coming home?” he asked.

The girls released his neck. Aslana motioned for everyone to sit down. Karri and Quill sat on the floor next to each other, while Saleena and Tiercel stood. They started to inform Kestrel about what Kalee had told them.

“So that means he’ll be home soon?” Kestrel asked.

“If I know the Admiral, he’ll figure out a way to get uncle here in a few weeks,” Karri replied.

Kestrel glanced over at Aslana. "That means you two will be getting married soon," he said.

Aslana smiled.

"Well, it's getting late. We'd better get Karri and Saleena home," Quill said.

Quill stood and pulled Karri gently to her feet.

"I trust you're taking the girls right home?" Kestrel asked.

"Yes sir." Quill hesitated for a moment. "Sir? We'd like your permission to take Karri and Saleena out again tomorrow?" Quill asked.

Kestrel smiled. "Permission granted. Where will you two be taking them?" Kestrel asked.

"We were thinking about taking them to the mountains," Quill replied.

Kestrel looked over at Karri and Saleena.

"What do you think? Would you two like to go to the mountains?" he asked.

"Yes uncle. We'd like that very much," Karri answered with a smile.

"All right, but hear me Quill and Tiercel. If anything happens to my nieces up on that mountain, I will hunt you down. And if I can't find you, I know one who can," Kestrel said in a threatening voice.

"We would never do anything to put Karri or Saleena in danger sir," Quill said.

"Good, because if you did you would have to answer to me after Hawk finished with you," Kalee replied.

"I swear, we'll protect both with our lives," Tiercel replied.

On that Kestrel smiled.

Quill, Tiercel and Karri lowered their heads. Saleena smiled and they all turned and walked out the door. On the way home Quill and Tiercel barely spoke. The girls thought deep down inside that they would probably not be seeing them again. They arrived at the house.

"Will we see you tomorrow?" Karri asked.

"Of course you'll see us. What made you think you wouldn't?" Quill asked.

"I thought maybe after the threat our uncle made, that you might have changed your mind," Karri replied.

"No. Your uncle was right to threaten us. It shows that he cares deeply for you two. And he also made the point very clear, that if he couldn't find us that your uncle Hawk will," Tiercel said.

The girls smiled.

“What time do you think you’ll be over?” Karri asked.

Quill glanced over at Tiercel.

“What, maybe about ten in the morning?”

“Ten in the morning sounds good to me. It’ll take a few hours to walk up the mountain,” Tiercel replied.

“Okay, ten sounds good to us,” Karri said.

Tiercel reached out and gently took Saleena’s hand in his. He lowered his head and softly kissed her hand. “I’ll see you tomorrow,” he said softly.

Saleena smiled.

Quill not wanting to be showed up reached for Karri’s hand and gently kissed it.

“Good night Karri,” Quill said.

“Good night Saleena,” Tiercel said.

They turned and walked away. Karri and Saleena stood there and watched as they walked away.

“Do you think they’ll be back tomorrow?” Saleena asked.

“I don’t know. I hope so,” Karri replied.

Chapter 17

Back on Throm, Buck and Hawk had finished burying Black Hawk. Hawk lowered his head in prayer. He raised his head and began to sing. Buck, having heard that song before at Koori's burial, stood back with his head also lowered. After Hawk had finished he turned to Buck.

"I have to go home," Hawk said.

"I know, my friend. It won't be too much longer and you'll be reunited with Aslana and the girls. Until then, I'll always be here for you," Buck replied.

Hawk forced a smile.

"I know. You always have been, and I hope you always will be," Hawk said.

After that all Buck could do was hang his head. He knew that he could not stay on Acklon with his friend. There was nothing for him there. His life was on the Searcher with Wilma, the Admiral and the rest of the crew that he got to know so well.

"Buck? What's wrong?" Hawk asked seeing tears form in Buck's eyes.

"Nothing my friend. I'm just happy for you, that's all," Buck replied.

Hawk knowing Buck, knew there was something wrong, but he didn't want to push Buck into telling him. He knew he would tell him when the time was right. They gathered the equipment and headed back to the shuttle. Once on board the shuttle Buck started the engines and lifted off of Throm. Hawk looked out the window maybe for the last time. He gazed down on the planet that was home to him, Koori and their family and friends. He closed his eyes as if to say a final farewell. The trip back to the Searcher was a quiet one. Neither Buck nor Hawk spoke a word along the way.

"Captain Rogers to Searcher."

"Searcher here... go ahead Captain Rogers."

"Requesting landing bay."

"Approach landing bay 6... Searcher out."

"Landing bay 6... confirmed... Rogers out."

Buck guided the shuttle safely into the hangar and landed with a very light thump. Hawk stood and walked towards the shuttle door. He turned and gazed at Buck.

"Okay, I know there's something wrong. What is it, Buck?" he asked in a demanding voice.

Buck just glanced at him. "Nothing's wrong," Buck replied.

Buck stood and started to walk towards the door when Hawk grabbed his arm.

“Buck, you and I have been friends for a very long time now. You know me and I know you. When you don’t speak one word for about three hours, there is something wrong. Is it about Black Hawk passing away? Or is it because I’ll be leaving the Searcher for good in a few months?” Hawk asked.

Buck looked at Hawk’s hand, which was grasping his arm. Hawk looking down seeing his hand grasping Buck’s arm tightly released it. Buck walked over to one of the seats in the rear of the shuttle and sat down. Hawk followed him back and sat down next to him.

“I’m sorry Hawk. All these years we’ve been trying to find your people, finally we find some and now you’ll be leaving the Searcher. I’m happy for you but at the same time I’m sad. I’ll never see you again my friend,” Buck replied.

Hawk gently placed his hand on Buck’s shoulder.

“Now what makes you say that? We’ll see each other again my friend. Besides, how can I get married without a best man?” Hawk said.

Buck looked at Hawk.

“Your best man? I figured you’d want one of your own people for that honor?” Buck replied.

“You are one of my people. You may not have feathers, or our ancestral knowledge. But, you are my best friend.” Hawk thought for a moment. “You and I have been through a lot the past few years. You’ve always had my back and I have always had yours. It has been a lot more than a friendship, it’s been more like a brotherhood. And brothers do not forget each other.” Hawk stood up. “Besides, I’ve already talked to the Admiral about coming back for the wedding. He informed me there was nothing that would keep the Searcher from coming back for that,” Hawk said with a smile.

Buck stood up and gazed at Hawk for a moment.

“It would be an honor to stand by your side as your best man at your wedding,” Buck said with a smile.

Hawk smiled. He removed his glove from his hand and reached it out to Buck. Buck smiled in return and reached his hand out to Hawk. Hawk took Buck’s hand and they shook.

“Besides that, Karri and Saleena would never forgive me if I didn’t have you there for the wedding. Remember, you are their uncle,” Hawk said with a smile.

Buck laughed.

“Come on, we’d better report back to the Admiral. You know how grumpy he gets when we don’t keep him up to date,” Buck said.

Hawk laughed. They walked off the shuttle and headed for the bridge.

Up on the bridge the Admiral was setting their next course.

“Admiral, you have a message from the Galactic Council,” communications informed him.

“Patch it through to the meeting room,” Asimov replied.

“Yes sir.”

The Admiral walked quickly into the meeting room and the door closed. A few moments after the Admiral went in, Buck and Hawk entered the bridge. They looked around, and not seeing the Admiral, Buck asked Wilma who was standing at the console.

“Where’s the Admiral?” he asked.

“He just got a message from the Galactic Council. He’s in the meeting room,” she replied.

About an hour later the door to the meeting room opened and the Admiral entered the bridge. He walked over to the control panel, turned and gazed at everyone. He smiled.

“Set course for Serenity,” was all he said.

Hawk, Buck and Wilma stood there looking at the Admiral with a look on their face that made the Admiral laugh.

“Hawk, I just finished talking to the Council. They got a message from a couple of the elders on Acklon. It seems that there’s been a change in your plan to return to Acklon. Instead of waiting for a few months, my orders are to return you to Acklon now. You will be released from the Searcher when we arrive there. In other words Hawk,” the Admiral hesitated for a moment. “You’re going home.”

“Congratulations Hawk,” Wilma said.

“Admiral? Are you telling me I’m going home to stay?” Hawk asked.

The Admiral nodded his head. “Yes Hawk. I am.”

Hawk soon got the biggest smile on his face that he had ever had.

“When will we arrive?” he asked.

“In about seven to ten days. We have to make a stop on Serenity first, then we’ll be heading for Acklon,” Asimov replied.

“Serenity sir?” Buck asked.

“Yes.” He looked over at Hawk. “It seems that there’s been a few more bird people found on Serenity,” the Admiral replied.

“More of my people?” Hawk asked.

“Yes. A small village on Serenity had a couple of your people there. They brought them into town shortly after we left, and that’s when they found out about Karri and Saleena. They sent a message about five weeks ago. So the Council wants us to stop and pick them up and take them to Acklon,” Asimov said.

Hawk smiled.

“Did they say how many were there?” Hawk asked with excitement in his voice.

“No. They just said a couple of them. Why do you ask?” Asimov asked.

Hawk’s smile grew bigger.

“I was hoping a few of them were young males. When I left Acklon, there were not very many single adult males there. Karri and Saleena are of bonding age. They will need a mate soon,” Hawk replied.

The Admiral blushed, as did Wilma.

Hawk glanced around. “Well, they do,” he said.

“Hawk, wouldn’t it be better if the girls picked their own mates?” Wilma asked.

“Wilma, they can pick whomever they choose. But it’s mine and Kestrel’s final word. As the only adult males left on the family, we have to make sure that the male they choose will provide for them, protect them and care for them,” Hawk replied.

“And love them?” Wilma asked.

Hawk gazed at Wilma.

“Yes Wilma, and love them,” he replied.

Wilma smiled, she walked over to Hawk and embraced him.

“I will truly miss you when you leave us,” she whispered in his ear.

“And I you,” he whispered back.

Chapter 18

The next day, Karri and Saleena were waiting for Quill and Tiercel to show up.

"I know they're not coming. After what Kestrel and Kalee said to the, they figured it's not worth it," Karri said.

"I don't know. Maybe it will show them that our uncles care for us and want to make sure we're taken care of," Saleena replied.

About 9:25 there came a knock at the door. Karri smiled.

"It must be them," she said as she walked towards the door.

She opened the door and there stood Quill and Tiercel.

"You two ready to go?" Quill asked.

Karri smiled. "We just need to grab a few things first," she replied.

Karri and Saleena gathered their stuff that they wanted to take with them and walked out the door while Quill and Tiercel waited.

"Do you know anything about this mountain you're taking us to?" Saleena asked.

"Yes, my father used to take Kree and myself up there all the time when we were younger. It's very quiet and beautiful. There are a few caves up there and lots of animals," Quill replied.

Karri glanced over at Saleena.

"Why did you tell us that there were animals up there?" Karri asked.

Quill turned and looked at Karri and Saleena. Seeing the look on their faces he thought of what he said and how he said it.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean it that way. I just wanted to let you know that it was safe up there. There are no large animals, only small ones. I promised your uncle and Kalee that we would make sure you stayed safe. You thought I wanted to test your ability to communicate with the animals, didn't you?" Quill asked.

Karri looked deep into Quill's eyes. She saw that he was telling the truth.

"I'm sorry I doubted you. It's just that a lot of people don't understand my abilities and they question them," Karri replied.

"I believe you have those abilities. I would never doubt you," Quill said.

"Could you tell us of your adventure with the wolves on Serenity?" Tiercel asked.

Karri smiled. 'I'd like that. I miss them terribly,' she replied.

They started to walk towards the mountain. Karri was telling them how she first met the wolves and what happened with the bear cub and its mother. How the Alpha male gave his life to protect them. By the time they reached the base of the mountain she had told them the whole story.

'That's amazing. It's a shame you had to leave them,' Quill said.

'Yes, I wish there was a way to bring them here,' Karri replied.

They slowly walked up the mountain and found a small cave, a lot smaller than the one on Serenity. They walked around it and saw drawings on the cavern walls.

'I wonder who drew these?' Saleena asked.

Quill smiled and gently ran his hand over the drawings. Karri saw the happiness in his eyes. 'You drew these, didn't you?' she asked Quill.

Quill smiled. 'Yes, I drew these when I was about 10 years old.' He blushed. 'You could tell I wasn't very good at drawing at that time.'

'Is this Make-Make?' Saleena asked.

Quill and Karri walked over to the wall where Saleena and Tiercel were standing.

'Yes,' he chuckled. 'I never could get his face right.'

Karri started to smile.

'What are you smiling about?' Quill asked.

'Oh, I'm not laughing at your drawing. I remember I made drawings on my cave walls back home. My parents took me up there a lot. They told me if anything should happen, for me to go there, it was our safe house,' Karri said running her fingers gently over the drawing.

'You miss your parents, don't you?' Quill asked.

'I really don't remember too much about them. I was raised by a couple that befriended my real mother and father. They're the ones that found me that day when my parents were killed. I lived with them until Hawk found me and found out that I was his mate's sister's daughter. Then he had to leave. Shortly after my adoptive parents were killed. Well, my mother survived long enough to deliver twins. Then shortly after that, she died,' Karri said with tears in her eyes.

Saleena walked over to her sister and embraced her.

Quill and Tiercel embraced both of the girls and held them tight.

'I'm sorry. I didn't mean to remind you of a painful part of your life,' Quill said.

“It’s all right. I’m sorry I’m acting like a child, crying over my parents and my adoptive parents,” Karri said softly.

“There’s nothing to be sorry about. You miss your parents, just like I miss mine,” Quill replied.

Karri looked into the eyes of this man who held her close. She knew, one day that this would be her mate. “Uncle would like him. He’s kind, understanding and caring,” she thought to herself.

For a moment Quill looked into Karri’s eyes as well. Their eyes reflected each other. That was when he knew that this was the woman he had waited for. “But when would be the appropriate time to ask Hawk for his consent? Right after he returns to Acklon? No, a while after he comes back. He’ll want to be with his soon-to-be-mate. He’ll have to meet me first. Maybe a month or so after he returns. That way he’ll have time to get to know me and to settle in,” Quill thought to himself.

Saleena and Tiercel were having some special moments themselves. They noticed that Quill and Karri’s eyes were locked on each other. They quietly walked outside and sat down on a small ledge.

“I think we’d better start back down soon. It’s getting late in the afternoon. We don’t want to be caught up here after nightfall. Besides, that wouldn’t be appropriate,” Tiercel said.

Saleena looked at the sun, which was about ready to set.

“I agree,” Saleena replied.

Tiercel stood and held his hand out to Saleena. She looked up at him and smiled. She took his hand, he pulled her up to him ever so gently. They were standing so close to each other Saleena could hear his heart beat. He smiled and slowly stepped back. She returned the smile, they turned and walked back into the cave. Karri and Quill were sitting on the ground talking.

“It’s about time for us to take these beautiful ladies home. It’s almost sunset,” Tiercel said.

“You’re right. I made a promise and I’m going to keep it,” Quill said as he stood.

He reached his hand out to Karri, she placed her hand in his. He gently pulled her up. They started back down the mountain. After about two hours they were in town. Quill and Tiercel walked the girls back to their house.

“I had a great time,” Saleena said.

“As did I,” Tiercel replied. He glanced down at the ground then raised his head to gaze into Saleena’s eyes. “Would it be all right if I asked you out for another date?” he asked.

Saleena smiled.

“It would be an honor to go out with you again,” she said.

He moved a little closer to her. Then placed his hand around her small waist. Karri and Quill were standing there watching them, smiling.

Saleena, not sure how to react at this kind of advance, backed away.

“I’m sorry. I’ve never been out on a date before. I feel that it’s not right,” she said.

Tiercel smiled.

“Thank you. You are the first woman that I have ever been with as well,” Tiercel replied hanging his head.

“You mean, you’ve never been out on a date either?” Saleena asked.

Tiercel looked at the ground. “Never,” he replied.

Saleena feeling strongly for this male did something she never should have done. She gently kissed Tiercel on the cheek.

Karri turned just in time to see what Saleena was doing.

“NO!!” she yelled out.

Saleena backed away quickly. “I’m so sorry,” she said as she ran into the house.

“Karri, it was just an innocent kiss on his cheek. There’s no harm in that,” Quill said.

“There is no harm for a single male to kiss a female on the cheek, but there is harm when a female kisses a single male. She broke our rules,” she said as she ran into the house after Saleena.

Tiercel turned and looked at Quill with a confused look on his face.

“What did she do wrong? She just did what her heart wanted her to do. There’s nothing wrong with that, is there?” Tiercel asked.

Quill shrugged his shoulders. “Let’s go talk to Kalee, she’ll know what is wrong and what is right about it,” Quill replied.

They walked quickly over to Kalee’s house and knocked on the door. The door opened and there stood Kestrel.

“What’s wrong? Where are my nieces?” he asked in a concerned voice.

“Don’t worry, Kestrel. They are safely at home. Is Kalee home? We really need to talk to her about something,” Quill asked.

Kestrel opened the door wider and allowed Quill and Tiercel to enter. Kalee was in the kitchen when they came into the living room.

“Quill? Tiercel? What’s wrong? You have a worried look on your faces,” Kalee said.

“Kalee, you know the rules better than anyone I know. I have a question,” Quill said.

“What is it?” she replied.

“What are the rules about a single female kissing a single male?” Quill asked.

“Who kissed who?” she asked.

“Saleena gave me a small kiss on my cheek. Karri yelled at her and she ran into the house. Kalee, it was an innocent kiss,” Tiercel replied.

“Did she ask to kiss you? Or was it just a feeling she had?” Kalee asked.

“I’m pretty sure it was just a sudden feeling she had,” Tiercel replied.

“Now, how do you feel about her?” Kalee asked.

Tiercel looked at the floor for a moment then raised his head and looked right at Kalee and Kestrel. “I wanted to kiss her back, but I know it wouldn’t have been right. Not right now anyway,” Tiercel replied.

“Tiercel, I’m going to ask you a very important question. I want you to answer me truthfully. Do you love Saleena?” Kalee asked.

Tiercel glanced at Kalee then at Kestrel. He then turned to Quill. He turned his eyes back on Kalee and Kestrel. “Yes, I do love her,” he said proudly. “I know I’ve only known her for a short time, but when I’m with her, I’m happy and content and I feel the need to protect and care for her. But when I’m away from her, all I can think about is her and when I will see her again.”

Kalee smiled. “You’ve answered the question right. And as her only living relative, I’m giving you my permission to court Saleena,” Kalee said.

Tiercel looked at Kalee with a confused look.

“I know what you’re thinking. You’re thinking that I’m only a female. But I’m also her only living relative and I’m also an elder. So you see Tiercel, I have full authority over who dates my half sister. Yes, it would be nice if Hawk were here. But since he’s not, I’m taking the responsibility. And I think you would make a wonderful mate for her,” Kalee said.

Chapter 19

Back at Karri and Saleena's house, Saleena was in her room with her face buried in her hands crying. "What have I done?" she cried.

Karri sat down next to her. She placed her arms around Saleena and gently rocked her back and forth as if trying to comfort her sister.

"I'm sorry I yelled at you like that," Karri said softly.

Saleena glanced up and looked into Karri's eyes. "I'm so sorry Karri. I don't know what came over me. When I'm in his arms I feel safe, secure and happy. And when I looked into his eyes, I saw a kind and gentle man that would protect me and keep me safe. Was I wrong to kiss him?" she asked.

"No, to me it wasn't wrong. I have the same feeling towards Quill when I'm near him. I came so close to kissing him tonight myself. But we don't want uncle Kestrel or Hawk to get mad at them. I'm hoping Quill will ask uncle Hawk for his permission to court me," Karri said.

Saleena smiled at her sister. "Do you love Quill?" she asked.

"I feel the same way when I'm with him as you do when you're with Tiercel. To answer your question," Karri thought for a moment. "Yes, I think I do love him," she replied.

Just then there was a knock at the door.

"Stay here, I'll get it," Karri said. She slowly got up and made her way to the front door. When she opened it there stood Quill, Tiercel, Kalee and Kestrel. Karri's heart dropped from her chest.

"Hello Karri. May we come in and speak to you and Saleena?" Kalee asked.

"Please come in," Karri replied motioning for them to enter. They walked into the living room.

"Where's Saleena?" Kalee asked.

"She's in her bedroom. I'll go get her," Karri replied.

"No. I'll talk to her in there first. We'll be out shortly," Kalee said as she headed for Saleena's bedroom.

Karri looked at Quill and Tiercel with a frightened look on her face.

"It's all right Karri. We felt so bad about what happened, we went over and talked to Kalee about it," Tiercel said.

"You did what?" Karri said with a surprised voice.

“We wanted to talk to Kalee about what happened.” Quill walked over and stood closer to Karri. “It’s all right. Kalee asked him a certain question and he answered it the way he should have.”

Karri still had a concerned look on her face when Kalee and Saleena walked into the living room. Kalee walked over and stood next to Kestrel. Saleena made her way over to Tiercel. She looked into his eyes and smiled.

“Go ahead Tiercel, ask her,” Kalee said softly.

Tiercel gently picked up Saleena’s hand and gently kissed it.

“Saleena, I have asked your only living relative permission for me to court you. Do you accept?” Tiercel asked.

Saleena looked over at Kalee and smiled. “I accept,” she replied joyfully.

Karri started to cry. Quill walked over and placed his arm around her shoulder. Kestrel smiled and nodded in his direction.

“Karri, I too have asked your living male relative for permission to court you. Do you except?” Quill asked.

Karri looked over at Kestrel. Kestrel smiled. She turned her gaze back to Quill. “I accept,” she replied smiling.

Kalee stepped forward. “Let it be known that, Quill and Karri are now a courting couple. And also let it be known that Tiercel and Saleena are also a courting couple. I, as a living relative and an elder of Acklon hereby acknowledge and agree to the courtship of these people,” Kalee said with pride in her voice.

“Uncle Kestrel? What is uncle Hawk going to say about it when he comes home?” Karri asked.

Kestrel laughed. “He’s going to be so busy making wedding plans of his own, he won’t have time to get mad. If he does, you let me handle him. You four deserve to be happy. And from what I’ve seen of all of you together you will make great mates for each other. Quill, Tiercel, you two have the heart and the commitment to care for mates. Karri and Saleena, you two have the love for this commitment,” Kestrel replied.

Saleena and Karri ran over to Kestrel and Kalee and embraced them.

“But you still have to tell Hawk about it.” He said looking into their eyes. “But, that can wait till after he and Aslana are married,” Kestrel said with a chuckle.

Kalee and Kestrel turned and was about to walk out the door when Quill and Tiercel called out. “Wait.”

They walked over to Kestrel and shook his hand. They turned to face Kalee and lowered their heads. “Thank you,” they both said.

Kestrel and Kalee smiled, then they walked out the door.

Quill and Tiercel turned to face Karri and Saleena.

“We had better go. Tomorrow is a workday for you ladies and for us as well. May we see you tomorrow?” Quill asked.

“Yes, I’d like that very much,” Karri replied.

Tiercel smiled at Saleena. “How about you? May I see you tomorrow as well?” he asked.

Saleena smiled also. “I’d love it,” she replied.

Tiercel and Quill left the house. Karri and Saleena squealed with delight.

“Can Kalee really do that?” Karri asked.

“She is an elder. Even adults have to get permission from the elders before they marry. So I guess she can,” Saleena replied.

“We’d better get some rest. We do have to work tomorrow. I don’t want to fall asleep when they come over,” Karri said jokingly.

Saleena and Karri embraced each other. Just then a strange noise came from inside one of them. Karri and Saleena started to laugh. “I guess we’d better get something to eat first,” Karri said laughing.

Saleena agreed.

After they had eaten it didn’t take them long to fall into a sound sleep.

The next day Saleena and Karri had went back to work at the clinic. The first thing they did was to run in and tell Dennis what happened.

“Are you happy?” he asked.

“Oh yes,” Karri and Saleena replied.

“Well, I guess when the time comes I’ll have to work so you two can go seal your bond with your mates,” Dennis said smiling.

“It won’t be for a while yet. We still have to tell uncle Hawk,” Karri said.

“Who gave them the permission to court you?” Dennis asked in a concerned voice.

“Well, Kalee gave Tiercel permission to court Saleena. And uncle Kestrel gave his consent for Quill to court me,” Karri explained.

“I hope you’re going to tell him?” Dennis asked.

“Oh yes. Quill and Tiercel want to ask Hawk for his permission and blessing as well,” Karri said.

“Well, it’s getting late. We have a lot of patients today. I hope you didn’t have any plans for tonight?” Dennis asked.

“Quill and Tiercel are supposed to come over, but they know that this is important to us. They won’t mind,” Saleena said.

“Good. Let’s get to work. Oh, I want to complete your schooling before your uncle returns. So we’re going to have classes all week long for about three hours after work every night,” Dennis informed them.

“Why do you want to complete our schooling before uncle returns?” Karri asked.

“Never mind, it’s a surprise. Now go to work,” Dennis said with a smile.

Karri and Saleena left Dennis’s office and headed for theirs. Shortly after that they were seeing patients. Dennis was right, from the time they started work till almost 7 PM they were busy.

“All right, I want you girls to go home, get something to eat, then come back here in one hour. We still have a lot to go through,” Dennis said.

Karri and Saleena nodded and left for their dinner break. They made it home in time to see Quill and Tiercel walking up the street.

“Where have you been? We’ve been worried about you,” Quill said.

“We’re sorry. Dennis is having us go to classes for the whole week after work. We’re only home for an hour, then we have to go back for classes,” Karri replied.

“For the whole week? That means we won’t be able to see each other,” Quill said with a sad voice.

“We know. But you knew how important this was to our uncle and us. We were hoping you would understand,” Karri said.

“Oh we do understand. We were kind of hoping we could take a walk up the mountain. We found something. And we needed your help,” Quill replied.

“Is it an animal that’s been hurt?” Karri asked with concern.

“No. I guess we’ll have to check it out ourselves,” Quill said.

Saleena walked over and stood next to Tiercel.

“You understand, don’t you?” she asked.

“Of course we understand. It’s not that important, it can wait. Maybe the doctor will give you the weekend off again,” Tiercel replied.

“We’ll ask him when we get back to work. Speaking of work, if we don’t hurry we’re going to be late,” Karri said.

“We’ll see you later?” Quill asked.

Karri nodded as she and Saleena headed out the door.

Quill and Tiercel stood there and watched as Karri and Saleena ran down the street and around the corner.

“My friend, it looks like we might have to play seconds to our soon to be mates for a while,” Tiercel said.

Quill nodded. “But it is really important to them. Besides, soon they will be our mates and we’ll see and be with them every night. That’s worth waiting for,” Quill replied.

They both smiled.

Chapter 20

Back up on the Searcher, Hawk was getting more and more impatient. He knew it was only a matter of days before he would be home. He also got an extra benefit. For a while during his depression, he completely lost his senses of Karri. But now he was feeling everything... joy, happiness and love? Hawk was a little confused. Who would she be showing love for? It was a different feeling than he had before. Before it was a family love: her love for Saleena and himself. But this was entirely different, he thought to himself.

Hawk was standing beside Buck. Buck glanced over and saw this strange look on Hawk's face.

"Hawk? Are you all right?" Buck asked with concern.

"I'm fine. I just have a few things on my mind, that's all," Hawk replied.

Buck nodded he understood.

"Admiral, we are approaching Serenity."

"Very well. Hawk, Buck, I want you two to go down there and pick up those people. Oh and Hawk, why don't you stop and say hello to a few of your friends. We'll be in orbit here for forty eight hours," the Admiral said.

"Sir? What friends are you talking about?" Hawk asked.

"Oh, Karri and Saleena's friends. Some that live in town and the others that might still live on the mountain," Asimov replied.

Hawk's smile came back.

"Thank you sir. It would mean a lot to them if they knew for sure they were all right," Hawk said.

"Remember, forty eight hours. Then we head back to Acklon," the Admiral repeated.

Hawk glanced over at Buck and smiled.

"I guess you're ready to go?" Buck asked.

Hawk nodded and together they left the bridge. The Admiral looked at Wilma and smiled.

As Hawk and Buck were walking towards the hangar, Buck glanced over at Hawk and smiled.

"What are you smiling about Buck?" Hawk asked.

"You, my friend. Ever since the Admiral told you that you'll be going back to Acklon soon, you've been on cloud nine. You're smiling more, and you want to get things done. Then when he told us to go down the Serenity to pick up some more of your people you were almost running to get to the shuttle," Buck said smiling.

Hawk stopped and faced Buck.

“Is it that obvious?” Hawk asked.

Buck laughed. “You look just like you did when you found Karri and Saleena... happy,” Buck replied.

They started to walk again.

“Buck, I’ve been getting some strange feeling from Karri. She seems to be happy and in love,” Hawk said.

“Well, maybe she met someone. Remember, Kalee did say that there were new bird people arriving almost everyday,” Buck replied.

Hawk nodded his head. “That’s true,” he replied.

They got to the hangar and walked in. They headed directly over to the shuttle and boarded it. The engines fired up and before long they were on their way down to Serenity.

“What did the Admiral mean by seeing some of your friends there?” Buck asked.

Hawk smiled. “He meant I should go see Marie and the wolves up on the mountain. Karri would probably like to know how they are doing,” Hawk replied.

Buck picked up the mike.

“Searcher shuttle to Serenity.”

“Go ahead Searcher shuttle.”

“Searcher shuttle requesting permission to land.”

“Searcher shuttle, you have permission to land on landing pad One.”

“Landing pad One... Thank you Serenity... shuttle out.”

“Welcome back Searcher... Serenity out.”

“Well, I guess they remember us,” Buck said with a chuckle.

Buck landed the shuttle on the landing pad and began shutting down the engines when he looked out the window. There stood Marie and a few other people.

“Looks like we have a welcoming committee,” Buck said pointing out the window.

Hawk didn’t hesitate, he got up and headed for the door and opened it. Marie quickly walked over to the door. She saw Hawk walk off.

“Hawk!” she yelled as she ran to meet him.

Hawk smiled.

She stopped short and looked inside the shuttle. “Where are Karri and Saleena?” she asked.

“They’re at home, on Acklon,” Hawk replied.

“How are they doing? How are the twins?” she asked.

“Karri and Saleena are doing great. They are taking medical training from a doctor. The twins have grown,” Hawk replied.

Hawk looked over Marie’s shoulder and gazed at these two humans that were staring at him.

“Who are they?” Hawk asked.

“Don’t you recognize these men?” she asked.

“No. But I have been gone for a while,” Hawk replied.

Just then Buck walked off the shuttle.

“Buck! I didn’t know you were here too,” Marie said smiling.

“How are you Marie?” Buck asked.

“I’m doing good. I guess I should introduce you two to these men. Hawk, Buck, this is Mr. Collins, and Mr. Finney,” Marie said.

“Finney?” Hawk asked with a little anger in his voice.

“Hawk, this is the other Mr. Finney’s younger brother. His name is Carl,” Marie replied.

Buck and Hawk stood there for the longest time looking at this man, whose brother killed so many humans and bird people. Marie could see Hawk was getting more and more angry.

“Hawk, he’s not like his brother at all. He’s the one that brought the others here. I told him what his brother had done, and what happened up on the mountain,” Marie said.

Buck gently touched Hawk’s arm. Hawk turned and looked at Buck.

“We have to give him the benefit of the doubt. He might not be like his brother at all,” Buck said softly.

Carl walked up to Hawk.

“If you don’t want to shake my hand, I’ll understand. My brother did a horrible thing to you and your people. But I hope you don’t hold that against me,” Carl said extending his hand to Hawk.

Hawk looked into the eyes of this man and for some reason, believed him. Hawk extended his hand and shook it.

"I'm sorry for what happened to your sister," Hawk said.

Carl and Mr. Collins smiled.

"Oh I forgot, Mr. Collins is the new magistrate of Serenity. He came in shortly after you left," Marie said a little embarrassed.

"Mr. Collins, nice to meet you," Buck said shaking his hand.

"So you two are the ones that killed Mr. Finney?" Mr. Collins asked with a sarcastic voice.

Hawk and Buck turned and glared at Mr. Collins.

"We did not kill him. He fell off the mountain. Besides, what is it to you? You got his job," Hawk replied with anger in his voice.

Buck quickly took his hand away from Mr. Collins. Hawk could tell Buck was even getting a little mad at this man for what he had just said.

"Well Mr. Collins. Do you like bird people?" Hawk asked.

Buck smiled and softly chuckled to himself.

"I have nothing against your people, if that's what you mean," Mr. Collins replied.

Marie quickly interrupted. "How about going into town Hawk. I know there's a lot of people that would be very happy to see you again," Marie said.

Hawk smiled. "I'd love to see them. Then I'd like to make a trip up to the mountain. There's something up there I'd like to see again," Hawk said with a smile.

Carl lowered his head, thinking that maybe Hawk was talking about where his brother had fallen off the cliff to his death. Hawk looked at Carl.

"I'm sorry. I wasn't talking about where your brother fell. My niece had a special place up there where she used to go. I wanted to go look and maybe bring some of things she might have forgotten," Hawk said.

Carl looked into Hawk's eyes. "Thank you," was all he said.

Hawk got on one side of Marie and Buck got on the other side. Together they walked out of the landing pad area and into the street. No sooner as they walked out on to the street, they were surrounded by friends.

"It's Hawk and Buck," someone yelled.

“How are Karri and Saleena?” someone asked.

“They are doing wonderful. They are studying medicine right now on Acklon,” Hawk announced.

Marie turned to Hawk. “How are the twins?” she asked again with a little swelling in her eyes.

“They are living on the Searcher with a very nice couple.” Hawk knew he had to tell her. “I had better tell you some thing about the twins,” he said looking at Marie.

Marie looked into his eyes. “I know, you had this couple adopt them,” she said smiling .

“You knew?” Hawk asked.

“Yes.” She placed her hand on Hawk’s shoulder. “Hawk, I knew about it shortly after you left. We had to make out a death certificate for Marc. We sent a message about the certificate and the Galactic Council informed us. Hawk, raising two babies all by yourself would have been too much to ask of anyone. I’m glad they have someone that loves them. What did Karri and Saleena name them?” Marie asked.

“Lola had a boy and a girl. They named them Falcon and Kala,” Hawk replied.

Carl walked up to Hawk.

“Hawk? I was wondering, would you permit me to come to Acklon with you and Buck?” he asked.

Hawk surprised by this question from the brother of the man that killed all of his people on Throm and so many here. Hawk lowered his head. “I don’t think that would be a good idea,” he replied.

“Please! I owe your people so much for what my brother had done. I only want to make it right with as many as I can... Please Hawk?” Carl pleaded.

Buck looked over at Hawk.

“I don’t know about you my friend, but he sounds pretty sincere to me,” Buck said softly.

Hawk looked at Carl. “First off, we’ll have to get permission from the elders of Acklon. Then I’ll send a message to my nieces. They were the last to see everything your brother did, including killing their pregnant mother. If all consent to you coming, I’ll request it to the Admiral. If they all agree, you may go with us.” Hawk hesitated for a moment. “They must all agree. Do you understand?” Hawk asked.

“I understand. Thank you Hawk,” Carl replied.

“Now if you’d excuse me, I have some walking to do.” Hawk said as he left for the mountain.

“Where is he going?” Carl asked.

“He’s going up to see some old friends,” Buck replied smiling.

Mr. Collins started to walk away. “Mr. Collins?” Buck called out.

Collins turned around and looked at Buck. “What is it?” he asked in a rude voice.

Buck looked at him. “Never mind,” Buck replied.

Collins turned and walked off.

“He’s a real winner, isn’t he?” Buck asked.

Marie stood close to Buck. “He’s the one that I have concerns about, Buck. That’s why I sent that message to the Searcher. He acts just like Finney did. I’m scared for these people,” Marie said softly.

Buck looked at Marie. “I’ll be right back.” Buck walked quickly back to the shuttle. He made a call to the Searcher, telling the Admiral what was going on, and asking him to send a message to Acklon requesting permission to bring Carl Finney with them when they left. And also to get approval from the Galactic Council and the elders of Acklon.

“All right, Buck. I’ll see what I can do. How is Hawk?” Asimov asked.

“He’s gone up to the mountain, Admiral. But he has to go past Marc and Lola’s house to get there,” Buck said with sorrow in his voice.

“Understood. I’ll get on this request right away. ... Searcher out,” the Admiral replied.

“Thank you Admiral.... Buck out.”

Buck walked back out into the streets of Serenity. Marie was standing there waiting for him along with Carl. Buck looked over at Carl.

“I made a call to the Admiral. He’s going to make the request to the Galactic Council and to Acklon.” Buck turned to Marie. “Is the house still standing?” he asked.

“Yes. Nobody dares to touch it. Carl has seen to that,” she said glancing over at Carl.

“What do you mean, he’s seen to that?” Buck asked.

“He won’t let anyone near there, let alone enter. He said that no one has any cause to go in there except three people, Karri, Saleena and Hawk,” Marie replied.

Buck looked at Carl. “Why Carl?” Buck asked.

“Because those people deserve respect. As far as I’m concerned, that house belongs to Karri and Saleena. No one has the right to enter and remove things. And with the people around here...” He looked into Buck’s eyes. “They will not allow anyone to damage that house. They loved Marc and Lola. They also loved Karri and Saleena,” he replied.

Buck smiled. "Thank you," was all he could say.

Hawk had made it to the crossroads close to the house. He knew exactly where he was and how to get where he was going. He started to walk a little faster. Off in the distance he could see the house. It started to get bigger and bigger. He knew he was almost there. He started to run. By the time he reached the house he was winded. He stopped just a little ways from it. He slowly walked up to the door. It was still open, and it seemed nothing had been touched. He slowly walked inside. The first thing he noticed was the dried bloodstain on the floor. He turned his head away. Tears started to swell in his eyes. He walked into the dining room where Buck and he had had several meals with Marc and Lola. He made his way to the kitchen. He gently ran his fingers over the counter where Lola had prepared all those meals. By this time tears were falling down his cheek. He walked back into the living room and headed for the bedrooms. He slowly opened the door to Karri's bedroom. He could tell no one had been in there. Dust covered the floor and all of what was left of her belongings. He softly closed the door. He started to walk towards the back door. It too was still open. He slowly walked outside. To just north of the house was a small clearing. He slowly walked over to it. There under a weeping willow was Marc's grave. Hawk knelt down and started to pull the weeds that had gathered on his grave. He removed his glove and gently touched the head stone and lowered his head. A moment later he stood and started to walk towards the mountain.

Chapter 21

Hawk walked to the base of the mountain and stopped. He turned and looked in the direction of the house, then turned back around and started to walk up the small path. He knew exactly where he was going. About an hour later, he came across the clearing where he used to land the War Hawk. He started to smile. He quickly started up the narrow path that led to the cave. He knew it had been a while since the wolves had his scent, so he decided to slow down. He was just about to reach the mouth of the cave when he heard the bushes move on one side of him, and he stopped. A moment later out from the bushes came a very large bear. Hawk, not thinking that this could be the bear cub, drew his weapon. The bear stood on its hind legs and started growling. Just then a few wolves emerged from the bushes in front of Hawk. He looked at them and within seconds they jumped on him, licking his face and whining. He started to laugh. "It's good to see you too," he said laughing.

He started to walk the rest of the way up the path. He got to the opening and out walked the female. Her tail started to wag and she started to lick his hand like she had done in the past. Hawk knelt down and started to pet her. "How are you?" he asked as he scratched her back.

Hawk walked into the cave followed by the female and the others. He walked over to the wall, removed his glove and gently touched the names on it. He turned and gazed at all of the wolves and the bear who were standing there watching him.

"I know someone who misses you all very deeply," he said softly. He sat down on the log that was near the old fire ring. The female walked over to Hawk and sat next to him, looking at him as if wanting to tell him something.

"I wish Karri was here. She'd know what you're thinking," he said.

He sat there for the longest time. Then from the back of the cave came one of the wolves that had a bowed leg. It was the pup that Karri had saved. But without anyone to take care of the pup's cast, it had chewed it off too soon, leaving the leg to finish healing on its own. The young wolf made his way over to Hawk and sat down next to him. Hawk started to pet him when out from the dark came another wolf Hawk had never seen before. The wolf was a bit larger than the rest of them. The newcomer was another male wolf that took over the pack after the other Alpha male died. The female and the young wolf tucked their tails between their hind legs and backed away. It started to circle Hawk baring its teeth and growling. Hawk, not sure of the wolf's intent, sat there and watched. Just then the wolf lunged at him. But it never reached him. The other wolves stood between Hawk and the new male growling and baring their teeth as well. The newcomer started to fight with the pack. Hawk stood and "I hope you understand why I'm doing this," he said as he fired a shot into the ceiling of the cave. The male wolf jumped and ran from the cave with his tail tucked between his legs. The other wolves turned and started to circle Hawk, but a moment later they sat and started to howl. It wasn't a crying howl like they did for their other leader. It was more of a happy, welcome home kind of howling cry. The female crouched down and approached Hawk in a submissive position, as did the rest of the pack. Hawk not realizing what he did, finally understood that by taking action like he did, he had become the Alpha male. The female started to lightly bark, whimper and growl. Some of the wolves ran from the cave. Hawk sat back down and the female lay down next to him. The young wolf also made his way over to Hawk and lay down next to the female.

After a while the wolves that had left returned. One of them carried a dead rabbit in its mouth. The wolf crouched down and approached Hawk. It dropped the rabbit on the ground in front of him. Hawk smiled. He reached over and picked up the rabbit. The wolves, thinking that Hawk accepted the rabbit, stood and left the cave once again. Hawk got up and started to gather wood that was lying around in the cave, including Karri's old bed. He placed it into the fire ring and using his weapon fired a shot into the ring, setting the wood on fire. Just as he was about to cook the rabbit the wolves returned again, this time dragging in a deer. They stood by their prize kill and watched as Hawk placed the rabbit in the fire. They pulled the deer over to the other side of the cave and allowed the pups to eat first. After the pups were done eating their fill, the adults started to feed. Hawk watched as they showed both love and respect for each other during their feeding. Occasionally several of the wolves would stop eating and look over at Hawk. Hawk, who was also kind of hungry by this time, was tending to his rabbit. Finally the rabbit was cooked. Hawk placed it on a large leaf and started to eat.

The aroma caught the attention of a few very young pups that were sitting in the back of the cave. They slowly made their way to Hawk and sat down just behind him. The mother wolf barked a few times and the pups started to retreat to the rear of the cave. Hawk turned and saw that they were kind of thin. He stood up and walked over to them. He knelt down and placed a few pieces of meat on the ground in front of them and backed away. The pups didn't hesitate: they started to eat the rabbit meat as fast as they could. Hawk, seeing how hungry they really were, walked back over to the fire and cut the rabbit in half. He walked back and placed the half of rabbit down and walked back to the fire ring. He turned and saw that the little ones were lying down next to the rabbit and gnawing on the bones. Hawk started to laugh. The other wolves watched as their new leader started to eat what was left of the rabbit. A few hours had passed, and Hawk was so relaxed that he had fallen asleep. Next to him were the female and about five young wolf pups. The other wolves lay around in a circle around Hawk. Then all of a sudden some of the wolves jumped up and started to growl. Hawk opened his eyes and stood up. They were not growling at him. They were pacing back and forth looking towards the opening of the cave. Hawk drew his weapon and walked slowly towards the opening. He looked around, and not seeing anything lowered his weapon.

"Hawk!" yelled a voice down the path. "It's Buck. Are you up there?"

"I'm here. Come on up," Hawk replied.

Buck walked up the path and was met by five adult wolves. Buck stopped and called out to Hawk.

"Huh... Hawk. Could you tell your friends I'm not going to hurt them," Buck asked.

Hawk exited the cave and smiled. "They won't hurt you. Come on in," he said.

Buck followed Hawk into the cave.

"I was beginning to think something happened to you. You've been gone for almost twelve hours," Buck said looking at all the wolves.

"I got a little sidetracked. Did you bring the shuttle up here?" Hawk asked.

“Yes. I sent that message to the Admiral shortly after you left. He already got a reply back, that’s why I came looking for you,” Buck replied.

“What was the answer?” Hawk asked.

“They all gave their permission, including Karri and Saleena,” Buck replied still watching all the wolves.

“Good. I have to get another approval for something that’s rather strange,” Hawk said looking at all the wolves.

Buck looked at Hawk as Hawk was looking at the wolves.

“You’re not thinking what I think you’re thinking... are you?” Buck asked.

“I can’t leave them behind. Not this time,” Hawk replied.

He sat down and told Buck what had happened with the other new Alpha male. “If he should come back, most likely he will try to kill some of them and probably kill the pups,” Hawk replied glancing behind him at the pups.

Buck hung and shook his head. “The shuttle is in the clearing at the bottom of the path,” Buck replied with understanding.

Hawk smiled. “I’ll be right back.”

“Hawk? What about these wolves? You’re not going to leave me alone with them, are you?” Buck said in a concerned voice.

Hawk chuckled. “They won’t harm you. Just don’t try to pet them or pick up one of the pups,” Hawk replied as he left the cave.

The wolves sat and watched Hawk leave. The female started to whine, as did the young pup.

“It’s okay, he’ll be back shortly. He won’t leave you behind... not again,” Buck said in a soothing voice.

The young pup that had the bowed leg walked slowly towards Buck. Buck noticed how slightly deformed its leg was.

“You’re the pup from the trap,” Buck said watching the wolf pup coming closer.

The pup walked right up to Buck and started to lick his face. Buck started to laugh. “So you do remember me,” Buck said chuckling.

Hawk had made his way back to the shuttle. He called the Searcher and explained everything to the Admiral.

“Admiral, I can’t leave them here. I’d like to take all of them back to Acklon,” Hawk said.

“Hawk, that’s a tall request. I’ll send it in but I don’t know if they would go for that. It’s removing wild animals and relocating them to another planet. One that’s full of people,” Asimov replied.

“Please Admiral?” Hawk pleaded. He started to remind the Admiral about the time the wolves saved Karri and Saleena.

“Hawk, that’s not like you to use something like that against me. It must be very important to you,” the Admiral replied.

“It is, sir.”

“I’ll see what I can do. I’ll put a call through to the elders on Acklon and to the Galactic Council. I’ll explain to them what happened. Maybe, just maybe it might be enough to get them to grant you permission,” the Admiral said.

“Thank you Admiral,” Hawk said with a sigh.

Hawk made his way back up to the cave. As he walked inside he noticed the young wolf licking and playing with Buck. The others sat and watched. Hawk walked over to the fire ring and seated himself again.

“What did the Admiral say?” Buck asked.

“He’s going to put in another call to the elders and the Galactic Council and request permission for me to take the wolves to Acklon.” Hawk sat and then started to smile.

“What are you smiling about?” Buck asked.

“I was just thinking of what Karri would do if she saw the wolves again,” Hawk replied.

“Well my friend, I hope we’ll be able to find out,” Buck replied with a smile.

“Hawk, we’d better head for town. Some of the people would like to see you again. You can always come back up later,” Buck said.

“You’re right. We still have to let Carl know that he got the approval to come with us. Maybe by then we’ll hear from the Admiral about taking the wolves,” Hawk replied looking at the wolves sitting on top of the ridge.

“You are getting just like Karri and Koori. You can’t abandon any animal,” Buck said chuckling.

Hawk smiled. He walked back up the path and knelt down next to the female wolf.

“I’ll be back soon, I promise. You and your family will not be left behind, not this time,” Hawk said softly while rubbing her head.

He stood and walked back down the path and into the shuttle. Buck started the engines and lifted off. Within minutes they were nearing town. Buck landed the shuttle on the same

landing pad. They exited the shuttle just in time to see a fight had started. At first Buck and Hawk stood back. Then Hawk heard one of the men yell at the other.

“I swear, I’ll kill you if you harm any of them,” the voice yelled out.

Chapter 22

Hawk and Buck rushed towards the voice. There, standing in the middle of the street were Carl and Mr. Collins. Mr. Collins was holding on to the arm of a young male bird person. Hawk rushed over and helped Carl up.

“What’s going on here?” Hawk asked.

Mr. Collins smiled and released the boy. The small boy ran to Hawk and Carl and grabbed Carl by the arm. “He stole some fruit from that store,” Collins replied pointing to a nearby store.

Hawk turned to the small boy. “Did you do what he said you did?” Hawk asked.

The small boy shook his head. “No, I was hungry. My sister told me that the people there were really nice and that if I get hungry to just ask them and they would give me something to eat. They gave me an apple and some grapes. Then when I came out he grabbed me by the arm and told everyone that I stole the fruit,” the boy said hanging his head.

Hawk looked at Mr. Collins. Hawk then walked over to the store and asked the owners if they could please come out and explain. They walked out and saw Mr. Collins and half the town standing around the small boy. Mr. Collins smiled at the owners.

“Did this child steal this fruit from your store?” Hawk asked.

The owners looked and smiled at Hawk and the boy.

“No sir. We gave him that fruit. We give his sister and him two apples and two bunches of grapes everyday. We know no one else will feed them,” the storeowner replied looking at the magistrate.

Hawk looked at the people that were gathered around them.

“When I left here a while back, all of you told me how much you cared for and loved my people. Now I return to pick up some more and I find that no one is willing to feed them or take them into their homes. Do all of you remember what Finney did to some of your own family and friends? He also murdered all my people on Throm,” Hawk said with anger in his voice. “Now, there are small children involved and you won’t even help them? You’ve all changed, you’ve changed for the worst. I’m going to get in touch with the Galactic Council and the elders on Acklon. I’m going to make sure not one bird person will ever set foot on this planet again,” Hawk said with more anger.

“Hawk, not all of us are that way. I’ve asked them to come and live in my home till you could come back to get them, but they refused,” Marie replied.

Hawk looked at Marie.

“I know you Marie. You’d give everything you had to my people. If it wasn’t for you, I would have lost my only living relative.” Hawk turned around and looked at all the other people

standing there. "What gets me upset more than anything else, is that you let this... human. treat you just like Finney did," Hawk replied.

Hawk looked at Carl. "This is the brother of the man that treated my people so badly that he killed them. He was the only one to stand up, and fought for this child." Hawk smiled at Carl. "Go pack your belongings, you're coming with us," Hawk said with a smile. "The Galactic Council and the elders on Acklon gave you permission to come to Acklon to live. As did my own nieces," Hawk said looking at all the people.

Hawk walked back over to Buck with the small boy. "Buck, I need you to make another call to the Searcher. No, wait... I'll do that myself," Hawk said glancing down at the boy who was holding his hand.

Buck nodded.

Hawk knelt down and smiled at the young child. "Where is your sister?" he asked.

The young child smiled back and started to pull Hawk in the direction of where his sister was. Hawk and Buck followed. On the outside of town they found a few bird people. There in a make shift wooden house were five bird people. They stood and watched as the child led Hawk and Buck to his sister. Hawk and Buck looked around at all of them.

"Hawk, we need to get these people on the Searcher now," Buck said.

"Go call for more shuttles, I'm going to find this boy's sister," Hawk replied.

Buck started to run back to the shuttle in town. He arrived there and called the Searcher right away.

"Admiral, Hawk and I are requesting more shuttles for transport. We found several bird people down here. Admiral? I'm also requesting permission you to do a whole planet scan for any more bird people that might live too far away to get here," Buck requested.

"Permission granted. We'll start the scan from up here and notify you if we find anything. I'm also sending down more people to help you and Hawk," the Admiral replied.

"Thank you Admiral. You can lock in on our coordinates by the location of the shuttle. I'm going back out to find Hawk... Buck out."

"Understood, Searcher out."

Buck flipped the switch to close the shuttle's door and started the engines. Within seconds he was air born and heading for where Hawk was.

The young boy led Hawk to a small crevice. There, tucked inside was his sister. She looked up and saw Hawk standing there. She slowly crawled out and stood there looking at him.

"My name is Hawk. I am Karri and Saleena's uncle. What is your name?" he asked softly.

She smiled but didn't answer. She just stood there and smiled.

Hawk smiled back.

“Come with me, I’m taking you and your brother to a very nice place. There is more of our kind and humans that really do care for us,” Hawk said as he reached out for her hand.

She placed her hand in Hawk’s and together they walked back to the makeshift wooden house. There were more bird people there by the time they returned. Hawk walked over to them.

“My name is Hawk. Go gather what belongings you have. We will be leaving for Acklon soon,” Hawk announced.

Hawk heard the shuttle coming. Buck landed it just a little way off. He exited the shuttle and made his way over to Hawk.

“Hawk, I made that call to the Admiral. He’s going to send down more shuttles and also scan the entire planet for more of your people,” Buck said.

Hawk nodded. Buck looked around at all the bird people standing there.

“Where did they all come from?” Buck asked.

An old birdman walked very slowly over to Hawk and Buck.

“My name is Kite. This is what’s left of my family: my son Darter and his mate Raven. You are the uncle and protector of Karri and Saleena?” he asked.

Hawk smiled. “Yes.”

The old man smiled. He then looked over at Buck. “You are Karri and Saleena’s other uncle?”

Buck smiled back at the old man. “Yes, I am,” Buck replied.

“Kite? How long have you and the rest been living like this?” Hawk asked.

Kite ran his worn crippled fingers through his head feathers and looked up at Hawk. “We’ve lived here for many years. We used to live in a nice valley a long way from here. We didn’t know Karri and Saleena even existed. We thought we were the last. But when Marie found us by accident, she told us about you, the Searcher, Karri and Saleena. She wanted us to move into her home till you arrived, but we refused. Most of the people would bring food out when they could. But then that new magistrate stopped them from coming out here. Once in a while someone would sneak out and bring us as much food as possible. We tried to send the children over to Marie’s. But they would rather stay here with their family and friends. I’m more frightened for Marie than I am myself. That man is evil. He burned her house down just to make sure none of us could live there,” Kite said.

“Mr. Collins burned her house down?” Hawk asked with even more anger.

Kite nodded.

Hawk turned and looked at Buck.

“I have to make a call. That does it,” Hawk said enraged.

Hawk made his way to the shuttle.

“Hawk to Searcher.”

“Go ahead Hawk, Searcher here.”

“I want to talk to the Admiral,” Hawk demanded.

“Asimov here. What’s wrong Hawk?”

“Sir, I want to lodge a formal complaint against the magistrate here. Sir, he burned down Marie’s home. And he kept the town’s people from giving food to these people,” Hawk said.

“He did what? I’ll put another call into the Galactic Council right away. How long will it take you and Buck to load and bring them up to the Searcher?” the Admiral asked.

“Not long sir. Are the other shuttles on their way?” Hawk asked.

“Yes, they just left. They should be there soon. We are still in the progress of scanning the planet, but I want you to transport those people up here right away... Asimov out.”

“Yes sir...Hawk out.”

Hawk turned and smiled at the people. “Go get your things. We’re leaving,” Hawk said. The people scattered and went to gather their belongings. Buck heard the other shuttles coming.

“There are the other shuttles,” he said pointing in the direction they were coming from.

“Good, Buck? Could you go into town and bring Marie out here for me?” Hawk asked.

“Sure, but why?” Buck asked with a puzzled look on his face.

“We’re taking her with us. By the time I finish with this planet, no one will want to live on it,” Hawk replied with hatred in his eyes.

“Hawk, you can’t attack this planet. You are getting ready to be released. If you do, they might sentence you to death this time,” Buck pleaded with his friend.

“I’m not going to attack this planet. But I am going to make that man pay dearly for what he did to these people and some of the people in town. What is the important thing that keeps this planet going?” Hawk asked.

Buck looked at Hawk for a moment. “It’s the visitors and freighters, why?” Buck asked.

“You’ll see, my friend,” Hawk replied.

“I’d better go get Marie. I’ll be back as soon as I can,” Buck said.

Hawk placed his hand on Buck’s shoulder. “Thank you Buck,” he said with a smile.

Buck smiled and headed for the shuttle. He climbed into the seat, shut the door and lifted off. Within moments Buck was landing on the outside of town. He shut down the engines and opened the door. He could see Carl right away. Carl walked over to Buck.

“Where’s Hawk?” he asked.

“He’s taking care of some business. Have you seen Marie?” Buck asked looking around.

“The last time I saw her was when Hawk confronted Collins,” Carl replied.

“Do you know where she lives?” Buck asked with concern.

“I’ll take you to her,” Carl said with concern.

They started to walk in the direction where Carl believed Marie lived. They approached an old worn down house with no windows and a blanket covering the door. Buck walked up and knocked on what used to be a doorframe. A moment later Marie walked out.

“Buck? What are you doing here?” she asked looking around.

“Marie? How long have you lived here?” Buck asked.

Marie hung her head. Buck walked into the shell of the house. Inside he found a few pieces of furniture, an old bed with the springs coming through every inch of it and a dirt floor. He turned and walked back outside. Marie still standing there with her head lowered looked up at Buck with tears in her eyes Buck wrapped his arms around her and held her close. He started to look around. “Marie? Where’s Bryan?” Buck asked.

Marie turned and buried her head in Buck’s chest.

Buck forced her back a little. “Marie? Where is your son?” he asked again.

“He’s gone,” she replied crying.

“What do you mean he’s gone? Did he move on or did something happen to him?” Buck asked.

Marie couldn’t say anymore. She was crying so hard that she fainted. Buck picked her up and carried her back to the shuttle. Carl followed closely.

“Carl, could you do me a favor? Could you please go back to Marie’s house and gather as much of her belongings as you possibly can?” Buck asked.

“Of course. I’ll be back as soon as I can,” Carl replied placing his belongings inside the shuttle.

He started to run back to Marie’s. When he arrived, it took him only a few minutes to gather all of her belongings, including an old picture of her late husband and another picture of her son. He stopped at the door and looked around, making sure he didn’t forget anything. He then started back to town carrying Marie’s belongings. He arrived back at the shuttle. He boarded and placed her things next to her. Buck started the engines and they were airborne within moments.

“Carl, we’re going to help Hawk gather the rest of the bird people. Then we’ll go up to the Searcher and do a complete scan. This time when we leave, there will not be one bird person left on this planet,” Buck said with anger.

“Who is this Bryan? Is that her son?” Carl asked.

“Yes. By the way she reacted to his name. I’d say he’s probably dead,” Buck replied.

“But how?” Carl asked.

“I don’t know. But I do know that Hawk will find out, and when he does, all hell is going to break loose on this planet,” Buck replied.

Buck turned to Carl. “How come you are so different from your brother?” Buck asked.

Carl smiled. “I had a good teacher,” he replied.

Buck smiled. “I wish that teacher could help some of these other people,” Buck said.

“So do I,” Carl replied.

The shuttle landed just a little ways from Hawk and the rest of the shuttles. Buck shut down the engines and opened the door. He walked quickly over to Hawk.

“I need to talk to you,” Buck said.

Hawk could tell right away something was wrong. He headed for the shuttle at a full run. He got inside and saw Marie. He knelt down next to her and gently pushed her hair away from her face. Buck walked on and stood next to Hawk.

“What happened?” Hawk asked.

“We’ll take another shuttle. I want to show you something,” Buck said.

Hawk stood up and looked at Buck with a very concerned look on his face.

“Show me,” Hawk said in a low voice.

Chapter 23

Hawk requested one of the pilots to take Marie up to the Searcher immediately. Hawk and Buck climbed into another shuttle and Buck headed for the old house where Marie was living. They landed just outside of it. Hawk exited the shuttle and walked inside.

“This is where she was living?” Hawk asked with sorrow in his voice.

“Yes Hawk. There’s also some thing else you should know,” Buck said.

“What?” Hawk replied with concern.

“Marie’s son is gone. I’m not sure if he just left or if he died. But when I asked Marie where her son was, she broke down and cried even harder; then she fainted,” Buck said.

Hawk turned and faced Buck, looking him straight in his eyes.

“If that man had anything to do with it, I swear...”

“Hawk, we have to get these others to safety first. You have to think about them, Karri and Saleena right now. Collins will get what he deserves. If not by you, by someone or something else,” Buck said.

Hawk hung his head. “You’re right my friend. As much as I hate that man right now, I have to think about the others first. Come on, let’s get back and see if they found anymore of my people on that scan. Then after we get them all loaded on the Searcher, it will be time to go home,” Hawk replied.

Buck nodded in agreement with his friend. They climbed back into the shuttle, and just as they were about to take off the Admiral called for them.

“Searcher to Hawk.”

“This is Hawk. What is it Admiral?”

“Hawk, I’ve heard from the Galactic Council and the elders of Acklon about your request about the wolves,” Asimov said.

“What did they say Admiral? Did they approve it?” Hawk asked.

“I don’t know how to say this but, they all approved your request, again. From what I understood from the message, the elders told Kalee, and Kalee passed the message on to Karri and Saleena. Well, Saleena being the half sister to an elder, she begged her half sister to allow the wolves to come to Acklon. Kalee requested it to the other elders and they agreed. So after we get all your people on the Searcher, you are ordered to go get all of those wolves, oh and one bear and bring them up to the Searcher, for transport to Acklon,” the Admiral said.

Hawk smiled. “Thank you sir. This means a lot to Karri, Saleena and myself,” Hawk replied.

“I know Hawk...Searcher out.”

“Hawk out.”

Hawk turned to face Buck with a smile on his face.

“You are one lucky man Hawk,” Buck said with a grin.

They got back to the old wooded house and saw that almost all the bird people were loaded onto the shuttles. Hawk and Buck had expected Carl to go up with Marie. They exited the shuttle and found Carl helping the rescue crew to help load the children and the old people into the shuttles. He turned and smiled at Hawk and Buck as they approached.

“What are you doing here? We thought you’d gone up with Marie,” Hawk said.

“I wanted to help. I figured I owed it to your people for what my brother had done,” Carl replied.

“Carl, you had nothing to do with what your brother did. He was the one that murdered all my people on Throm and a lot of the people here on Serenity. You were not responsible for any of it. When you get to Acklon, you will probably be greeted by some bird people and humans that don’t care for you, because of your last name. But you will also have a lot of friends there,” Hawk said placing his hand on Carl’s shoulder.

“Thank you Hawk. That means a lot to me,” Carl replied with a smile.

“Captain Rogers, Hawk, all the bird people are loaded and ready for transport to the Searcher,” Murphy said with a smile.

“Thank you Murphy, go ahead and take them up. I still have a few passengers to retrieve,” Hawk said.

Hawk turned and faced Buck. “I think it would be best if you went in one of the other shuttles Buck. I don’t know how they are going to react to flying,” Hawk requested.

“No, I’m coming with you. You’re going to need a distraction for all those animals. The female and the young pup didn’t mind me being there. With her there, I don’t think the others will mind being locked up for a while,” Buck said.

Just then a few of the crewmembers carried over some very large cages and placed them into Hawk’s shuttle.

“What are those for?” Hawk asked.

“For transporting the wolves and the bear sir.”

“You take those cages out of that shuttle right now. I’m not going to cage those wolves and bear. They will not be a threat to anyone if they are not caged. If you put them in cages now, they will think that they are going to be caged for the rest of their lives,” Hawk said with anger in his voice.

“Murphy? We have a little problem over here,” one of the crewmembers called out.

Murphy turned and saw that a small boy and his sister had exited the shuttle and were walking towards Hawk and Buck. Hawk walked over to meet them.

“You two need to get back into the shuttle. We’ll be leaving soon,” Hawk said in a soft voice.

“Hawk, we want to go with you,” the boy replied.

Hawk picked up the boy and started to walk back to the shuttle followed by his sister. “I’ll take them with me,” Hawk informed the other pilot.

During this time Buck had removed the cages for the shuttle and placed them on the ground. “Are you sure it will be safe to put them in with the animals?” Buck asked.

“Yes. The female and others will sense that they are pure and they will not harm them. Just like they didn’t harm Karri and Saleena,” Hawk replied.

“Take off and head for the Searcher. We’ll be there soon,” Buck yelled.

“Well, let’s go. We have another important stop to make,” Buck said with a smile.

Hawk smiled. Hawk and Buck boarded the shuttle and placed the children in their seats and buckled them in. A few moments later, Hawk and Buck were seated and starting up the shuttle engines. They looked out the windows and saw that the other shuttles were already gone.

Hawk flew the shuttle back up to the mountain. He looked out the window and saw some of the wolves running towards the clearing.

“They know I’m coming,” Hawk said.

“But will they come peacefully? That’s the main question,” Buck replied.

Hawk landed in the clearing as he often did. The wolves ran out to meet him. Ahead of the rest was the female. She started to bark and jump around.

Buck laughed.

“I think she’s happy to see you,” Buck said laughing.

Hawk opened the door and walked out of the shuttle. The wolves gathered around him as they did their other leader, showing their respect by lying in a submissive position. Hawk went to each one and either scratched their head or petted them. He walked up to the cave and entered. A few moments later he emerged carrying an arm full of pups. The wolves didn’t mind at all. They followed him right into the shuttle. He left again, but only a few of the wolves followed. He entered the cave again, and came out carrying the rest of the pups. He climbed back into the shuttle and placed them on the floor next to the others. The other adult wolves followed and stayed with their pups.

"I need to make one more trip," Hawk said as he left the shuttle for the third time.

He made his way back up the path again but he didn't have to go far. The last one was the young pup with the bowed leg. It had left the cave on Hawk's first trip, but couldn't travel too fast. Hawk picked it up and walked back to the shuttle, with the pup licking his face all the way back.

"I'm going to make one last check of the cave. I hope none of them were out hunting," Hawk said standing at the opened door of the shuttle.

Hawk looked in the back of the shuttle and saw that all the wolves were all lying down with the pups and the two children. Hawk and Buck smiled.

"Go make a complete check of the cave. I'll check around out here. It's got to be here someplace," Buck said.

Hawk walked back up to the cave and Buck exited the shuttle and started to look around outside. An hour later, they still couldn't find the bear.

"Where could it be? Maybe by the stream? Bears do like to fish," Buck thought to himself, so he headed for the stream, hoping to find it there. When he arrived he found nothing. Buck made his way back to the shuttle. Hawk was waiting for him.

"Any luck?" Hawk asked.

"No. A bear that big should be pretty easy to see, but I didn't see it anywhere." Buck thought for a moment. "You don't suppose it headed for town, do you?" Buck asked with concern.

Hawk thought for a moment.

"I think I might know where to find it. Get in the shuttle," Hawk said.

They boarded the shuttle and Hawk fired up the engines again. Soon they were airborne again, this time heading for a place that brought sadness back to both of them... Marc and Lola's house. As they were flying across the field Buck saw something move in the tree line just to the south of the house.

"There! Down there in that tree line," he said loudly and pointing in the direction.

Hawk glanced over to the other side and sure enough, there was the bear. Hawk landed the shuttle quickly and exited. He made his way over to the bear. At first the bear didn't recognize him. It stood on its hind legs and started to growl. But after a few moments it saw Hawk. It went back down to all fours and walked over to Hawk.

"Where have you been?" Hawk asked patting it on the back. "Come on, it's time to go."

The bear followed Hawk right up and into the shuttle. At first it was a little nervous when Hawk closed the door and fired up the engines again. But when it saw its family lying around the shuttle, it walked over to the female and lay down next to her and the children.

“Hawk, you’ve done it. You managed to round up every one of those wolves and the bear with no trouble. Now, there’s one more thing we have to do,” Buck said.

“What’s that?” Hawk asked.

Buck laughed.

“Try to find an area on the Searcher big enough to hold all of them,” Buck replied laughing.

Hawk started to laugh. Just as they were about to leave Serenity, the small boy woke up and walked over to Hawk. Hawk turned and smiled at him.

“I thought you were sleeping?” Hawk asked.

The boy smiled.

“Well, you can sit on Buck’s lap and watch as we leave Serenity for good. The planet where we’re going is a lot nicer. The humans and our people live in peace there, like a big family,” Hawk said.

The small boy climbed into Buck’s lap and watched as Serenity got smaller and smaller.

“Hawk to Searcher.”

“Go ahead Hawk...Searcher here.”

“Requesting landing bay number.”

“Approach landing bay 4.”

“Landing bay 4... confirmed...Hawk out.”

“Searcher out.”

Hawk guided the shuttle into the landing bay and set it down with a light thump. He then shut down the engines. Buck picked up the child and placed him on Hawk’s lap. He then started to open the shuttle door.

“Buck, you’d better wait for a few moments. I think it would be best to clear the hangar before letting the wolves and bear out. I don’t know how they will react to so many strangers,” Hawk said.

Buck quickly closed the door. “You’re right,” Buck replied.

“Hawk to Searcher.”

“Go ahead Hawk. What’s the problem?”

“Admiral, I think it would be best to clear the hangar bay till I can get these animals to their quarters. I know they won’t harm Buck, myself or these children, but I’m not sure how they

would react to so many people in a small confined area,” Hawk said.

“I agree Hawk. I’ll clear the hangar and the level which they will be released in,” the Admiral replied.

“Thank you sir. Sir? I was wondering where they were going to stay for the next few days?” Hawk asked.

“I’m having you put them in the Galactic Gardens. We’ve done a small amount of changing the landscape in there. They should be quite comfortable,” Asimov replied.

“Thanks again Admiral... Hawk out.”

“So he did some rearranging in the Galactic Gardens huh? I hope the animals will like it?” Buck asked.

Hawk smiled.

“Okay, he’s cleared out the hangar. Let’s get them unloaded and move them into the garden,” Hawk said.

Buck once again opened the shuttle door and Hawk led the female out. The others followed with no problem, including the bear. Buck stayed with the children while Hawk opened the door that led to the inside of the Searcher. The wolves and bear were a little nervous at first. He guided them to the Galactic Gardens door. He opened it and walked in; again they followed.

Hawk saw that the Admiral had done a wonderful job fixing up the garden for their short trip to Acklon. All of the flowers had been removed and replaced with boulders and a small stream. It also had a few trees. In the corner was a small cavern, which was to serve as their sleeping area. Hawk smiled. The wolves and bear took to their temporary home very well. The wolves started to run around and checking out the cavern and stream. The bear walked over and started to eat the fruit that was in a large container. Hawk walked out of the garden and headed for the hangar again. As he walked into it Buck was on the floor playing with the small boy. He was actually laughing. Hawk smiled and walked over to them.

“Where’s your sister?” Hawk asked.

Chapter 24

The boy pointed to where his sister was. She had exited the shuttle and was walking around the War Hawk gently sliding her fingers over the hull. Hawk walked over to her and smiled.

“Is this your ship?” she asked.

Hawk’s smile got even bigger. Those were the first words she had spoken since he found them. “Yes, it is,” he replied.

Hawk walked around the War Hawk with her and pointed out certain parts of it and explained what they were and what they were for. She acted like she couldn’t get enough. She asked him questions and more questions. Final she glanced over at her brother and smiled. He had fallen asleep lying in Buck’s arms.

“Would you like to see the bridge?” Hawk asked.

“No, thank you,” she yawned.

“Where are your mother and father?” Hawk asked.

She turned her head away as if trying to avoid the question. Hawk knelt down next to her. She turned and looked into his eyes. “They’re dead,” she replied.

Hawk hung his head. “I’m sorry, little one,” he said.

She started to yawn again.

“You must be very tired. I’ll take you and your brother to a place where you can sleep and get something to eat,” Hawk said standing up and holding his hand out to her.

As with before she placed her small hand into his.

“Buck, we’ll take them to my quarters,” Hawk said.

“Good, this one is sound asleep,” Buck replied with a smile.

“Do you live on this ship?” she asked.

“Yes, but only for a few more days. I’m going to Acklon also. When we get there I’ll be able to see my nieces and my mate,” Hawk replied.

“Will you be living there?” she asked yawning.

Hawk smiled. “Yes. Now let’s get you and your brother to my quarters so you can get some rest,” Hawk said.

The girl nodded. Buck gently picked up the boy and carried him to Hawk’s quarters. When they got in Hawk’s quarters, the girl walked over to the portal and looked out.

"Is that Serenity?" she asked looking down at the planet.

"Yes. Come, I'll show you how to work the food dispenser, so when you wake up, you and your brother will be able to get as much food as you want," Hawk said.

"As much food as we want?" she asked with a big smile on her face.

"Yes. As much as you want," Hawk replied smiling back.

She walked over with him and he explained how it worked. Her brother, who was still asleep, started to stir a little.

"I have to report to the Admiral. You eat as much as you want. I'll be back soon," Hawk said.

The girl looked at Hawk with a sad look on her face.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"What's going to happen to us on Acklon?" she asked.

"There are a lot of humans and bird people that would love to care for you and your brother on Acklon. Now, you get some sleep, I'll be back in a little while," Hawk said.

The girl started to yawn again. "I am rather tired, but where am I supposed to sleep?" she asked looking around Hawk's quarters.

"Right in there," Hawk replied pointing to the back room. "There are two beds, one for you and one for your brother."

The girl nodded then yawned again. She got up from the chair and slowly walked into the back room. Hawk followed carrying her brother. He placed him in one of the beds and covered him with a light blanket. She barely lay down in the other one and she was sound asleep. Hawk smiled and pulled the blanket up over her also. He left the sleeping area, closing the door behind him. Hawk left his quarters and headed for the bridge. As he entered Buck and Wilma were waiting for him.

"Are they all right?" Buck asked.

"Yes. The boy stayed asleep all the way there. The girl ate a little seed bread, then went to sleep herself," Hawk replied.

"Oh good, you're both here. I want the full details on what went on down there. Follow me," the Admiral said motioning them to follow him into the meeting room.

Hawk and Buck followed the Admiral into the meeting room. The door closed.

"Hawk, you start. What the blazes went on down there?" Asimov asked.

"Everything was going fine until Mr. Collins grabbed a boy by the arm and accused him of stealing some fruit. That's when we found out he's worse than Finney was," Hawk lowered

his head for a moment. "We didn't want to take any chances of somebody else being murdered," Hawk replied.

"What do you mean murdered? Did he murder someone?" Asimov asked.

"We're not certain. All we know is that he's the one that burned down Marie's house." Hawk glanced over at Buck. "There's a chance that Marie's son was in it when he torched it," Hawk said.

"Marie's son is dead?"

"We believe so, Admiral. When Buck asked her where her son was, that's when she broke down and cried. Then she fainted," Hawk replied.

"Admiral? Is there anything we can do to stop more bird people from landing on Serenity, for their own safety?" Buck asked.

"I'll have to talk to the Galactic Council, Buck. I can't promise anything, Hawk, but maybe they can come up with a solution," Asimov replied.

"Admiral? How is Marie doing?" Hawk asked with concern.

"I haven't heard anything from the doctor about her yet Hawk," the Admiral replied.

"Admiral, with your permission. I'd like to go check on her?" Hawk asked.

"Of course Hawk. Let me know how she's doing will you?" Asimov said.

Hawk nodded. He stood and left the meeting room and headed for the sickbay. Buck was still in the meeting room with the Admiral.

"Admiral? There's really nothing we can do, is there?" Buck asked.

"I really don't know Buck. I am going to contact the Galactic Council though. Maybe they can figure out something. If not, the most we can do is set out a warning beacon to warn any approaching crafts that bird people will be in danger if they land on this planet. That, I do have the authority to do without the Council's approval. Too much has happened on this planet with Hawk's people to be ignored." Asimov lowered his head then looked up at Buck again. "And to any humans that helped the bird people," Asimov replied.

Buck nodded.

Down at sickbay Hawk was just walking in when the doctor caught him.

"Hawk," Goodfellow called out.

Hawk walked over to him. "How is Marie?" he asked.

"She's doing well. I gave her a shot to calm her. She's still a little groggy, but I think she'll be happy to see you," Goodfellow said with a smile.

Hawk smiled and patted the doctor on his shoulder as he walked over to Marie's side. Hawk gently picked up Marie's hand and held it, gently stroking it. Marie opened her eyes and smiled.

"Hawk, are they all right?" she asked.

"Yes, we have every bird person on the Searcher. We did a complete scan of Serenity and found every one of them. We are now heading for Acklon," Hawk replied softly.

"Acklon? But my home?" she said in a soft voice.

"Marie, I wasn't about to leave you there. From what Kite told me you were in as much danger as they were. I can't lose you too. Besides, there are two children on board who will need someone to care for them," Hawk said with a smile.

"Arrow and Koori?" she asked.

Hawk was surprised by that name.

"Is that what the girl's name is?" Hawk asked.

"Yes. The humans that were taking care of her and her brother heard about you. They changed her name to Koori, in honor of your mate," Marie said with a small smile.

"But, how? They never heard of Koori or me. How did they know Koori's name?" Hawk asked a little confused.

Marie smiled at Hawk then turned her head away.

"Marie? Are you all right?" Hawk asked in a worried tone.

She turned her head back and faced Hawk.

"I'm the one that told them about you and Koori. Shortly before Mr. Collins arrived, I was taking care of them. They would not leave their people, so I would take food out to them. Most of the other humans on Serenity were doing the same. Many opened their homes to them, but they wanted to stay together. Then when Collins came, everything changed. He told anyone that was caught feeding those people would regret it. He caught me one night on my way back from where they were living. He..." Marie looked away with tears in her eyes.

"Marie? What did he do?" Hawk asked with concern.

"He burned down my house. He said he wanted to make sure no one would live there. My son, myself or any bird people," Marie said crying.

"Marie? Did he kill your son?" Hawk asked with anger growing inside him.

Marie looked into Hawk's eyes.

“Yes,” was all she could say before she broke down again.

The doctor and nurse came running over.

“Hawk, you should leave now. She needs her rest,” Goodfellow said.

Hawk stood to leave. Rage was building up inside him. He stormed out of sickbay and headed for the bridge. He entered the bridge and started to look for the Admiral.

“Where’s the Admiral?” he asked.

Buck and Wilma looked at Hawk and knew something was up.

“Hawk, what’s wrong? Is Marie all right?” Buck asked.

Hawk turned to face Buck and Wilma.

“He killed Bryan. He killed Marie’s son,” Hawk said loudly.

Wilma placed her hands over her mouth and started to weep. Buck walked over to Hawk.

“Are you sure?” he asked.

“Yes. She told me he killed Bryan,” Hawk replied.

Just then the Admiral walked back on the bridge from the meeting room.

“Hawk, Buck. Come with me,” he said walking back into the meeting room.

They followed and seated themselves.

“What’s wrong, Hawk?” Asimov asked.

“Admiral, Marie just told me that Collins did kill her son,” Hawk replied with anger.

“That’s all I needed to know. I’ve placed a call into the Galactic Council. I’m waiting for them to return. I’ll let them know about that and to find out if they plan on doing anything about it. If they can’t or don’t make a decision, I’ll make a decision myself,” Asimov said.

“Admiral, that call from the Galactic Council is coming in,” the communications officer said.

“Thank you. Patch it through.”

“Yes sir.”

Hawk and Buck stood and left the meeting room.

Chapter 25

Moments later the door to the meeting room opened and the Admiral entered the bridge.

“Admiral?”

Asimov turned his gaze to Hawk. “I’m sorry Hawk. The Galactic Council said there’s not enough proof that Collins murdered Marie’s son. Collins reported it as an accident the day it happened. There’s nothing they can do.”

Hawk, being outraged about the news, stormed off the bridge before the Admiral could finish. Buck ran after him.

“Hawk!” Buck called out.

Hawk stopped and paced the floor waiting for Buck to catch up. Just as Buck caught up, Hawk drove his fist into the wall.

“How can they let him get away with this? That human murdered an innocent boy. But they don’t have enough proof to say he did it? What about Marie’s statement? She was there when it happened. She saw what that man did. He knew the boy was in the house, but he torched it anyway,” Hawk said out loud with rage.

“Hawk? I know how you feel. But you can’t take matters into your own hands, not again. You left the bridge before the Admiral finished what he was going to tell you,” Buck replied.

“Oh, and what was that? That humans can get away with murder?” he shouted.

“No, he has an idea. Come back up to the bridge with me. Let the Admiral explain what he wants to do,” Buck said.

Hawk stood there for a moment and looked into Buck’s eyes. He knew Buck would not lie to him about something like that. He knew Buck cared for Marie and her son as much as he did.

“All right,” Hawk replied.

Buck nodded. Together they walked back up to the bridge. Asimov was waiting for them.

“Hawk, please come into the meeting room,” the Admiral asked.

Hawk nodded and followed the Admiral and Buck to the meeting room.

“Hawk, I know you’re upset, but you didn’t let me finish. I said the Council could not do anything, but I feel that this planet is too dangerous for any bird people. Therefore, I’m sending a warning beacon out. That warning beacon will keep all space cruisers and freighters from landing on Serenity.” Asimov hesitated for a few moments. “I know it won’t make up for the loss of Marie’s son, but it will keep other innocent people and bird people from the same fate they had,” the Admiral said.

Hawk looked at the Admiral with a sad look in his eyes.

“How can you do that Admiral? Don’t you need the Council’s permission first?” Hawk asked.

“No, due to all the deaths here I have the authority to place a warning beacon out. This planet will be marked as an unsafe planet. True, the other people on this planet will also suffer, but they have the option to leave it if they want. They can come to Acklon if they like, but they will have to seek permission from the elders of Acklon and from the Galactic Council first,” Asimov replied.

“Thank you Admiral. I know it won’t bring Bryan back, but it might bring some relief to Marie,” Hawk said.

“I hope so Hawk, I really do. We’ll be leaving for Acklon within the hour. I’ve ordered another complete scan, just to make sure we’ve got every bird person on this planet,” Asimov said.

Hawk smiled and reached his hand out to the Admiral. “Thank you sir.”

Asimov reached his hand out to Hawk. “I wish I could do more, Hawk,” the Admiral replied.

Hawk smiled, reached his hand out to the Admiral and shook his hand. He then left the meeting room followed by Buck.

“Where you heading now?” Buck asked.

Hawk turned around and looked at Buck.

“Well, I thought I would check on the wolves first, then go check on Arrow and Koori. Then check on Marie,” Hawk replied.

“Koori? But Hawk, Koori is gone,” Buck said in a concerned voice.

Hawk started to laugh a little.

“Koori is the name of the girl we brought back. Her brother’s name is Arrow,” Hawk replied.

Buck started to blush a little. “Oh,” he said.

Hawk turned and started to walk away when he stopped, turned around and faced Buck again. “Are you coming with me or not?” Hawk asked.

Buck nodded. “I’d like that,” he replied.

Buck and Hawk headed for the Galactic Gardens. When they arrived, Hawk noticed there was a guard standing outside the door.

“Anderson? What are you doing here?” Hawk asked.

“Hawk, Captain Rogers. I was ordered to stand guard outside the door in case someone tried to enter the garden. The Admiral didn’t want anyone going in and possibly being attacked,” Anderson replied.

“Has anyone tried to enter?” Hawk asked.

“Yes sir. I informed them no one was allowed to enter except you. They understood after I explained to them what was in there,” Anderson said with a chuckle.

“Thank you Anderson,” Hawk said as he opened the door.

After Hawk and Buck entered the room. The wolves noticed that Hawk and Buck were there. They ran over to Hawk and started to jump up and down. Hawk started to laugh. He noticed that the pups sat quietly in the corner close to the small cavern. He walked slowly over to them and knelt down. The pups crouched down and rolled over showing their soft underside, similar to what the adult wolves would do to show submission.

Meanwhile back up on the bridge, the Admiral was ordering that the warning beacon be set for orbit around Serenity.

“Admiral, there’s a call from Serenity,” Communications announced.

“Patch it through,” the Admiral replied.

“Serenity, this is magistrate Collins. You have removed all of our bird people. I’m ordering that you return them all immediately,” Collins barked.

“Serenity, this is Admiral Asimov. I have removed all bird people from Serenity for their own safety; I will not return them. They will be leaving within the hour to another planet. They came to us of their own free will. I will also be placing a warning beacon in orbit around your planet. Due to all the deaths that have happened here to both bird people and humans, I feel this planet is unsafe,” Asimov replied with authority.

“But that will keep all space vessels away from our planet. I’m ordering you to remove that beacon immediately,” Collins shouted.

“With the authority I have Mr. Collins, I don’t answer to anyone except the Galactic Council. You may contact them if you wish, but they will tell you the same thing... Searcher out.”

Asimov turned and looked at Wilma. “Send out that beacon,” Asimov ordered.

“Yes sir,” Wilma replied with a smile.

Within minutes the warning beacon was sent. It set in a perfect orbit around Serenity.

“Now, set our course for Acklon. We have a lot of bird people that would like to go home now,” Asimov said with a smile.

“Course set Admiral,” the crewmember at the helm replied.

Back in the Galactic Gardens, “I think Karri and Saleena will be happy to see them,” Hawk said.

“I know they will, my friend,” Buck replied.

Hawk looked out the portal and noticed that Serenity was once again getting smaller and smaller. Only this time, he knew that he would never have to return there again. He smiled.

Hawk turned and looked at Buck. “What’s wrong?” Buck asked.

“Nothing. I’d better go check on Arrow and Koori. I haven’t seen them since we came back on board. Then I want to check on Marie. Maybe take a few visitors into see her,” Hawk replied.

“I think she’d like that. You can also tell her what the Admiral has done to protect other bird people from that planet,” Buck said.

Hawk stood there with a daze for a few moments.

“I just thought of something. I’m going home,” he said with a smile.

Buck smiled in return.

“When do you think you and Aslana will be getting married?” Buck asked.

“It won’t be for a while. We have to do the proper courting first. Then we have to seek permission from the elders. But, that’s if she accepts,” Hawk replied.

“Hawk my friend. That woman loves you so much. Do you honestly think she’ll refuse?” Buck asked.

“Come on. I’d better check on the children. They probably think I abandoned them,” Hawk said as he turned to leave the garden.

Hawk and Buck left the garden and headed for Hawk’s quarters. He opened the door and didn’t see the children. He walked into the sleeping area and there they were, still sound asleep.

“Do you think you should wake them?” Buck asked.

“No, not right now. They were so exhausted when they came on board, I’m going to let them sleep for a while longer.” Hawk thought for a moment, then looked over at Buck. “When do you go on patrol?” Hawk asked.

“Not for several hours, why?” Buck asked.

“Could you watch them for a few minutes while I check on Marie?” Hawk asked.

“Of course. Go ahead,” Buck replied with a smile.

Hawk smiled back. “Thank you my friend.”

Hawk left his quarters and headed for sickbay. He had just walked in the door when he heard a familiar voice.

“Hawk!”

He looked over and sitting up in bed was Marie. He walked swiftly over to her. “How are you feeling?” he asked.

“I’m feeling a lot better. Now I know where Karri and S aleena get their bedside manner from,” she said with a smile looking over at Dr. Goodfellow.

“I wanted to see how you were doing. And also let you know what’s been going on,” Hawk said.

“Are the children all right?” she asked with concern.

“The children are fine, as are all the other bird people. We’ve left Serenity’s orbit. We’re now on our way to Acklon. The Galactic Council couldn’t do anything to Collins, because there was no proof, but the Admiral took matters into his own hands. He placed a warning beacon in Serenity’s orbit. No space vessels, cruisers or freighters will land there. It is marked as a dangerous planet,” Hawk informed Marie.

Marie let out a big sigh of relief.

“I know it won’t bring Bryan back, but he was hoping it would bring you a little comfort knowing that for now on, not one bird person will be in danger on that planet,” Hawk said.

Marie’s eyes started to swell with tears.

“May I speak to the Admiral? Just for a moment?” she asked weeping.

Hawk stood and walked over to the intercom. “Hawk to Admiral Asimov.”

“Go ahead Hawk. Is everything all right?” Asimov asked.

“Sir, do you have a moment to come down to sickbay?”

“I’ll be down in a moment Hawk. Is Marie all right?” he asked.

“Yes sir. She would like to speak to you for a moment,” Hawk answered.

“On my way... Bridge out.”

Hawk walked back over to Marie’s bed. “He’s on his way, he should be here shortly,” Hawk said.

Marie smiled. “How are Koori and Arrow?” she asked.

“They’re still sleeping. They must have been exhausted,” Hawk replied.

Just then the sickbay door whooshed open and the Admiral walked in.

“Admiral Asimov, may I introduce you to Marie. Marie, this is Admiral Asimov,” Hawk said.

“It’s an honor to finally meet the woman that saved Karri and Saleena,” Asimov said.

“No Admiral. It’s an honor to meet the man that saved so many of Hawk’s people. I also wanted to say thank you for what you’re doing to Serenity,” Marie replied.

“Marie, I know it will not bring him back to you, but I hope you can feel a little comfort from it,” Asimov said.

“I do, Admiral,” she said with tears falling down her cheek.

Chapter 26

Back on Acklon, Karri and Saleena were just about finished with their schooling. They had been seeing Quill and Tiercel almost every day, after work or on their weekends off. Their hearts were growing fonder for one another. Kalee and Kestrel's love for each other was also growing more each day. Every night after they saw their potential mates, Karri and Saleena would go over to Aslana's house. They would sit for hours and talk about her feeling for Hawk. Aslana told the girls several times that she was worried Hawk would not have the same feelings for her when he returned.

"Aslana, Hawk loves you very much. I can tell he's thinking of you right now. Aslana, you are our uncle's destiny. Our ancestors led him to this planet and to you. You are meant to be together," Karri said.

Aslana could only smile.

"I pray that's true. I think the only thing I'm really concerned about is the memory he has of Koori," Aslana replied.

"I know he will always think of Koori. But he also knows that what he had with her, he could never have again," Karri replied.

They sat and talked for a few more moments, then the girls decided to go home. They stood and started to walk towards the door.

"We'll see you tomorrow," Karri said as she turned to face Aslana.

"You girls go straight home and get some rest. I'll see you tomorrow," Aslana replied.

They slowly made their way home. As they approached the house there was a figure standing by the door. At first they weren't sure who or what it was. As they drew closer they could tell it was a person.

"Can we help you?" Karri asked.

The figure started to move slowly towards them, closer and closer. The girls started to back up slowly. They were just about ready to turn and run when a voice said, "It's about time you got home. I was going to leave you a note on the door." They watched as the figure came closer and closer and saw that it was Kalee.

"Kalee! You scared us. What are you doing out this late?" Karri asked.

"I got a message from your uncle. I knew you'd want it as soon as possible. So I decided to bring it over now. I'm sorry if I startled you," Kalee replied.

Karri and Saleena walked closer to Kalee. "You heard from Hawk?" they asked.

"Yes. Karri, Saleena, your uncle is on his way home," Kalee said with excitement in her voice.

“He’s coming home?” Karri and Saleena repeated with tears forming in their eyes.

Kalee smiled and nodded her head. “Yes, he’s on his way home right now. They should be here within two days,” Kalee replied.

The girls started to weep.

“Maybe you should go over and tell Aslana that Hawk’s on his way home?” Kalee said.

They smiled and walked over to Kalee and embraced her.

“Go on, it’s getting late. Go tell her that her mate is coming home,” she said with a smile.

The girls started to run as fast as they could over to Aslana’s house. When they got there they noticed the lights were still on.

“She’s still up,” Saleena said. They walked up to the door and knocked softly so they wouldn’t wake Ashla.

The door opened, and there stood Aslana with a surprised look on her face.

“What are you two doing running back over here so late?” she asked.

They looked at her and got the biggest smile on their faces.

“What’s going on?” she asked.

“He’s coming home!” they shouted.

Aslana stood there for a moment. “Who’s coming home?” she asked.

“Hawk!” they squealed.

Aslana, still with a surprised look on her face, started to smile.

“Are you sure? Who told you he was coming home?” she asked with excitement.

“Yes, we’re sure. Kalee was standing by our front door when we got home. She didn’t want to wait till morning, so she came over to let us know right away. Then she told us we should come over here to let you know,” Karri replied.

“When? Do you know when he’s coming home?” she asked.

“Kalee said he’d probably be here within two days,” Saleena replied.

Aslana’s smile turned to tears of joy.

“Aslana? Are you all right?” Karri asked.

“Oh yes. I’m just so happy,” she replied with tears slowly falling down her cheeks.

“We’d better go home. We wanted to come over and give you the great news,” Karri said.

“No, it’s late. I don’t want you girls walking home alone again. I want you to stay here for the night. That way I know you’re safe,” Aslana said.

“Thank you. To tell you the truth, we are pretty tired,” Karri replied.

Aslana smiled and showed them to her bedroom. “You two can sleep in here tonight. I’ll sleep in the living room,” she said.

“No, we can’t have you give up your bed. We’ll sleep in the living room. We have to get up early for work, and that way we won’t wake you or Ashla,” Karri said.

“Are you sure?” she asked.

“We’re sure. But thank you for the offer,” Karri and Saleena said with a smile.

“All right girls. I’ll get you some blankets,” Aslana said as she headed for the closet for the blankets. She handed them the blankets and made sure the door was locked. “Good night girls,” she said.

“Good night Aslana, and thank you again,” Karri replied.

Aslana smiled and reached up to shut off the living room light. She made her way back to her bedroom and closed the door. The girls tried and tried to fall asleep, but being so excited about their uncle coming back home they just couldn’t do it. They sat up and softly talked about Hawk and Aslana. But they were not the only ones that were unable to sleep. In the bedroom Aslana tossed and turned. Finally she gave up, she gently opened the bedroom door and walked softly into the living room. She saw that she was not the only one. The girls looked up at her and smiled.

“You’re too excited?” Karri asked.

“Yes,” Aslana replied.

“How would you girls like a nice big breakfast? she asked.

“That would be great. We don’t really get to eat too much usually before we go to work,” Saleena replied.

Aslana started to prepare them breakfast. The girls folded and placed the blankets back into the closet, then they started to set the table.

“Why don’t you two go ahead and take your bath or shower? It’ll be a few minutes before the seed bread is ready,” Aslana said.

“You go first,” Saleena said to Karri.

“Are you sure?” Karri replied.

“Yes, I’ll help Aslana until you get done,” Saleena said.

Karri smiled and walked into the bathroom and started her shower.

Aslana and Saleena stood and talked about Hawk, Quill and Tiercel while the bread was baking.

“Do you think you’re uncle will approve of Tiercel?” Aslana asked.

“Yes, he’s already proved to uncle Kestrel that he’s able to provide for me,” Saleena replied.

“Aslana? You’re still not thinking that Hawk will not take you as his mate, are you?” Saleena asked with concern.

Aslana smiled in an unsure way.

“He loves you so much, and he didn’t want to leave you, but he had an obligation to fulfill on the Searcher. But when he gets back home he won’t be leaving anymore,” Saleena tried to reassure her.

“I know. But for some reason, I have this feeling that something is going on. That he has feelings for another,” Aslana replied.

“He did have feelings for Kalee for a while. But Kalee only had feelings of friendship towards him,” Saleena explained.

“Is that all?” she asked.

“Yes, only as friends,” Saleena said smiling.

Aslana sighed a big sigh of relief.

“Oh, the bread is about ready,” she said changing the subject.

Saleena just smiled. Karri walked out of the bathroom and into the kitchen. “Your turn,” she said.

Saleena smiled and walked towards the bathroom.

“What were you two talking about? You have a big smile on your face,” Karri asked.

Aslana turned and looked at Karri.

“Hawk does love me, doesn’t he?” she asked.

“Yes, with all his heart and soul,” Karri replied.

“Well, I guess I’d better get this place cleaned up a lot better than this. He’ll be home soon and I don’t want him to think I can’t keep a clean home,” Aslana said smiling.

Karri, a little confused by Aslana's turnaround, walked quickly into the bathroom and asked Saleena what they had talked about. Saleena explained to her that she just told her about Hawk and Kalee's friendship, and that's all it will ever be.

"That's all you told her?" Karri asked.

"Yes. Why, did I say something wrong?" Saleena asked getting a little nervous.

Karri smiled. "No, you didn't say anything wrong," Karri replied.

Just then there was a tapping on the bathroom door. "Girls, breakfast is ready."

Karri walked out of the bathroom as Saleena started to get dressed. She walked out of the bathroom shortly after Karri did and walked over to the dining room table. There was fresh baked seed bread, all kinds of fruit, cheese and juice.

"This looks great," Saleena said seating herself next to Karri.

"Thank you. Now, you girls eat. You'll have to go to work shortly," Aslana replied.

They sat at the table and ate. Aslana looked over at them and smiled.

"Oh, how are your studies going?" she asked.

"We're almost done with all our courses. I think Dennis said we'll be graduating in about a week," Karri replied.

"That's great. Just in time for your uncle to return home," she said with excitement.

"He said we'll probably be graduating on Friday," Saleena said.

Aslana looked at the girls with a puzzled look on her face.

"What's wrong Aslana?" Karri asked.

"Girls, did you say Friday? When did he tell you this?" she asked.

"He told us Thursday," Karri said.

"Girls, this is Thursday. So if I'm not mistaken, you'll be graduating tomorrow," Aslana replied.

Karri and Saleena looked at each other with a confused look. They both jumped up and walked quickly towards the door.

"We're sorry Aslana. Thank you for the great breakfast, but we'd better go check with Dennis and find out if we're graduating today or next Friday," Karri said.

“It’s all right girls, go check and I pray that it will be next week you graduate,” Aslana replied.

The girls were out the door and running towards the clinic. When they arrived, Edna was just unlocking the doors.

“Edna? Has Dennis arrived yet?” they asked trying to catch their breath.

“No. What are you girls doing here so early? You should be at home sleeping,” Edna asked.

“Edna? Is our graduation to morrow?” Karri asked.

“Yes it is. That’s why the doctor gave you two the day off,” she replied.

Just then Dennis came walking around the corner. “Karri? Saleena? What are you two doing here?” he asked.

“Dennis, we really need to talk to you,” Karri said .

“Is something wrong?” he asked.

“No. But we really do need to talk to you about something rather important,” Saleena replied.

“Well, come in. We’ll go into my office and talk,” Dennis said with a concerned look on his face.

Chapter 27

They walked into Dennis's office and sat down. Dennis seated himself in his chair and gazed over at Karri and Saleena.

"Okay, now what's going on?" he asked.

Karri and Saleena smiled.

"We got word last night that our uncle is on his way home. He should be here within the next few days. We were hoping that maybe you could hold off on the graduation till he got here?" Karri asked.

"Hawk's coming home? That's wonderful. Of course we could wait till he gets here. But you two girls have to promise me something right now," Dennis said in a strong voice.

"What is it?" Saleena asked.

"You two have to promise me that you'll take the next few days off. Because when you graduate, I'll be retiring," Dennis said.

"But we thought you would still be working for a while after we graduated?" Karri asked.

"No, Judy and I talked it over and we decided to retire completely. We're even thinking about moving back to Thom," Dennis replied.

The girls sat there quietly and looked at each other.

"Are you sure we're ready to take over the clinic by ourselves?" Karri asked.

Dennis smiled.

"You girls have been ready for a long time now. I think you've been ready the week after you started. But seeing this is a clinic, I had to train you in all fields of the medical profession. So when you graduate, you Karri and you Saleena will be fully trained medical doctors. You'll receive a medical diploma showing you completed and passed all medical training by myself and Dr. Hanson," Dennis said.

"But Dr. Hanson passed away. How can he sign the diploma?" Saleena asked a little confused.

"He had a lot of faith in you two girls. He saw right away that you would not let anything come between you and your training. So after talking to me, he signed the diploma about a month before he passed away," Dennis replied.

"He had that much trust and faith in us?" Karri asked.

"Yes, he did. And I'm very happy to say, you didn't let him down," Dennis said with a smile.

Karri and Saleena stood up and walked around Dennis's desk. He stood up and held his arms out to them. They wrapped their arms around his neck and embraced him. He in return did the same.

"Now, get out of here. I don't want to see you in this clinic till the day of your graduation," Dennis said with a single tear falling slowly down his cheek.

They left the office and walked towards the stores. They knew they would have to stock up on food. Their uncle would be home soon, plus with Dennis retiring, they would not really have time to get to the stores. The clinic opened at sunrise and closed at sunset. The stores also closed at sunset. Then Saleena remembered something Dennis had told them earlier. She stopped and looked at Karri with a smile.

"What are you smiling about?" Karri asked.

"Remember what Dennis told us the first time we ran the clinic. He said we should take turns working the clinic. That means that one of us will be off one day while the other works, then we switch the next day," Saleena replied.

Karri started to smile along with Saleena. "That's right. So one of us is off each day. That means we'll be able to go to the store or clean house, whatever has to be done that day," Karri said.

"But we should still go shopping today. You never know, uncle might come home today instead of tomorrow," Karri said.

"That's true," Saleena replied.

The girls started to do some food shopping. About an hour later with their arms full of bags they headed for the house. After they got home they started to clean the house from top to bottom. The hours passed, and finally they were done. They sat down on the sofa and sighed a sigh of relief. They smiled at one another.

"I don't know about you, but I'm exhausted," Saleena said.

Just then there was a knock at the door. The girls looked at one another and smiled. "Maybe they'll go away if we don't answer," Karri said softly.

Saleena started to giggle softly. Then she got a strange look on her face. "What if it's Quill or Tiercel? Or even uncle Hawk?" she asked.

Both girls jumped up and ran to the door. Karri swung open the door and there stood Kalee.

"I was hoping you girls would be home. I stopped by the clinic and Edna told me that you were going food shopping. I got another message from the Searcher," Kalee said with a smile.

Karri and Saleena's smile turned to a look of concern.

"Is something wrong? Uncle is coming home, isn't he?" Karri asked.

Kalee started to laugh. "Everything is fine. Your uncle sent a message telling us that he had a surprise for you two when he got here, that's all," Kalee replied smiling.

"Is he still on his way?" Saleena asked.

"Yes, they were a little delayed. They'll be here a day later," Kalee said with a smile.

"Thank you Kalee," Karri said lowering her head.

"I'm glad your uncle will be home soon. Well, I have to leave for a few days, but I should be back before your uncle gets here," Kalee said.

Saleena walked over to her half sister and embraced her. "Be careful," Saleena said.

"A surprise? I wonder what it is?" Karri asked.

"I don't know." Saleena all of a sudden got a sad look on her face. "What if he found another female he decided to have for his mate?" she said.

"No, uncle wouldn't do that. He loves Aslana too much. No, I think it will be something nice," Karri replied.

Just then there was another knock at the door. The girls smiled.

"Kalee probably forgot to tell us something else," Karri said smiling.

She walked back over to the door and opened it. This time it wasn't Kalee. Standing at the door were Quill and Tiercel.

"Good morning," Quill said holding a bouquet of flowers out to Karri.

Karri smiled and gently took the flowers and held them up to her nose and smelled them.

"They're beautiful, thank you," she said.

"Beautiful flowers for a beautiful woman," Quill replied.

Karri started to blush. Tiercel walked over to Saleena and handed her a bouquet of flowers also. He blushed. "He said it before I could," Tiercel said.

"It's all right. Thank you, they are beautiful," Saleena replied with a smile.

"Won't you come in?" Saleena asked.

"Thank you," Quill and Tiercel replied. They followed the girls in and seated themselves on the sofa.

"We were wondering if you two lovely ladies would like to go out to dinner tonight?" Tiercel asked.

“Well, it’s more like a picnic,” Quill replied.

“We’d love to, but we really do have to be home early,” Karri replied.

“Oh why? We heard you were off for the next few days,” Quill asked.

“Well, we are off. But we got word that our uncle is on his way home. He should be here within the next few days,” Karri said.

“He’s coming home?” Quill asked with concern in his voice.

“Yes,” Karri replied.

Tiercel looked more worried than Quill did. Saleena saw that he was nervous.

“Don’t worry. Hawk will like you,” she said in a reassuring voice.

“Now, where is that picnic going to be?” Karri asked.

“We thought we could have it up by the caves. But if you need to be home early, maybe we should have it down by the stream,” Quill said.

“No, the caves will be nice. It’s been a while since we were up there,” Karri replied.

“Okay, caves it is. Are you ready to go?” Quill asked.

“Oh, can you give us a few minutes? We just want to gather a few things,” Karri asked.

“Of course, take your time,” Quill said.

The girls walked into the kitchen and started to gather a few things. They then walked past the guys and into their bedrooms. They gathered a few blankets and towels. They walked back out into the living room.

“Okay, we’re ready,” Saleena and Karri said.

“Shall we go?” Quill asked.

The girls smiled and all of them walked out the door. As they walked through town, people were waving and smiling at them. The girls started to blush. Quill and Tiercel walked beside the girls as a mate would. Along the way they talked about their lives and what Hawk might say.

Quill was very comfortable with the idea of meeting Hawk for the first time as Karri’s potential mate. But Tiercel was still very nervous.

“What if he doesn’t like me? Or thinks I’m not a good provider and protector for you?” Tiercel asked.

Saleena turned and faced Tiercel.

“For one, you are a good provider. Two, you told Kalee and Kestrel you would protect me with your life. And three, really Hawk has no say over who I choose as a mate. He is not my real uncle, but seeing I have no male relative, I abide by his rules. But since my half sister is an elder, she has the right to approve or reject you as my mate,” Saleena replied.

Tiercel looked at Saleena with a strange expression on his face.

“How could you say that about a man who took you under his wing and protected you?” Tiercel said with anger in his voice.

Karri and Quill turned to see what was going on.

“If it wasn’t for him, most likely you’d be that human’s slave or something even worse. He took you in, he protected you and loved you, just like he would have done any family member. And you have the nerve to say that. I thought I knew you, but I guess I don’t,” Tiercel said as he walked away.

Quill looked at Karri. He ran to catch up with Tiercel.

“Hey, what’s going on?” he asked with concern.

“I can’t believe what she said about her uncle, even if he’s not her real uncle.”

Saleena was standing back with Karri crying.

“Saleena? What happened?” Karri asked rubbing Saleena’s shoulder.

“Oh Karri, I didn’t mean for it to sound that way. I just tried to explain to Tiercel that Hawk was not my real uncle, and that by our laws he didn’t really have any legal rights to approve or disapprove of him as a mate. Maybe I said it wrong, I don’t know,” Saleena said still crying.

Quill was talking to Tiercel a distance off from the girls.

“My friend, have you even considered that maybe she is under some stress right now. She’s getting ready to graduate medical school, her uncle is coming home and her feelings for you? That would make anyone say something that maybe sounded all right to them, but bad to someone else,” Quill asked.

Tiercel looked at his friend.

“I never thought of it that way. I know she’s under a lot of stress. I guess I just got upset because soon I’ll have a mate. Someone that will depend on me to protect her and provide for her,” Tiercel replied.

“Listen, I think that woman can do very well providing for herself. Heck, she’s getting a doctor’s diploma. Her half sister is an elder, and she already has a house to live in,” Quill said.

“I’m wanting to provide for her. Can’t you understand that? I want her to depend on me,” Tiercel said with a couple of tears falling down his cheek.

Saleena heard what Tiercel said. She slowly walked over to him and wrapped her arms around his waist. He stood there not returning the affection at first, but soon he felt her sobbing against his chest. He quickly wrapped his arms around her and held her close.

“I’m sorry Tiercel. I didn’t mean for it to sound that way. I just wanted to explain that if Hawk does not approve you as a mate for me, my half sister can still grant us our marriage if that’s what we want. I would never go against Hawk’s word, but I love you and I want to be your mate. Please forgive me,” Saleena said crying.

Tiercel gently lifted Saleena’s head and gently kissed her.

“Nothing and nobody will keep us apart. That, I promise,” he said as he kissed her again.

“Uumm, I hate to break you two up, but it’s getting late and we have to get back down the mountain before dark,” Quill said.

Saleena and Tiercel smiled at one another, then looked at Karri and Quill.

“All right. We made a promise to these two to have them home early. So a promise is a promise,” Tiercel replied.

They gathered their stuff and started walking back to town. Tiercel and Saleena were holding each other so tight on the way down the mountain that nothing could separate them. Quill and Karri walked side by side, holding hands.

“I never did ask you. Would you rather live in town or in the mountains after we’re married?” Quill asked.

Chapter 28

"I would love to live on the mountain, but seeing I'll be working at the clinic every day that would be hard to travel at night. So maybe for now it would be better to live in town," Karri replied. Deep down inside, she knew she really wanted to live on the mountain.

"Then in town it is," Quill replied.

Tiercel and Saleena, still holding each other tightly, talked about their little fight. Tiercel understood how stressed out she was and that she didn't mean what she said earlier. He could tell she loved her uncle very much. As they drew closer to town they didn't release each other as they did in the past. They walked through town either holding each other's hand or walking with their arm around one another. The townspeople stopped and smiled as they passed. Quill and Tiercel walked Karri and Saleena to their house and stopped outside the door. Tiercel gently kissed Saleena, and Quill gently kissed Karri.

"I'll see you tomorrow," Quill said slowly kissing Karri's hand as he backed away.

"I love you," Karri said.

"And I love you, my mate," Quill replied.

Tiercel and Saleena stood and watched the romance between Karri and Quill. Tiercel gently kissed Saleena again and backed away. "I'll see you tomorrow," he said.

"I love you Tiercel," Saleena said.

Only Tiercel didn't say it back. Instead he walked back over to her and gave her another kiss. Only this one was more passionate, more meaningful. He backed away slowly again still holding her hand.

"Until tomorrow," he said.

Karri and Saleena watched as they walked down the street and disappeared around the corner. The girls walked into the house and flopped down on the sofa.

"Are things all right between you and Tiercel now?" Karri asked.

"Yes, I explained to him that I didn't mean for it to sound like I didn't and don't need uncle's permission to marry. He understood. He also asked me if I'd like to live on the mountain or in town when we're married," Saleena said with a smile.

Just then a hard knock came at the door. Karri pushed herself off the sofa and walked over to the door. She opened it and there was Kalee again.

"There's a meeting in the center of town. Everyone is to attend. Come with me," Kalee said with concern in her eyes.

"What's it about?" Karri asked.

“You’ll find out. Come along,” Kalee replied.

Karri and Saleena walked out the door and followed Kalee to the meeting center in the middle of town. There was an elder standing on a platform in the middle of the street.

“I have a grave announcement to make.” He saw Karri and Saleena walking up behind Kalee. “Karri, Saleena, this is meant for you mostly. About an hour ago Edna, the receptionist at the clinic, found Dennis slumped over in his chair in his office. It seems he had a heart attack. He died before anyone found him.” The elder hung his head. He looked up again and looked directly at Karri and Saleena. “I’m sorry, girls. Until a doctor could be found in another town, there will be no graduation,” he said.

Karri and Saleena started crying. It wasn’t for them not graduating, it was for their dear friend and teacher. Kalee embraced both of them and kissed both of them softly on the top of their heads.

“I’ve sent word to the Searcher about Dennis’s death. I’m so sorry,” Kalee said holding them close.

The townspeople gathered around them and gave their condolences as well. Karri and Saleena stared at each other for a moment then bolted away from everyone. They ran straight to Dennis’s home. They knocked and knocked. Finally the door opened and there stood Judy. They could tell she had been crying, her eyes were swollen and red, her face was pale. They ran into her arms and they cried together.

“He was so proud of you girls,” she sobbed.

The girls backed away a little and looked into Judy’s eyes. “What happened? He was fine this morning,” Karri asked.

“He had some chest pains last night. But you know him, he didn’t want to admit anything was wrong. I talked to him just before he left and he said he was feeling a lot better. Then the next thing I knew... he was gone,” Judy replied weeping. “I’m just sorry you girls can’t get your diploma. Not until another doctor is found to hand you your diplomas. But that can’t and won’t be done until you take another complete exam test,” Judy said.

Karri and Saleena gazed at Judy for a long time.

“Judy, that diploma means nothing to us right now. You are a lot more important to us than that diploma ever could be,” Saleena said.

Judy started to cry even harder. All three of them wrapped their arms around each other and cried for a long time out on the front step of Judy and Dennis’s house. Not knowing that standing behind them were a few people that could make a difference. Kalee, Grey Falcon and White Eagle stood quietly behind them, watching, listening. They looked at one another and nodded.

“It is time,” Grey Falcon said.

Kalee walked up to the girls and Judy. "Karri, Saleena, it's time," was all she said as she turned and walked away.

Karri and Saleena glanced back over at Judy, who was smiling.

"What's going on?" Karri asked confused.

Grey Falcon, White Eagle and Kalee walked up to the girls and smiled.

"We're sorry we had to trick you like that. Dennis is fine," Judy said as she held out her hand. A moment later out walked Dennis, smiling.

"DENNIS?" Karri called out loudly with surprise. "But how? Why?" Saleena asked.

"You girls had to be put to the test. You proved to us and all the elders that you are very worthy of becoming doctors. You showed your concern, your pain, your compassion and your willingness to help. You will be great doctors," Dennis said.

"You mean this was all a test?" Karri asked.

"I'm sorry my dears. Dennis and the elders talked this morning. Dennis told them that he believed you were truly ready for the test. So the elders informed everyone in town of what was going to happen. We had to make it as real as possible. I'm sorry we had to trick you like that," Judy explained.

Karri and Saleena started to weep. Dennis walked over to them and embraced them both. "When your uncle gets here, we will have that graduation ceremony," Dennis said with a smile.

"Were Quill and Tiercel in on it?" Karri asked.

"No, they didn't know anything about it. We knew that there could be a slight chance that one of them might slip, and say something about it," Kalee replied.

"I believe those two men have chosen two great women as their mates," Grey Falcon said.

Karri and Saleena started to blush. "You knew about us?" she asked.

"It's my duty to know what's going on. Besides, I'm one of the elders who can deny or grant your marriage," Grey Falcon replied.

Karri and Saleena smiled.

"Well, I have to get back to the clinic, there's a lot of people waiting to see me," Dennis said smiling as he kissed Judy gently on her forehead.

"I'll be home at the regular time dear," he said as he walked off.

Karri and Saleena stood there.

“Is uncle really coming? Or was that a test also?” Saleena asked.

“Your uncle is coming. He should be here either tomorrow or the day after,” Kalee replied.

“You girls look like you could use some tea, would you like to come in and have some?” Judy asked.

Karri and Saleena nodded and walked in the house behind Judy, the front door closed. They sat while Judy served the tea. “Are you girls all right?” she asked.

“Yes, we’re all right. We’re just a little surprised that’s all,” Karri replied.

They sat there and talked about the clinic and how the elders felt about the girls becoming full medical doctors. The girls were surprised to hear that at first the elders weren’t too happy about having females as doctors, but as time passed, they realized how devoted they were to the people of Acklon. After they finished their tea the girls gave Judy a kiss and hug and walked back home. They had another surprise waiting on the doorstep of the house. People from the town had been placing flowers and food on their doorstep.

“What’s this for?” Saleena asked.

The question didn’t go unanswered for long. As they started to pick up the food and flowers, a note dropped out. Karri picked it up and started to read it out loud. “We know your uncle will be arriving soon. We also know you didn’t really have time to shop for food; we hope this will help,” signed the townspeople.

Karri and Saleena started to cry as they finished picking up the gifts.

They carried them into the house and started to sort them. Still weeping they put all the food away, and placed the flowers in vases around the house. They sat down on the sofa and gently cried themselves to sleep.

The next morning the girls decided to go check on Dennis, just to make sure he was okay. They started to walk towards the clinic. They walked around the corner that led to the clinic. As they approached they saw someone standing by the locked clinic door. Karri and Saleena noticed this person was wearing a long, black hooded cape. They stopped and looked at each other. Saleena could see the fear in Karri’s eyes. She knew Karri was remembering the day when Marc and Lola were murdered, and she was abducted by a man that wore a hooded cape. Saleena softly squeezed Karri’s hand to reassure her this time she was not alone. Karri gently nodded, they started to walk towards the stranger.

“May we help you?” Saleena asked nervously.

The stranger slowly turned to face them, still looking down at the ground. Karri and Saleena stood there, trying to see this person’s face. Slowly the mysterious person started to raise his or her head. Finally the mysterious person looked Karri and Saleena straight in their eyes.

The girls gasped...

Chapter 29

The stranger flipped the hood back and revealed his face.

“UNCLE!!” the girls squealed with delight.

Hawk stood there with a smile on his face. He quickly grabbed both girls around their waist, lifted them up and held them tightly. He kissed them both over and over again on their cheeks.

“I’ve missed you both so very much. I couldn’t wait to get back home,” Hawk said in an emotional voice.

Karri and Saleena started to weep as they embraced their uncle.

He put them back down and smiled. “But we thought you weren’t going to be here until tomorrow. How did you get here so fast?” Karri asked with a confused look on her face.

“When Kalee got in contact with us, we were already in orbit around Acklon. So I asked her not to say anything to you about me being here. She agreed. I heard a few things had happened since I left,” Hawk said with a knowing look on his face.

The girls lowered their heads and nodded lightly.

“Yes uncle. Something did happen after you left.” Karri and Saleena hesitated for a moment then looked back up into Hawk’s eyes. “We’ve both met someone very special,” Karri replied.

“I know.” Hawk looked over at Saleena. “Your potential mate’s name is Tiercel. And yours is Quill,” Hawk replied.

Karri and Saleena stood there with a surprised look on their faces.

“But, how did you find out?” Karri asked.

“You forget you have another uncle. Your uncle Kestrel has kept in contact with me as much as he could. He informed me that you two met and had fallen in love with these men,” Hawk said.

Karri and Saleena lowered their heads again in shame.

“He also informed me that he gave Quill permission to court you. And that Kalee gave Tiercel permission to court you, Saleena,” Hawk replied.

“Are you upset with us, uncle?” Karri asked.

Hawk’s smile returned.

“How can I be upset with you two. I was hoping you would find mates. I was just hoping you would wait till I returned,” Hawk replied.

Karri and Saleena embraced Hawk again.

“So when do I get to meet these lucky men?” Hawk asked.

“How about tonight? We can have them over for dinner,” Karri said.

“That sounds wonderful. Would you mind if I brought a few friends with me?” Hawk asked.

Karri and Saleena looked at Hawk for a moment, trying to figure out what friends he meant. They knew he would want to bring Aslana and Ashla, but the way it sounded there were more than just them.

“Of course uncle. Bring whomever you want,” Saleena replied.

As they stood there looking at each other, Hawk glanced across the street and saw someone he'd been wanting to see very much. Aslana and Ashla were doing their morning shopping. Hawk removed the cape completely and walked out into the middle of the street. The girls knew what he was looking at. “Aslana?” Karri called out.

Aslana looked in the direction the voice came from. Her eyes drifted a little way and saw a very familiar face. She dropped her bag of groceries and ran to Hawk's opened arms. Hawk embraced Aslana for a long time. Caressing her body with his hands, he gently tipped her head back to look into her eyes. He smiled, then gently but passionately kissed her. Standing in the middle of the street, Hawk and Aslana were together once again. Karri and Saleena smiled and still weeping started to applaud the couple. Soon all the shop owners and people shopping started to applaud. Hawk and Aslana looked around and smiled. Karri and Saleena ran over to them and embraced them. Little Ashla ran over to her mother, not knowing what was really going on, looked up and saw Hawk's face. She started smiling as well.

“Come on. Let's go home,” Hawk said.

He wrapped his arms around Karri, Saleena and Aslana. They walked back to Karri and Saleena's house, where there was another surprise waiting. Karri and Saleena smiled and walked quickly over to them. Waiting for the girls were Quill and Tiercel. Hawk watched as the girls went to their potential mates. Quill and Tiercel looked a little nervous when Hawk walked up to them.

“Hello sir. My name is Quill,” Quill said reaching his hand out to Hawk.

Hawk smiled and reached out and shook Quill's hand. “It's nice to meet you Quill. I am Hawk,” Hawk replied.

Hawk then turned his gaze to Tiercel.

Saleena started to introduce Tiercel to Hawk. Hawk raised his hand as if to stop Saleena.

“I want Tiercel to introduce himself to me,” Hawk said.

Tiercel looked at Hawk.

“My name is Tiercel sir. It’s an honor to meet you,” Tiercel said reaching out for Hawk’s hand.

Hawk stood there for a few moments then finally reached out his hand to Tiercel. “Hello Tiercel,” was all he said to Tiercel.

Tiercel feeling a little uncomfortable lowered his eyes to the ground. Saleena noticed that Tiercel would not look Hawk directly in the eyes. She walked over to him and embraced him.

“Your uncle does not approve of me,” Tiercel said sadly.

“He has to get to know you, as I did,” Saleena replied.

They all walked into the house and seated themselves on the sofa and chairs. Karri stood up and started to walk towards the kitchen. “Would anyone care for some tea?” she asked.

“I’d love some,” Aslana replied.

“As would I,” Quill said.

Tiercel sat there with his eyes looking at the ground. Hawk could tell Tiercel was very uncomfortable.

“Tiercel? May I speak to you outside?” Hawk asked.

Tiercel looked up and saw that Hawk was walking towards the door. He stood up and followed Hawk outside.

“Tiercel, from the moment I met you, you have not once looked me in the eye. Why?” Hawk asked.

Tiercel took a deep breath.

“I’m sorry sir. I was taught not to look the parent or guardian in the eyes. It shows disrespect and a challenge. I would never challenge you. I have too much respect for you and your family,” Tiercel replied.

Hawk smiled. “That’s the answer I was looking for,” Hawk said. Hawk extended his hand out to Tiercel. “It would be an honor to have you as Saleena’s mate,” Hawk said smiling.

Tiercel looked Hawk in the eyes for the first time. He saw a warm smile. He reached his hand out and shook Hawk’s hand. “Thank you sir,” he said smiling in return.

“I know Kalee already gave you permission to court Saleena, but I was hoping you’d take my permission also?” Hawk said.

“I would like that sir,” Tiercel replied.

“Then, Tiercel. You are granted my permission to court my niece Saleena,” Hawk said with pride.

Tiercel smiled, and was not nervous about looking Hawk directly in his eyes anymore. "Thank you sir. That means a lot to me," Tiercel replied holding his hand out to Hawk.

Hawk reached his hand out and with a good strong handshake they both smiled.

"Let's go get some of that tea. I could use a nice cold drink about now," Hawk said.

Tiercel smiled. They walked back into the house. Tiercel sat back down next to Saleena with a smile on his face. Hawk remained standing.

"I've just given Tiercel my permission to court Saleena," Hawk said proudly.

Saleena giggled a little, then ran over to Hawk, throwing her arms around his neck. "Thank you uncle," she whispered.

Hawk smiled and embraced her back. "He's going to make you a fine mate," Hawk replied softly.

Aslana stood up and walked slowly over to Hawk. He watched every move she made on her way over to him. She placed her hands in Hawk's hand and smiled. "We need to spend some time together," she said softly.

"Uncle? What about Quill?" Karri asked.

"Your uncle Kestrel already gave him permission to court you. If he thinks Quill will make a good mate for you, I won't dispute his judgment," Hawk replied.

"Now if you'd excuse us, Aslana and myself have some courting to do ourselves," Hawk said smiling.

They walked out the door hand in hand. They strolled down the street and around the corner heading towards town. Karri, Saleena and the boys just sat there and smiled at one another. Hawk and Aslana were walking when Hawk stopped, and looked at Aslana.

"I forgot to give Karri and Saleena their little surprise. They won't stay still for long. We have to go back," Hawk said.

He started to head back towards the house when he saw Karri, Saleena and their future mates walk out of the house.

"Karri? Saleena? I almost forgot something," Hawk said reaching into his vest.

He pulled out a piece of paper and handed it to Karri. "Follow these directions," Hawk said with a smile.

Karri and Saleena looked at Hawk with a confused look on their faces.

"Where does it lead, uncle?" Karri asked.

“Just follow it,” Hawk replied.

Karri, Saleena, Quill and Tiercel opened up the piece of paper and started to follow the directions.

“I know where this is. It’s close to the base of the mountain,” Tiercel said pointing in the direction of the mountain.

“Uncle? What’s up there?” Saleena asked.

“Just go. You’ll see soon enough,” Hawk replied.

They started their small walk to the base of the mountain. It took them about an hour to get there. Karri soon had a feeling they were being watched. But it wasn’t a threatening watch; more like a family member watching. Karri stopped and started to look around.

“What’s wrong, Karri?” Quill asked.

Karri placed her finger across her lips as if to say, be quiet. She started to walk slowly in the direction that Hawk had told them to go. Down around the stream where they first met were tracks that looked so familiar to Karri. She started to run in the direction of the rocks and caves. Then out from nowhere came two large wolves. Karri stopped and started to weep softly, cupping her hands over her mouth. Saleena and the boys were next to her when she started to weep.

“Karri, are those our friends?” Saleena asked.

Just then the female walked out in front of them. She walked over to Karri and Saleena and started to jump up and down in a joyful manner. Barking and whining, she lay down and rolled over on her back and exposed her soft underbelly. The rest of the wolves also did the same.

“Karri? what are they doing?” Quill asked.

“They’re showing me their underbellies. That means they trust me,” Karri replied. “Oh my dear friends, you’re here. But how?” she asked weeping.

Then walking up behind them were Hawk and Aslana. “I brought them back with us,” Hawk replied.

Karri ran over to Hawk and wrapped her arms around his neck and held on tightly. “Oh thank you uncle,” she said weeping and kissing Hawk on his cheek over and over again.

“I couldn’t leave them behind again, not this time. There’s something else, follow me,” Hawk said as he turned and walk up a small path.

Not far from where the wolves were, were all the bird people that he and the Searcher had taken from Serenity.

“Uncle? Where did they all come from?” Karri asked.

“They were scattered all over Serenity. I want you to meet someone,” Hawk said as he walked over to a human that was tending to the bird people. Saleena and Karri followed him. Hawk patted Carl on his shoulder.

“Carl, these are my nieces Saleena and Karri,” Hawk said.

Carl turned around and gazed at the girls. Karri and Saleena smiled and reached their hands out to him.

“Hello Carl. It’s very nice to meet you,” they said politely.

“Hawk, your nieces are beautiful... I mean, it’s an honor to meet the nieces of Hawk,” Carl replied lowering his head.

“Uncle? Is this the brother of Finney?” Saleena asked.

“Yes. But he’s not like Finney at all. In fact he’s just the opposite,” Hawk replied.

“Karri, Saleena, I know what my brother did to you and your families. I just wanted to say, I’m sorry,” Carl said.

“Carl, you have no need to apologize. You are not the one that caused all the pain to my people and myself,” Karri replied.

“Thank you. Coming from you girls, that means the world to me,” Carl said smiling.

“Carl has been tending to our people since we left Serenity,” Hawk said. Aslana stood by Hawk’s side, not saying a word.

“Hawk? Where are these people going to stay?” she asked.

“Well, I’m not sure yet. I want to talk to the elders about building some more homes for them,” Hawk replied.

Just then another voice called out from the crowd. A female’s voice.

“Am I invited to your little get together?” she asked.

Karri and Saleena knew that voice very well.

“Marie? Is that you?” Karri asked trying to look through the crowd.

“Yes, it’s me my dears,” she replied.

She walked out from behind a tree and ran over to them. “Oh my girls, you’ve grown so much,” Marie cried.

“Marie!” they said back as they embraced one another.

Quill and Tiercel stood and watched as Karri and Saleena embraced Marie with as much love as they had for their uncle.

Tiercel and Quill started to whisper to each other.

“I don’t know. We can try,” Quill replied.

“Try what?” Hawk asked.

Chapter 30

Tiercel and Quill explained to Hawk what they were discussing.

“Do you think you could do it?” Hawk asked.

“I’m sure we can. If we can get the supplies we need,” Tiercel replied.

“Let me see what I can do. Right now it’s getting late and we should get the women back home,” Hawk said.

Quill and Tiercel agreed. Hawk walked over to Karri, Saleena and Marie.

“It’s time to head home. It’s getting late,” Hawk said.

“All right uncle. May we come back up tomorrow?” Saleena asked.

“You two are grown women now. It’s up to you when you want to come up here again,” Hawk replied.

The girls smiled and embraced Marie. “We’ll be back tomorrow,” Karri said.

“I’ll be waiting for you,” Marie replied with a smile.

On the way home Hawk, Tiercel and Quill talked quietly among themselves. “Do you really think they’ll do it?” Tiercel asked Hawk.

“I’m sure they will,” Hawk replied.

Hawk then turned to Quill. “I’m sorry about your father. He was a good man,” Hawk said placing his hand on Quill’s shoulder.

“Thank you Hawk. Was he in any pain when he passed away?” Quill asked.

“No, I don’t think so. I took him out in the War Hawk just a few hours before he died. He had a great time. He was laughing and was enjoying every minute of it,” Hawk replied. Hawk lowered his head for a moment.

“Your father’s spirit saved my life shortly afterwards,” Hawk said.

“He saved your life? How?” Quill asked.

“I was mourning his death when somehow the outer lining to the Galactic Gardens ruptured. I was feeling very cold, so I tried to make it to the door, and that’s when I collapsed. The only thing I could remember was hearing a voice behind me calling for help on the intercom. A few moments later the medical team was there pulling me out. When I asked the doctor who it was that called for help, he told me no one was in there when they arrived. Shortly after that, I was in the sickbay when Black Hawk’s spirit came before me. At first I thought I was dreaming. I closed my eyes, then reopened them, and he was still there. He told me that I still had to fulfill my destiny. Then he was gone,” Hawk said with tears rolling down his cheek.

“Thank you Hawk,” Quill said.

“For what?” Hawk asked.

“For making my father’s final few hours happy,” Quill said.

“It was an honor to do that for him. I’m just sorry he could not make it all the way back to Throm before he died,” Hawk replied.

Karri, Saleena and Aslana knew the men were talking about something important, so they stayed back a little so they could talk freely. They made their way back to the house. Quill and Karri said their good-byes, as did Tiercel and Saleena. Quill and Tiercel shook Hawk’s hand and headed for home themselves. Hawk embraced the girls and told them that he’d be back shortly, and that he was going to walk Aslana home.

“First, I have to stop over at Dennis and Judy’s to pick up Ashla,” Aslana said.

Hawk nodded and they started to walk towards Dennis and Judy’s house. Hand in hand they walked slowly, talking about their feeling for each other. They arrived at Dennis’s house and knocked softly. Judy answered the door.

“I wasn’t expecting you to come over to pick her up till tomorrow. She’s sleeping right now,” Judy explained. Judy looked at Hawk and Aslana with a warm smile. “Why don’t you two go home and get to know each other again? You need your time together,” Judy replied.

Hawk smiled back. “Thank you Judy. We do have a lot more to talk about,” Hawk said.

“I’ll see you in the morning then. Good night,” Judy said as she closed the door.

Hawk and Aslana walked back to Aslana’s house. They entered and sat down on the sofa next to each other. They started to talk again about their upcoming marriage. Hawk asked Aslana a few questions about Quill and Tiercel.

“They’re good boys. They work hard and would make good mates for Karri and Saleena. There was a boy before that showed interest in Saleena. It was Quill’s older brother, Kree. But it turned out that he wasn’t about to make a commitment to her. He didn’t believe Karri could look into one’s soul or communicate with animals. He almost called her a liar. Needless to say he left that same day. But it turned out that Tiercel was there at the stream shortly after he left. I understand Saleena was going to come home, but Karri told her that she couldn’t stay there alone with a man that was not a potential mate without supervision. Well, Saleena agreed to stay, but she stayed by herself down by the stream. She said she heard a voice, and she stood up and slipped into the stream. That’s when Tiercel came to her rescue. He helped her out, and it turned out that he was a friend of Quill’s. Well, shortly after that, Tiercel and Saleena started to see each other on a regular basis. As did Quill and Karri. They both knew they couldn’t really date without the permission of a male relative. That’s when Kestrel met and liked Quill. Kalee pointed out to Saleena that although she was not a male relative, she was a blood relative and also an elder, which gave her the authority to approve Saleena and Tiercel’s courtship.

They wanted to wait till you got home to make it official; that's why Quill and Tiercel asked you themselves," Aslana explained.

Hawk sat and smiled. "The boys wanted my permission?" he asked.

"Yes, they said it wouldn't be right unless you gave them your permission. They really love the girls, Hawk. I've seen Quill and Tiercel bring flowers to them almost everyday. They stood by them when they worked everyday while Dennis was tending to Dr. Hanson's funeral. They worked every day with no complaints," Aslana said.

"I know I was supposed to spend a lot more time with you tonight, but I need to take care of something. Do you mind?" Hawk asked.

"Of course not. I know you and the boys were talking about something in private, that's why we stayed back. If it's important, go. We'll have the rest of our lives to be together," Aslana replied.

Hawk smiled. He knew he had found his perfect mate. Beautiful and understanding. "I'll be back as soon as I can." Hawk leaned over to Aslana and gently kissed her. "I love you," he said as he leaned towards her to kiss her again.

"I love you too," she replied with a smile.

Hawk smiled and walked out of the house and headed for the hangar where the War Hawk was sitting. He opened the hatch and climbed in. He knew the Searcher was still in orbit around Acklon for a few more days.

"Hawk to Acklon control."

"This is Acklon control... go ahead Hawk."

"Acklon control, requesting permission for take off."

"Acklon control to Hawk... Permission granted. Will you be returning?"

"Affirmative.. I'll be returning within four hours."

"Permission for take off in sector 4...Acklon control out."

"Thank you Acklon... Hawk out."

Within a few moments the War Hawk was warmed up and leaving the Acklon hangar. Hawk steered the ship towards the Searcher.

"Hawk to Searcher."

"Hawk? What are you doing back?"

"Admiral, I'd like a conference with you after I land," Hawk requested.

“Of course Hawk. Is everything all right?” the Admiral asked.

“I’m hoping you’ll be able to answer that, sir,” Hawk replied.

“War Hawk... approach landing bay 3.”

“Landing bay 3. Thank you Searcher... Hawk out.”

“Searcher out.”

Hawk guided the War Hawk gently and professionally into the Searcher and docked in hangar 3. He shut it down and climbed out. He headed for the bridge. On the bridge Buck, Wilma and the Admiral were waiting for him. As he entered the bridge Buck smiled.

“You couldn’t stay away, could you?” Buck said jokingly.

Hawk smiled back. “Admiral, may I speak to you in private?” Hawk asked.

“Of course Hawk. Let’s go into the meeting room,” Asimov replied.

Hawk followed the Admiral in and again the door closed. Hawk stood until the Admiral had seated himself, then he sat down.

“Hawk? What’s wrong? Is everything all right down there?” Asimov asked with concern.

“Sir, all those new bird people have no place to go. Some of them have found a place to stay temporarily, but they won’t be able to stay there for long. Quill and Tiercel are builders and carpenters. Sir, if they could find the supplies they need, they could start building these people a place to live, a home of their own,” Hawk said.

The Admiral gazed out the portal for a moment then turned his attention back to Hawk. “I was wondering, who are these Quill and Tiercel? Are they among the new bird people?” Asimov asked.

Hawk smiled. “No sir. They’re Karri and Saleena’s potential mates. They’ve been courting now for several months,” Hawk replied.

“Mates? Aren’t they a little young to have mates?” Asimov asked with a confused expression on his face.

“No sir. Our females are permitted to start courting by the age of 17 in your world. It might be several years before they actually get married,” Hawk replied.

“Oh. Well as for the supplies, go talk to Anderson, he’s in charge of building supplies. If he has enough for you, or should I say Quill and Tiercel, to build these people homes you’re more than welcome to it. By the way, did Karri and Saleena like their four legged gifts?” the Admiral asked.

Hawk laughed. “Yes sir, they loved it,” Hawk replied.

Asimov stood as did Hawk. Hawk removed his glove and extended his hand to the Admiral.

“Thank you sir,” he said.

The Admiral reached out and took Hawk’s hand and shook it. “You know if you ever need anything, all you have to do is contact us,” Asimov said.

Hawk smiled, turned and walked out of the meeting room. Outside Buck and Wilma were waiting to hear what was going on. Hawk just smiled and left the bridge heading for the supply room. Buck looked at the Admiral when he exited the meeting room.

Chapter 31

“Admiral? What did Hawk want to talk to you about?” Buck asked.

“He just asked if there was some way he could get some building supplies from us so he, Quill and Tiercel could build some homes for the new bird people, that’s all,” Asimov replied.

“Sir? Who are Tiercel and Quill?” Buck asked.

“They’re Karri and Saleena’s future mates,” the Admiral replied.

Buck’s mouth dropped. “Their future mates?” he asked to make sure he heard the Admiral correctly.

“Yes Buck, their future mates.”

The Admiral went back to doing his business while Buck and Wilma were still a little confused. Buck turned to Wilma. “He did say future mates, right?” he asked again.

Wilma nodded. “That’s what he said,” she replied.

Hawk made his way to the supply room. He entered and was greeted by Anderson. “Hawk, what are you doing back?” he asked.

“The Admiral granted permission for me to take some building supplies. We need as much as you can spare to build homes for the new residents on Acklon. Right now there are not enough homes to go around,” Hawk replied.

Anderson started to look around. “How many were there?” Anderson asked.

“A total of about 75, some bird people and some humans,” Hawk replied.

Anderson smiled. “I think we can give you all the supplies you’ll need to build at least 100 homes,” Anderson replied.

“Are you sure? I don’t want to leave you short on any of the supplies,” Hawk said.

“We’ll be heading for Omega 3 after we leave here. We’ll be able to pick up more building supplies there,” Anderson replied with a smile.

“Thank you. The newcomers will greatly appreciate it,” Hawk said shaking Anderson’s hand.

Anderson smiled and ordered four crewmembers to start loading as much building supplies as possible into two of the shuttles. “You’ll probably have to make several trips. Right now there are enough supplies in those two shuttles to build about ten homes. I was wondering, do you have anyone down there that knows how to do the work?” Anderson asked.

“Quill and Tiercel do building and carpeting work for a living. They should know how to do it,” Hawk replied.

Anderson nodded then walked over to the ship's intercom. "Anderson to bridge."

"Asimov here... What is it Anderson?"

"Sir, at this rate with only two shuttles to transport these building supplies, it will take several hours. Sir, I'd like permission to use four more shuttles, and also permission to take a building crew down to assist Hawk with the building of these homes?" Anderson asked.

Asimov was silent for a few moments. "Permission granted," Asimov replied.

"Thank you sir. Anderson out." Anderson turned to Hawk with a smile on his face. "Let's get all these supplies loaded. We have a lot of building to do," he said smiling. Anderson ordered five more crew members to assist in the loading of the supplies on to the other four shuttles. Within a matter of time all of the shuttles were loaded and ready to go.

"Hawk, you lead us down and show us where you want to start building," Anderson said.

Hawk smiled and headed for the War Hawk and climbed in. "Hawk to bridge."

"Asimov here. Are you ready to leave, Hawk?"

"Yes sir. Thank you sir, for all your help. All the new people of Acklon will greatly appreciate it," Hawk replied.

"Did Anderson have enough building supplies for you to build enough housing?" Asimov asked.

"Yes sir. There was enough to build about 100 homes. He released all of it. I hope that was all right?" Hawk asked.

"That's fine. Oh Hawk, we just received a message from Acklon. There seems to be a small disturbance on the planet. The elders are asking for you to return immediately," Asimov said.

"A disturbance sir? Did they say what was wrong?" Hawk asked.

"No, they didn't. Just that they need your assistance right away," the Admiral replied.

"Admiral, requesting permission to leave the Searcher?" Hawk asked.

"Permission granted. And Hawk, good luck," Admiral Asimov said.

Within a few moments, the War Hawk was on its way back down to Acklon, followed by the six shuttles loaded with all the building supplies and a building crew of eight.

"Hawk to Acklon."

"Go ahead Hawk. This is Acklon."

"Requesting permission to land in sector 101."

“Sector 101 is by the stream north of town. Why do you request that coordinate?”

“I’m bringing in six shuttles filled with building supplies. It would be easier to land there, instead of landing in the hangar and carrying them out of town,” Hawk replied.

“Stand by Hawk.”

“Standing by.”

A few moments later Acklon control called for Hawk. “Acklon to Hawk.”

“Go ahead Acklon...This is Hawk.”

“Permission granted... Acklon out.”

“Acknowledged... Hawk out.”

Hawk escorted the six shuttles to the outside of town where Carl and Marie were staying with all the newcomers. Marie heard the War Hawk coming over the small ridge and started waving.

“Who’s that?” Carl asked.

“It’s Hawk, and it looks like he brought some friends,” she replied with a smile.

Hawk landed the War Hawk a little way from the stream, shut down the engine and climbed out. The six shuttles landed close to his ship. They shut down their engines and exited the shuttles. As they were walking over to join Hawk, some of the newcomers ran over to greet them. They shook their hands and the women and children embraced the pilots and crewmembers. Hawk stood there next to Marie and Carl smiling.

“Hawk? What is all this?” Marie asked.

“It’s building supplies. There’s enough to build every one of these people a home of their own,” Hawk replied.

Marie embraced Hawk. “Oh Hawk, how can we ever thank you?” Marie said softly.

“There’s one way you can thank me. Go into town and find Quill and Tiercel. They are probably over at Karri and Saleena’s house about now. Have them come out here, tell them I got the building supplies they need,” Hawk replied.

Before Hawk could say another word Marie was running towards town with Carl right beside her. Hawk could do nothing but smile as he watched them run towards town. Marie and Carl made their way to Karri and Saleena’s house. Marie knocked on the door and waited. A few moments later the door opened and there stood Tiercel.

“Are you Tiercel or Quill?” she asked.

“I’m Tiercel,” he answered in a confused voice.

“My name is Marie. Hawk wanted me to come tell you and Quill that he has the building supplies, and for you two to come out to the stream,” Marie informed him.

“He got the supplies already?” he asked.

“Yes, he brought back six shuttles full of building supplies. He said there were enough supplies to build everyone a home,” Marie replied.

“Won’t you come in?” he asked.

Marie and Carl followed him into the house and into the kitchen where Karri and Saleena were preparing dinner. Tiercel told Quill that Hawk had returned with all the supplies.

“Is he waiting for us?” Quill asked.

“Yes,” Marie replied.

Quill and Tiercel smiled and gazed over at Karri and Saleena.

“Go on you two, we’ll be there shortly. We still have to make a few stops at the other stores and pick up more food,” Karri said.

Marie walked over to them and saw that they were fixing meals for all the people and bird people out by the stream. She embraced them and gave them a small kiss on their cheeks. “You two are angels. Your uncle is going to be so proud of you,” Marie said.

Karri and Saleena smiled. “Marie? How many crew members were with uncle?” Karri asked.

“About eight, I think,” she replied. “Do you need any help?” she asked.

“We’d love some help. Could you please get the bread out of the cupboard?” Saleena asked.

Marie went to the cupboard and pulled out the bread.

“There’s not much bread left. Do you have any more?” she asked.

“No, we have to stop by the bread store on our way out of town and get some more bread and some seed bread. The baker is giving us about twelve to fifteen loaves of seed bread and about ten to twelve loaves of regular bread. He said it’s the least he can do. They probably haven’t had a good meal for a long time,” Karri replied.

“We better leave. The stores will close shortly,” Karri said as she packed up the food.

Saleena, Marie and Karri left the house and started to head towards town. As they approached the center of town, they noticed the stores were filled with people. Dennis walked across the street and greeted them.

“Dennis? Where did all these people come from?” Karri asked.

“They heard what you and Saleena were doing, so they’re buying extra food for you to take out to all those people,” Dennis replied.

“How did they find out what we were doing?” Karri asked.

Dennis hung his head and tried to change the subject. The girls knew right away by the expression on his face that he was the one that informed everyone. They gently placed all the bags and boxes of food on the ground and wrapped their arms around his neck.

“You told them, didn’t you?” Saleena asked.

“Well, I saw Carl and the boys heading for the outside of town. I asked them where you were at and they told me you were at home fixing all this food for those new people. So I told some the other storeowners and they passed it on to the people and this is what happened. We can’t have them living by bread and fruit alone. A lot of the women have prepared complete meals. Most of the men have gone out to assist Hawk and the boys at building the houses. I believe your other uncle has gone out there also,” Dennis said.

Marie started to weep softly to herself. Dennis walked over to her and embraced her. “What’s wrong?” he asked softly.

Marie looked up at Dennis and started to smile.

“These people have gone through so much, and finally they have people that care for them. Complete strangers on another planet, and they’re being treated like they belong already,” Marie said sobbing softly.

“Oh my dear lady, we’re a family here as you will soon see. When one is in trouble, the whole town comes to help. It doesn’t matter if they’re human or bird people, we’re a family,” Dennis replied.

Marie smiled and patted Dennis on his arm to let him know she understood. Just then a voice called out from behind them. “Karri! Saleena! We’re ready to go,” the voice said.

The girls turned to see all the people lined up carrying bags and boxes of food.

“Thank you everyone. We better hurry, it’s getting late and there are probably a lot of hungry people out there. Including the workers,” Karri said smiling.

They followed Karri, Saleena and Marie out of town. After walking for about half an hour, they could see some of the roofs of some of the new houses that the men had already built. As they got closer they saw that not only did they have a few houses up, but also they had more than half of them built. People were moving what belongings they had left into the homes that they had done.

“Uncle? How did you get so many built so quickly?” Karri asked.

Then she turned to see even the newcomers were helping in any way they could. Carrying supplies, clearing the ground, or just getting water from the stream for the workers to drink. Everyone was helping in one way or another.

Hawk smiled. "You brought something to eat? That's great, these people could use some food right now," Hawk said.

Karri, Saleena and the other people that were carrying the food walked over to a small clearing and started to divide the food. They wanted to make sure everyone got an equal share. The larger households would get more food than the smaller ones. The newcomers with their houses already built started to line up. Karri, Saleena and a few of the other women handed some it to each household. A small child walked up to Karri and Saleena.

"May I have something to eat?" she asked in a soft, shy voice.

"How can you refuse that face," Saleena said.

She walked around to the child and handed her some seed bread and some fruit. "This should hold you till we get your house built," Saleena said handing her the food.

"She doesn't have a family," a voice said.

Karri, Saleena and the other women looked around and saw an older man come through the crowd.

"She doesn't have a family?" Marie asked.

"No, her family was murdered by humans a year ago. Probably the same one that murdered your mother and father," the old man said in a deep raspy voice looking at Karri and Saleena.

"Who's been taking care of here since then?" Karri asked.

"People would give her what they could. Most of the time no one had had any food to give," the old one replied.

Marie knelt down next to the little girl. "I know you don't know me, and you probably don't really trust any humans right now. But I have a small house in the clearing on this side of town. If you like, you can come live with me," Marie said.

The little girl smiled. "Really?" She hesitated for a moment. "Do you have enough food for the both of us?" she asked softly.

Marie started to laugh softly. "Aww, little one. I'll make sure you have plenty to eat every day," Marie replied.

Hawk, overhearing everything that was being said, smiled.

Karri and Saleena, still handing out the food bags and boxes, smiled. "What is your name?" Karri asked.

"My name is Robin."

Chapter 32

“Well Robin, my name is Marie. These are Karri and Saleena, they’re Hawk’s nieces. And this man here is Carl,” Marie said.

Robin smiled. “You’re his nieces?” she asked pointing at Hawk.

“Yes, we are. And Marie is a very nice lady. She helped our uncle find us on Serenity,” Karri replied.

Robin walked over to Marie and placed her small hand in hers. “Can I come home with you today?” she asked softly.

“I wouldn’t have it any other way,” Marie replied with a smile.

“I don’t think so!” a voice yelled out from the crowd.

Marie and the girls looked over to where the voice came from. Forcing his way through the crowd came a man. “I’m not going to allow a human to raise that child,” he said loudly.

“Excuse me sir? Are you the child’s guardian or parent?” Marie asked.

“No, but I’m not going to let you raise her like a human. She is one of us, so we’ll care for her,” he yelled out.

Marie, Saleena and Karri were surprised by this man’s rudeness. Hawk heard the yelling and quickly walked over to the girls and Marie. The little girl stood next to Marie holding her hand tightly.

“What’s the problem?” Hawk asked.

“This human wants to take this child and raise her like a human. That’s what the problem is,” the man replied.

Hawk turned and looked at Marie and the small child. “Marie? Does this child have a parent or guardian?” Hawk asked.

“No, she doesn’t,” the old man spoke out.

Hawk turned and faced the older man. “Do you know what happened to her parents?” he asked.

“Yes Hawk. Her real parents were murdered on Serenity. She is an orphan. All of us have cared for her since then. Now this kind lady would like to care for her, but this man decided he wants to care for her,” the old man replied.

Hawk turned to face the other man. “Are you willing to care and feed this child every day? To protect her, and allow her to live in your home?” Hawk asked.

The man walked over to Hawk and looked him in his eyes.

“Who do you think you are asking me those questions? I am Peregrine, I’m the leader of these people,” he replied.

“Since when Peregrine? You have done nothing but take what food we had left and kept it for yourself and your family. You are no leader,” the old man shouted.

Soon almost all the bird people had gathered around to see what the yelling was about.

“Ask anyone, Hawk. They’ll tell you the same thing. We’ve lost almost all our children, thanks to this man and his family,” the old one said.

Hawk turned to face the man again. “You have no right to take food from these people,” Hawk said with anger in his voice.

“You never told me who you think you are. To me you are nothing but one of us who thinks he knows everything,” the man said snickering.

By this time Hawk was furious. Marie had seen this look on Hawk’s face before. She gripped Robin tightly by the hand and started to back up. Just then another voice came out of the crowd.

“Stop right there, both of you,” the voice ordered.

The man turned around to see two older men walking towards them.

“This is none of your business, old man. Go away before you get hurt,” Peregrine ordered.

Hawk looked up to see Grey Falcon and White Eagle walking towards them. Hawk, showing respect, lowered his head, as did Karri and Saleena.

“Look, he even bows to two old men. What kind of leader would he be?” Peregrine laughed.

The elders walked over to Hawk and placed their hands on his shoulder.

“Look, he has to have his old father and uncle fight his battles for him,” Peregrine said laughing even more.

Peregrine walked over and pushed one of the elders. “I said to go away old man. Go back under your rock and die,” he said.

Hawk walked over and helped the older to his feet.

“I’m sorry sir, but I won’t stand by and watch him treat you this way,” Hawk said softly.

Peregrine laughed and turned to the others who had gathered.

“Now, you do as I say. Go pack your belongings. We’re leaving this place and find a home where we can live without humans around,” he ordered.

Hawk stood straight up and walked over to Peregrine.

“These people may leave, but only if they wish to,” Hawk said standing his ground.

“I’m getting tired of you trying to take charge. There was only one of our kind that I would allow to order me around, and he’s dead. Him and his mate were murdered with the rest of our people on Throm,” Peregrine said.

“You are talking about Hawk, aren’t you?” Hawk asked.

“Yes, he was a true leader and protector,” Peregrine replied.

“Then I guess I should introduce myself. My name is Hawk,” Hawk said looking Peregrine in the eyes.

The elders walked over and stood next to Hawk.

“And these old men as you call them, are the elders of this planet,” Hawk said loudly so every one could hear. Hawk hesitated for a moment. “These elders run this planet, and I am the protector,” Hawk said.

Soon every one of the bird people lowered their heads to the elders. All except Peregrine. He laughed and walked away. The elders patted Hawk on his shoulder and walked over to Marie and Robin. Marie lowered her head out of respect for the elders.

“Marie, we’ve heard so much about you. It’s an honor to have you living here on Acklon with us. Now tell us, what was all this about?” Grey Falcon asked.

Marie started to explain about Robin and her being an orphan. And how she would like to care for her in her home. The elders listened carefully to everything she said.

“We could not think of a better person, human or bird person to raise this child. We as the elders of Acklon hereby state that from now on, Robin will be the adopted daughter of Marie. And that this child will live in her home,” Grey Falcon said.

They then turned to Peregrine, who was standing in the back.

“You Peregrine, are hereby ordered to leave Acklon and to never return, that is our order. If you should return to Acklon, you will be imprisoned for life. We will not stand for any troublemakers on this planet. You have two hours to pack your belongings, your family and leave Acklon,” Grey Falcon ordered.

Peregrine slowly started to back away. He turned to his family and started to push them towards the house that was built for them before this happened. He made one small mistake; he pushed his pregnant mate. Everyone saw what he had done. Karri and Saleena rushed to the woman’s side.

Hawk ran over and knelt down next to her. “Are you all right?” he asked.

She looked at Hawk with tears in her eyes. “Please,” was all she said.

Hawk helped Karri and Saleena help the woman to her feet.

Karri and Saleena saw that she had fallen on to a large branch. As she stood they noticed her holding her lower stomach. Karri gently moved her hand away and saw that the branch was thrust deep into her body. Knowing it could have hit the unborn child, they ripped away some of their clothing and held it firmly on her wound.

Hawk walked over to Peregrine who didn't even stop to help his mate or even to see if she was all right. Hawk was furious, he took Peregrine by his shoulders and started to shake him. He then walked him over to his mate who had doubled over in pain.

"Look what you have done to your mate! If you treated these people the way you treat your own mate, I should kill you right now," Hawk yelled with anger.

Karri and Saleena started to walk the pregnant woman towards town.

"Wait!" someone yelled out. The girls stopped to see one of the pilots running towards them. "Take her to my shuttle. I'll take all of you into town. She won't make the trip walking all that way," he said with concern.

"Thank you," Karri replied.

They walked the woman over to one of the shuttles, and entered it. The door closed and before long the shuttle was airborne, heading for town. The pilot landed in the heart of town. Karri and Saleena helped the woman out of the shuttle. Dennis, who was standing outside the door, went running over to them.

"What happened?" he asked.

"Her mate pushed her to the ground. When we helped her up we saw that she had fallen onto a branch," Karri replied.

"Take her to the delivery room," Dennis said as he walked along side of them.

The girls slowly walked her into the delivery room and helped her up onto the exam table. The girls left one at a time to wash their hands getting ready to assist Dennis if they were needed.

Back at the stream, Peregrine took a swing at Hawk and missed. Hawk in return hit Peregrine in the jaw with full force, knocking him to the ground. Peregrine yelled for the others to protect him, but he got a small surprise: instead of any of them helping him, they turned their backs to him.

"How dare you treat your mate like that? What kind of man are you? Your mate is in town maybe losing your child, and you're worried about yourself?" an old birdman asked.

The others watched as Hawk turned and walked away. He turned around again and faced Peregrine. "You are not worthy of a mate," he said loudly and with anger still in his voice.

Back in town, the girls and Dennis were trying everything they could possibly do to keep the unborn child alive, but to no avail. They fought with all their might to deliver the child alive. The child died shortly after birth. Karri and Saleena stayed with the mother and held her

closely, comforting her in her time of grief. Dennis walked outside where the pilot of the shuttle was waiting.

“How is the woman?” he asked.

“The woman is doing fine.” Dennis hung his head. “We lost the child.”

The pilot hung his head and slowly walked over to the shuttle, hitting it in anger.

Dennis seeing the frustration in the pilot’s reaction, walked over and placed his hand on his shoulder. “Don’t blame yourself. You did all you could to get her here fast. The damage to the unborn child was too severe,” Dennis said with understanding.

“I’d better inform Hawk. He’d want to know,” the pilot replied.

“Tell Hawk, the girls will stay with the woman here at the clinic. They want to stay with her during her time of need,” Dennis said.

“I’ll tell him, thank you doctor,” the pilot said as he climbed into the shuttle.

The shuttle started its engines and lifted off. He landed shortly after that by the other shuttles. He exited the shuttle and walked slowly over to Hawk and Marie. “Hawk, the doctor wanted me to inform you that...” He hesitated for a moment. “That the baby died,” he said trying to force back the tears.

Hawk lowered his head. He then raised his head again and ran after Peregrine. He grabbed him by his throat. “I want to kill you so badly right now. I just found out that your mate, that beautiful woman that you took to protect and love for the rest of your life, lost your child because of what you did to her,” Hawk said with anger.

Peregrine’s eyes grew big. Not from fear, but from shame. “She lost my child?” he asked.

“No, she didn’t lose your child, you killed your child,” Hawk yelled.

The elders walked over and gently placed their hands on Hawk’s arm.

“Hawk, release him,” Grey Falcon ordered.

Hawk released Peregrine and stood next to the elders with his head lowered.

“Peregrine, you attacked your mate and killed your unborn child. Therefore, you are not worthy to have a mate. Your mate will remain here as will your other children, but you are to leave with these men from the Searcher. We will notify the Admiral and have him return you to Serenity to face your doom alone,” White Eagle ordered.

White Eagle nodded and within a few seconds the pilots had Peregrine in shackles. They escorted him to one of the shuttles, where they closed the door and lifted off. Hawk walked over to one of the other shuttles and made a call to the Searcher on the behalf of White Eagle. He told the Admiral what had happened and that the elders asked if he could take him back to Serenity and leave him there.

“Inform the elders of Acklon that I will do as they ask. We will be leaving shortly after the other crewmembers arrive back on the Searcher. And inform the woman of my deepest condolences for her loss,” Asimov replied.

“Thank you Admiral.. Hawk out.”

Hawk turned and glanced over at the elders. They smiled, turned and walked away. The other newcomers rallied around Hawk, patting him on his back and thanking him.

Marie walked over to Hawk and embraced him. “Thank you, Hawk.”

Hawk smiled at her and walked over to Robin.

“Little one, you now have a new home. This woman will care for you and I will protect you.” Hawk turned and gazed at all of the new bird people. “I am Hawk, protector of Acklon,” he said proudly.

They all started to applaud.

“Now, let’s finish building your homes. My nieces will not be back for a while. So I’m asking if some of you other women would please hand out the food boxes?” Hawk asked politely.

Almost half the women walked up to the table where Marie showed them how much food was to go to each family, and how much was to go to each single person. Peregrine’s other children, a girl and two boys, walked up to Hawk.

“May we go see our mother?” the girl asked softly.

“I will take you there myself. Did your father and mother already have a home that they had moved into?” Hawk asked.

“Yes, our father pushed an older couple and their grandchild away from it. We want them to have it. And we hope they will accept our apologies for what our father did,” the boy said lowering his head.

Hawk placed his hand on the boy’s shoulder.

“You have nothing to apologize for. Your father was the abusive one, not you, your bother, your mother or sister,” Hawk replied.

Marie walked over to them and embraced the girl.

“If you children want to stay with Robin and myself until your mother feels better, you’re more than welcome to,” Marie said.

They looked at Hawk, as if for his approval.

“Marie is a good woman. She’ll make sure you get plenty to eat and are well cared for until your mother feels well enough to return home,” Hawk said.

Chapter 33

Back in town Dennis, Karri and Saleena remained by the woman's side.

"How could he have done this to me? I loved him with all my heart and soul. And he didn't even return to see if I was injured or even to help me up," she said while she lay in bed weeping.

"I'm so sorry," Karri said.

Dennis patted her hand.

"Doctor? May I ask you something?" she asked between sobs.

"Anything dear lady," Dennis replied.

"Was it a boy or a girl? I'd really like to know?" she asked.

"Are you sure?" Dennis asked softly.

She nodded her head. "Yes. That way I can give him or her a name before being buried," she answered.

"It was a girl," he replied.

"A girl? Then her name shall be Kalana. She will be named after my mother," the woman said.

The door to the clinic opened and in walked Hawk and her other three children. Edna looked at Hawk. "Are these her children?" she asked.

"Yes, where is she?" Hawk asked.

"I'll take you to her, follow me," Edna said motioning for them to follow her. Edna escorted the children back to the exam room. "Wait here a moment," she said as she gently knocked on the door.

"Enter," a voice from inside replied.

She slowly opened the door and peeked around it. "Her children are here to see their mother," Edna said softly.

"Give me a moment before you let them in," Dennis replied.

Edna nodded and gently closed the door. "It will be a few minutes. The doctor will let you in when he's ready," Edna said softly as she turned and walked away.

"Thank you Edna," Hawk said.

The door opened and Karri and Saleena walked into the small hallway.

“You may go in now,” Karri said.

The children filed into the exam room. They saw their mother sitting up and quickly walked over to her. “Mother!” the girl called out softly as she ran to her mother’s side.

“I’m all right children,” she said in a soft voice.

Hawk walked in and stood next to Dennis. He saw this beautiful young woman embracing her children with love and compassion. She gazed up at Hawk with tears in her eyes. Hawk walked over to her. “What is your name?” he asked.

“My name is Raven, these are my children. Phoenix, my oldest son. This is Black Eagle, my youngest son. And this is Snowbird, my daughter,” Raven said.

Hawk smiled. “I am Hawk, from Throm. The elders of this planet have banned your mate from Acklon forever. The Searcher is taking him back to Serenity to live out his days alone. You and your children are welcome to stay if you wish. You still have a home ready for you when you’re feeling better. With your permission, Marie will take care of your children till you can return to your own home with them. She lives here in town, so they will be close and they can come see you whenever they like,” Hawk said.

“I know of Marie; she’s the human that brought all of us food when she could. She is here on Acklon?” Raven asked.

“Yes, and she is now the adopted mother of Robin.”

“I would like it very much if she could care for my children while I’m in here; I trust her,” Raven replied.

Hawk nodded. “I’ll leave you to be with your children for a while.” Hawk turned to the children. “When you’re ready, let my nieces know and they will get Marie for you,” Hawk said. He turned to walk out the door when Raven called to him.

“Karri and Saleena are your nieces?” she asked.

“Yes,” Hawk replied.

“They are fine doctors,” Raven said with a smile.

Hawk smiled and left the room, closing the door lightly behind him.

Hawk was just leaving the clinic when Quill and Tiercel ran up to him. “Are Karri and Saleena all right?” they asked.

“Yes, they’re fine. They’re tending to Raven,” Hawk replied. Hawk looked at the boys. “What are you doing here? Shouldn’t you be helping build the houses?” Hawk asked.

“There was only one left to build. The crew from the Searcher were just about to start it when we left to check on Karri and Saleena,” Tiercel replied.

“Only one left? But how could you have built all those houses in so short a time?” Hawk asked.

“The newcomers helped a lot. They either helped build or just brought us the things we needed. With their assistance, it didn’t take long at all. Plus some of the women even helped. I was amazed to see some of them climbing ladders or using tools,” Tiercel replied. He looked over at Quill for a brief moment then turned his eyes back to Hawk. “How is the woman?” he asked.

“She lost the child, but she’s doing good. Her other three children are with her right now. I have to go back and help finish building the rest of the homes. Tell Saleena and Karri that I’ll talk to them soon,” Hawk said as he turned to leave.

Hawk made his way back to the stream and saw that the crew from the Searcher was about done with the last house. The new people were in the process of making a walkway from each home to a wider path leading towards town. Hawk walked over to Anderson.

“How is it going?” he asked.

“Great, this is the last one. I was hoping I’d see you again before we left. I just wanted to say it’s been great having you as a member on the Searcher and that I wish you and your family lots of luck with your new home and life,” Anderson said reaching his hand out to Hawk.

Hawk removed his glove and shook Anderson’s hand. “It’s been a pleasure working with you and all the crew on the Searcher. I’m hoping you’ll be able to return for mine and Aslana’s wedding? It wouldn’t be the same without all my friends,” Hawk said smiling.

“Knowing the Admiral, he’d figure out some way to get here. He wouldn’t miss that for anything,” Anderson replied with a chuckle.

“When you get back to the Searcher, tell Buck goodbye for me. I was hoping he’d come down, but I guess he’s busy,” Hawk said.

“I will, Hawk.” Anderson hesitated for a moment. “How about if I call the Searcher to see if Buck is coming down to say goodbye?” Anderson asked.

“No thank you my friend. If he was going to come down, I think he would have done it by now,” Hawk replied with sorrow in his voice.

“All right Hawk. Well, we’re done here. I hope these people enjoy their new homes and their new lives as well. It’s time we headed back up to the Searcher. Take care my friend,” Anderson said.

“You too Anderson. And thanks for all you’ve done,” Hawk replied shaking Anderson’s hand again.

The other pilots walked over and shook Hawk’s hand as well, wishing him a fond farewell and luck with his new home. They walked back to their shuttles and boarded. The newcomers to Acklon had gathered behind Hawk, standing and waving as the shuttles lifted off one at a time. Hawk stood and waved also as they left.

After they had gone Hawk lowered his head and slowly walked back towards town. As he got closer to town his spirits started to lift. He knew where he had to go, to Aslana's home. His pace started to pick up, and his heart started to beat faster. Before long he was running. He ran straight through town and straight to Aslana's door. He hesitated for a moment, then he opened the door and walked in. He headed straight to the kitchen and there was Aslana preparing dinner. She glanced up at him and smiled a warm affectionate smile. He walked over and embraced her.

"I will go to the elders in the morning to ask for their permission for us to marry," Hawk said gently holding Aslana in his arms.

Aslana looked up at Hawk and smiled. Hawk gently kissed her.

"I have to check on Raven, I'll return soon," Hawk said.

"I'll have dinner ready soon. Are the girls coming over?" she asked.

"I don't think so. I think they will want to spend time with their potential mates also. But I'll check with them," Hawk replied with a soft smile.

He turned and walked out the door heading for the clinic. As he arrived Quill and Tiercel were just leaving.

"Are Karri and Saleena still here?" Hawk asked.

"Yes, they didn't want to leave Raven. So we're going over to the house to make some dinner for them and bring it back," Tiercel replied.

Hawk smiled. "You two are going to make good mates for them," he said.

"Hawk? Have you been to see Aslana yet?" Quill asked.

"Yes, I just left her. I wanted to check on the girls and see if they wanted to come and have dinner with us, but I guess they have already made plans," Hawk said chuckling.

"We had better go. We don't have the slightest idea of what to fix for dinner," Quill said jokingly.

"I'm going to check on Raven, then return to Aslana's house. If you need anything or if the girls want anything, that's where I'll be," Hawk said as he shook their hands.

"Oh Hawk, did the crew from the Searcher leave?" Tiercel asked.

"Yes, they left a while ago. I'll see you later," Hawk said as he opened the door to the clinic.

Tiercel and Quill nodded and walked off. Hawk walked into the exam room where he had last seen Raven and the girls. He was surprised to see Raven up and walking around.

"What are you doing out of bed?" he asked with concern.

Raven was startled. "Hawk ! What are you doing back here? I thought you had gone home?" Raven asked in a surprised voice.

"You still didn't answer my question. What are you doing out of bed?" Hawk asked again.

Raven looked around the room as if trying to figure out what to say. She looked at Hawk. "I'm sorry Hawk, I just want to be home with my children," she replied hanging her head.

Just then Karri and Saleena walked back in. "Uncle? What are you doing here?" Karri asked.

"I came into check on Raven and found she was out of bed and trying to leave," Hawk replied.

Karri and Saleena turned to Raven. "Raven, is that true? We told you if you stayed in bed the rest of today and tonight, we would most likely release you in the morning. That would really need time to heal," Karri said.

"I'm sorry girls, I just miss my children," Raven replied with tears streaming down her cheek. "I've never been away from them."

Karri and Saleena started to whisper in each other's ear.

"Okay, how about if you and your children stayed at our house for the night? That way you can be with them and we can keep an eye on you," Karri and Saleena asked.

"Really? Oh, that would be wonderful," Raven said with a smile returning to her face.

"Okay, it's settled. I'll go over to Marie's to get your children and Saleena will walk you over to our house. But you have to promise me that you'll take your time walking. We don't want those stitches to come out," Karri said.

"I have a better idea," Hawk said.

Karri, Saleena and Raven looked at Hawk with a confused look. "What is it, uncle?" Saleena asked.

"Just to be on the safe side, I'll carry Raven over to the house. I don't want her to fall or stumble and cause those stitches to come out," Hawk said.

Karri and Saleena smiled. "Oh, thank you uncle," they said.

"Now, I'm going to leave the room so you two girls can get her ready. I'll wait right outside the door. Let me know when she's ready to go," Hawk said as he walked out the exam room door.

Karri and Saleena gently and carefully got Raven ready. Karri handed Saleena Raven's clothes.

"Okay, I'm going to leave and go bring your children over to our house; I'll meet you there," Karri said.

“Are you sure we won’t bother you?” Raven asked.

“No, it won’t be any bother at all. I’ll send uncle in when I leave. Are you ready?” Karri asked.

“Yes, I’m ready,” Raven replied.

Karri opened the exam room door and walked out, a moment later Hawk walked in. “Are you ready to go?” he asked.

“Yes, Hawk.”

Saleena wrapped Raven up in a soft sheet. Hawk gently picked her up and walked out of the exam room and into the waiting room. “Are you okay?” he asked.

She nodded. “Yes, I’m okay.”

Hawk slowly and carefully walked outside and started to walk down the street. The townspeople followed them for a while. They asked if there was anything Raven wanted or needed. She replied that she was fine and she just wanted to see her children. Aslana heard all the people walking down the street and went out to see what was going on. She saw Hawk carrying Raven towards the house.

“Hawk ? Is she all right?” Aslana asked.

“She’s fine. She won’t stay in bed because she misses her children. So I’m taking her to Karri and Saleena’s house. Karri has gone to Marie’s to get the children and bring them to their house for the night,” Hawk replied.

Raven looked over at Aslana. “Is that your mate?” Raven asked Hawk.

Hawk smiled. “She will be soon,” he replied.

“She is a very lucky woman to find a good man like you,” Raven said.

Hawk blushed.

Chapter 34

Hawk slowly and carefully walked through the door at Karri and Saleena's home. He placed Raven gently down onto the sofa and stayed with her till Karri got there with her children. Saleena walked into the kitchen and started preparing dinner.

"Saleena, when I got to the clinic I saw Tiercel and Quill leaving. They told me they were going home and fix you and Karri dinner. So you might want to hold off on that till later," Hawk informed her.

"Oh, all right uncle. But maybe I should go ahead and make something. I don't know if Raven's children have had dinner yet, and Tiercel and Quill don't know we brought Raven over here," Saleena replied.

A few moments later Karri walked through the door with all of Raven's children. "Mother!" Snowbird cried out running to her mother.

Raven embraced her. Her sons Phoenix and Black Eagle stood at her side.

"Thank you Karri. I've never been apart from my children, except for maybe a few hours for shopping," Raven said with tears of joy.

"A family should be kept together, no matter what," Karri replied.

Hawk smiled.

"Well, you're in good hands. I'll leave so you and the children can relax," Hawk said.

"Thank you Hawk, for everything," Raven said.

Phoenix walked up to Hawk and extended his hand. "Thank you sir," he said.

Hawk removed his glove and shook Phoenix's hand. "You are the man of the house now. Take care of your mother, brother and sister," Hawk said.

Phoenix smiled. "I will," he replied with a smile.

Hawk walked over and embraced and kissed Karri and Saleena on the top of their heads. "I'll see you two later. Get some rest," Hawk said as he turned to leave.

"Good night uncle," Karri and Saleena replied.

Hawk had just left and was just about to the corner when he saw Tiercel and Quill approaching carrying boxes of food. He walked over to them.

"I see you fixed dinner for Karri and Saleena. I thought I would let you know that they are not alone. We brought Raven and her children over here. I caught Raven trying to leave the clinic, she wanted to be with her children. Karri and Saleena decided it would be best if Raven and the children stayed over at their house for the night so they can keep an eye on her," Hawk said.

“Really? That works out great. We tried to fix dinner, but it didn’t turn out,” Tiercel replied blushing. “So we stopped by the store and were going to buy something to eat when the store owner gave us all this food that his mate had cooked. It looks like the whole town cooked something; now we know why,” Tiercel said.

“I know the girls, Raven and her family will appreciate it. I won’t be back tonight, I’m on my way home,” Hawk said.

Tiercel and Quill smiled. “You haven’t had much time with Aslana, have you?” Quill asked.

“No, not really. But I’m hoping to change that very soon,” Hawk replied.

“Good night Hawk,” Tiercel said.

“Good night Tiercel. Good night Quill. I’ll see you tomorrow,” Hawk said as he turned to walk away.

Hawk made his way to Aslana’s house. He opened the door and entered. He found Aslana in the kitchen just finishing up with preparing dinner.

“You’re home; how is Raven?” she asked.

“She’ll be okay. She just needs a good night’s rest.” Hawk walked up and stood behind Aslana. “That smells good. You didn’t have to hold dinner for me,” Hawk said.

Aslana smiled. “Of course I did. You haven’t eaten all day,” Aslana replied.

Hawk wrapped his arms around her and started to kiss her gently on her neck then he moved slowly up to her ear and finally her lips. They stood in the kitchen and shared passionate kisses.

“Hawk, your dinner is getting cold,” Aslana said softly.

“I don’t care, I want to be with you right now. Dinner can wait,” Hawk replied kissing her softly and tenderly on her neck and cheek. “If the elders would allow it, would you become my mate tomorrow?” Hawk whispered softly looking deep into Aslana’s eyes.

“Yes, I would my love,” she replied softly.

Hawk smiled and kissed her passionately. Their loving embrace was interrupted by a knock on the door. Hawk hung his head. “Who can that be?” he asked.

Aslana pulled gently away from Hawk’s embrace and smiled. “I’ll be right back,” she said smiling.

She slowly walked to the door glancing back at Hawk, smiling. The door opened and there stood Buck. “Buck? What are you doing here? We thought the Searcher left?” she asked surprised.

“Is Hawk here?” he asked.

“Yes, please come in.”

Buck followed Aslana into the kitchen. Hawk was waiting patiently for his woman to return but was surprised to see Buck instead. “Buck?” he asked walking quickly around the counter towards Buck.

“Hello my friend. I’m sorry I didn’t come down to help. But...” Buck hung his head. Then looked up into Hawk’s eyes. “I was feeling sorry for myself. I can’t believe you’re leaving the Searcher. I know you finally found a wonderful woman, the girls are happy and a planet full of your own kind. But I can’t help feeling lost without you. Forgive me, my friend,” Buck said hanging his head again.

Hawk walked over and stood next to Buck, then embraced him.

“You’ll always be my friend and you’ll always be welcome here,” Hawk replied.

“I’ll leave you two alone for a while,” Aslana said as she started to leave the kitchen.

“No, I’m sorry Aslana. I did not mean to interrupt you two. I just wanted to tell Hawk goodbye, and to have a wonderful life,” Buck said.

“Buck, you are coming back to our wedding, aren’t you?” Aslana asked.

Buck looked at Aslana then at Hawk. “Wild horses couldn’t keep me away. When do you two think you’ll be getting married?” Buck asked.

“I’m going to see the elders tomorrow morning and ask them for permission to marry Aslana as soon as possible,” Hawk replied.

Buck hung his head. “I don’t know if the Searcher will be around tomorrow. The Admiral said we have orders to go to Omega 3 first for supplies. Then something about straightening out a conflict between two planets that can’t get along,” Buck said.

“Very well my friend. We will wait till the Searcher returns before we marry. Besides, I can’t get married without my best friend,” Hawk said smiling.

Buck smiled. “Hawk, I just want you and Aslana to be happy. Your happiness means a lot to me,” Buck said.

“We’ll wait until you return,” Hawk replied again.

“But Hawk, it might be years before we return. No, I want you and Aslana to get married and have several children before we come back,” Buck replied.

Hawk and Aslana smiled. “We’ll try, Buck,” Aslana replied smiling.

“I have to go. The Searcher will be leaving Acklon within the hour,” Buck said.

“I’ll walk you to your shuttle, my friend,” Hawk said.

Hawk turned to Aslana and gently kissed her on her cheek.

“I’ll be back soon,” he said as he started to walk Buck out the door.

“Goodbye Buck, come back soon,” Aslana said.

Buck turned and smiled. “I’ll be back before you know it,” he replied walking out the door.

Buck and Hawk walked through town heading for the hanger. “Are you going to stop and say farewell to the girls?” Hawk asked.

“Yes,” Buck said.

They turned down the small cobbled street where the girls lived. When they arrived at the house Hawk stopped. “You go on alone, I’ll wait for you here,” Hawk said.

Buck smiled and started to walk up to the door. He softly knocked and within a few moments the door opened. Buck was surprised to see a young birdman answer the door. “Is Karri or Saleena here?” Buck asked.

“Yes, please come in,” Phoenix replied.

Buck followed him in and stood at the opening to the living room. He saw that there were other bird people there as well, a woman and three children. The children were sitting next to their mother. A few minutes later Karri and Saleena walked out from the kitchen.

“Uncle!” they said loudly running over to Buck and embracing him.

“Karri, Saleena, you two are all grown up. What happened to the two little girls we found on Serenity?” Buck asked jokingly.

“Oh uncle...How long can you stay?” Karri asked.

“Not long, we’re getting ready to leave now. I wanted to come down and say goodbye to you and your uncle,” Buck replied with sorrow in his voice.

“When will you be returning?” Saleena asked.

“I don’t know Saleena. We might be gone for a couple of years. But I promised your uncle that I would be back for his wedding, and maybe for yours. I heard you two have potential mates? Do they treat you well?” Buck asked.

“Oh uncle. They’re the most sweetest, kindest men we’ve ever met,” Karri replied.

“Oh really now. I thought your uncle and I were?” Buck replied jokingly.

The girls laughed. “Would you like to meet them?” Karri asked.

“Are they here?” Buck asked looking around.

“They’re in the kitchen helping us clean up. Just a minute, I’ll go get them,” Karri said as she walked back into the kitchen. A moment later two men walked out from the kitchen beside Karri.

“Uncle, this is Tiercel, and Quill,” Karri said.

Buck walked over and shook their hands. “It’s nice to meet you, Tiercel and Quill. I’m Buck.”

“Uncle Buck is our adopted uncle. He’s the one I told you about,” Karri said.

“You’re the one that helped Hawk save Karri and Saleena?” Tiercel asked.

Buck nodded. “Yes, though it was their uncle that did most of the work,” Buck replied. Buck turned to the girls. “Well, I’d better go. Your uncle is waiting for me outside,” Buck said.

Karri and Saleena ran over to Buck and wrapped their arms around him.

“We’re going to miss you. You will come home as soon as you can, won’t you?” Karri asked.

“Like I told your uncle, wild horses couldn’t keep me away. I’ll be back as soon as I can,” Buck replied embracing the girls for possibly the last time. Buck turned to Tiercel and Quill. “It was nice meeting you. You take care of them and keep them safe,” Buck said reaching out to shake Tiercel and Quill’s hand again.

“We will sir,” Quill replied.

Buck turned and started to walk towards the door. He stopped and glanced back at Karri and Saleena and smiled, then Buck walked out the door. He walked over and stood next to Hawk. “I’m really going to miss them,” he said as they started towards the hangar again.

Hawk walked Buck up to the shuttle. Buck turned to look into his friend’s eyes maybe for the last time.

“You take care my friend,” Hawk said removing his glove.

“You do the same Hawk. We’ll try to get back as soon as we can,” Buck replied reaching out to shake Hawk’s hand.

Hawk reached out and shook Buck’s hand, then they embraced as true friends do. Buck walked into the shuttle and closed the door. Hawk backed away far enough to look inside to see Buck. Buck smiled and waved as he started the engines. Before long he took off and was heading back up to the Searcher.

Hawk stood outside the hangar, looking up into the sky.

“Until we meet again, my friend.”

Chapter 35

A week later Karri and Saleena were summoned to the meeting hall by the elders of Acklon. At first they thought they might have done something to offend the elders. Kalee assured them that they were not in any trouble. The meeting had something to do with their upcoming graduation. Saleena and Karri both sighed a big sigh of relief. The day of the meeting Saleena and Karri were escorted by Hawk and Kalee.

Kalee kissed Saleena gently on her forehead. "I'll meet you inside," she whispered.

Saleena nodded and took Karri and Hawk's hand as they entered the meeting hall. They entered the meeting room where Hawk had been so many times himself.

He remembered his last meeting with the elders the week before, when he came and asked for their permission to wed Aslana. To his surprise the elders knew he was coming that day and only had White Eagle there to talk to Hawk. White Eagle and the other elders had already known and approved their marriage request. Hawk, not knowing this, told White Eagle the whole vow of courtship. White Eagle started to laugh softly after Hawk had finished. Hawk was confused by the reaction he got from an elder about his request and courtship vows. "Hawk, we knew you were going to come and request our permission for marriage to Aslana. We elders were just wondering, what took you so long? We knew how you felt about Aslana. We also knew how she cared for you. We knew that you were going to come today; that's why I am the only one here. The elders of Acklon all approved of your marriage to Aslana," White Eagle said smiling.

Hawk started to smile as Saleena, Karri and himself seated themselves.

The elders filed in one by one. Hawk and the girls stood and lowered their heads. The elders seated themselves and motioned for Hawk, Karri and Saleena to do the same.

A few moments later, "Karri, Saleena, please rise," White Eagle said.

Karri and Saleena stood with their heads still lowered.

The elders then rose and walked out from behind their table. They slowly walked over to Karri and Saleena. Kalee walked over and stood next to her half sister.

"This is your graduation; here you will receive your medical diploma. It was written by our ancestors that any diplomas were to come from the elders. It is true that Dennis has to sign it but... that will be done tonight before the party being held in your honor. Hawk, please take your place by your nieces' side," White Eagle said.

Hawk stood and walked over and stood between Karri and Saleena.

"Hawk, do you approve of Karri and Saleena accepting these medical diplomas?" White Eagle asked.

"I do," Hawk replied with a smile.

“Karri and Saleena, you are hereby acknowledged as doctors here on Acklon,” White Eagle announced.

Grey Falcon walked over to the girls and handed them their diplomas. The girls opened up their diplomas and saw that every one of the elders had signed it. “Remember, they are not legal until Dennis signs them tonight,” White Eagle said.

Karri and Saleena smiled, then when they looked back up at the elders, they had tears forming.

“What is it? Why do you weep?” White Eagle asked.

“We’re sorry sir, it’s just that we’re so happy. Our parents would be so proud of us right now,” Karri replied forcing a small smile.

“I know I’m very proud of you,” Hawk said smiling.

“This graduation is over until six o’clock tonight. There you will hand your diplomas to Dennis in the middle of town and he will sign them. You may leave now,” White Eagle said as they turned to walk away.

Karri, Saleena and Hawk lowered their heads and waited until the elders had left. They walked out the doors and into the setting sun. Karri and Saleena once again opened their diplomas and gazed at them. Karri handed hers to Hawk so he might also see. On it were all the signatures of the elders, Grey Falcon, White Eagle and Kalee. Hawk embraced and kissed them on the top of their heads.

“I’m so very proud of both of you girls. And I know your parents would be also,” Hawk said with a smile.

“Uncle? Do you think we can send a message to the Searcher and let Dr. Goodfellow know we got our diplomas?” Karri asked.

“I don’t see why not. You know he’d be very happy and proud of you girls also. We’ll send it in the morning. Right now we have to get home, so you two can get ready for your party,” Hawk said.

They made their way home. Hawk dropped them off at their house and continued on to Aslana’s. When he got there he slowly opened the door and walked in quietly. Aslana was sitting on the sofa with Ashla next to her reading her a story from her favorite book. She looked up and saw Hawk smiling.

“What did the elders want with Karri and Saleena?” she asked.

“They gave them their diplomas. And tonight at six there’s going to be the final signature, and a party. I was hoping Ashla was still awake so all of us can go,” Hawk replied.

“A party? Oh mother, please can we go?” Ashla begged with her big brown eyes.

Aslana giggled. "I think we can, besides it's for Karri and Saleena's graduation. But first, Hawk and I have something to tell you," Aslana said.

Ashla looked up at Hawk then back to her mother. "Is everything okay?" she asked.

"Everything is fine Ashla. What we have to tell you is very important," Hawk replied sitting down next to Aslana. "Ashla, yesterday I went to talk to the elders about something. I asked for their permission to marry your mother," Hawk said.

Ashla sat there for a moment, then she realized what Hawk had said.

"You're going to be my father?" she asked.

"Yes, but we wanted to find out how you felt about it first," Hawk said.

Ashla jumped up and leaped into Hawk's lap.

"I'm going to have a father!" she yelled with excitement.

Hawk and Aslana laughed.

"Can I take that as you agree to me marrying your mother?" Hawk asked.

"Yes," she squealed with delight wrapping her arms around Hawk's neck.

"All right then." Hawk smiled. "Let's get ready for Karri and Saleena's graduation party."

Ashla slid down off Hawk's lap and ran to her room, closing the door behind her. Aslana and Hawk sat there for a moment smiling at one another.

"I had better get ready also. I want to look my best for the girls' graduation," Aslana said as she stood up and walked into her room.

Hawk walked over to Aslana's door. "I have to make a quick run to inform Tiercel and Quill about the party. I'll be back soon," Hawk said through the door to Aslana.

"All right my love," Aslana replied.

Hawk smiled, turned and walked back into the living room and out the front door. He was just about to enter the main street heading out of town when Dennis approached him.

"Are the girls ready for tonight?" he asked.

"They sure are. They're probably at home right now trying on everything they own," Hawk replied with a soft chuckle.

Dennis smiled. "I just saw them heading out of town; I think they might be going to check on Raven and her children," Dennis said.

"I'm heading that way myself. I was going to inform Tiercel and Quill about the party at six tonight," Hawk said.

"Speaking of couples, when is the big day for you and Aslana?" Dennis asked.

Hawk looked at Dennis with a confused look on his face. "How did you know about that? I only asked the elders yesterday," Hawk replied.

"Everyone knows about it. We all knew long ago that you and Aslana were meant to be together. Plus you two were never discreet about it. You embraced each other in public, you held hands in public, and a few times you two kissed in public. After all Hawk, we're not blind," Dennis said smiling.

"Was it that obvious?" Hawk asked blushing.

Dennis chuckled. "My friend, everyone here is ecstatic over your and Aslana's wedding. Aslana has gone through a lot. Losing her mate, and almost losing her daughter. You and her both deserve happiness," Dennis replied.

Hawk smiled.

"Well, if you'd excuse me, I have to get things ready for tonight. There's a party to plan and store owners to talk to," Dennis said.

"I too have things to do. I have to make sure that Quill and Tiercel know about the graduation party. Karri and Saleena would never forgive me if their future mates were not informed," Hawk replied.

Dennis smiled and nodded and walked off across the street to one of the stores and Hawk started to walk out of town. He was just about to reach the new small community when he saw Tiercel and Quill walking towards him.

"I was just coming to find you," Hawk said as they approached him.

"Is something wrong?" Tiercel asked.

Hawk smiled. "No, nothing is wrong. I wanted to tell you about Karri and Saleena's graduation party tonight. I didn't know if they had found or seen you yet," Hawk said.

"No, we didn't know anything about it. We've been out of town," Quill replied.

"The party is tonight at six. It would mean the world to the girls if their future mates were there," Hawk said.

"Hawk, may we ask you a question?" Tiercel asked.

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

Tiercel and Quill glanced over at each other for a moment. Hawk could see in their eyes they were very nervous.

"I think I know what you want to ask me. You're wondering if it's normal to be nervous before you get married," Hawk said.

The boys smiled and nodded. "Hawk, we've never been married before. What if we do something wrong? Or can't provide for our mates?" Quill asked.

Hawk smiled. "Quill, Tiercel, it's normal to think those things. When I first married Koori, I was thinking the same thing. What if I'm not good enough? What if something happens and I can't provide for her and protect her? I learned that as long as you do your best, things will work out," Hawk replied.

Tiercel and Quill started to smile a little.

"I want to ask you two something. Where is this cave that I keep hearing about?" Hawk asked.

"It's up on top of that mountain, but it takes several hours to walk up there. We wouldn't be back in time for the party," Tiercel said.

"Not unless you have another way of getting up there," Hawk replied.

"You two want to go for a ride?" Hawk asked.

Tiercel and Quill smiled and nodded.

"Come on, we have to hurry though. If I'm late for their graduation, I'll never forgive myself," Hawk said as he turned and started to walk very quickly back into town.

Tiercel and Quill followed. Hawk headed straight for the hangar. As they entered the hangar where Hawk kept his fighter, Tiercel and Quill stopped cold.

"That's your ship?" Tiercel asked.

"Yes," Hawk replied as he entered the code into the hatch security system. "As far as I know of, she's one of a kind," Hawk replied.

Quill walked around it, wanting to touch it but being afraid to. As with never entering someone's home without an invite, the same went for personal things as well. Hawk noticed Quill looking in the intakes. "Go ahead, you can touch it," Hawk said with a smile.

Tiercel and Quill both didn't hesitate. Tiercel headed for the front where he touched the beak. Quill just ran his hand over the entire outside of it.

"Okay, are you two coming with me or not?" Hawk asked.

They climbed inside and Hawk lowered the hatch, then started the engines. Tiercel and Quill could feel the power from the engines. Before long they were on their way to the mountain.

"Hawk? Why did you want to see the cave?" Quill asked.

"I'm not going to lie to you two. I miss living in a cave. I lived in a cave on Throm high up on the cliffs. I loved it there. I could see everything and I felt free. As I told Buck the day I fought him, I'm at ease in the mountains," Hawk replied.

"Do you think Karri or Saleena would live in the mountains?" Tiercel asked.

"I know Karri would. But as for Saleena, I don't really know. Why do you ask?" Hawk asked.

"I was thinking about moving up to a small cave on the north side of the mountain after we are married, but I don't know if Karri would like that," Quill asked.

"There's the path we always take to the cave," Tiercel said pointing. "The cave is just over there."

Hawk glanced out the window and saw a large field. He set the War Hawk down on the south side of it and then shut down the engines. Hawk, Tiercel and Quill exited the shuttle.

"Where are these caves located at?" Hawk asked.

"There's a few small ones straight up that way. And the larger one is up close to the top," Quill replied pointing in the direction of the caves.

"Let's go look at the large one first," Hawk said.

They started to climb the side of the mountain. About halfway up Hawk heard a very familiar sound. He glanced up and right above them was a pair of eagles. He smiled and started to climb the rest of the mountain. Finally getting to the top, Quill and Tiercel took the lead and took Hawk to an opening that was covered by bushes. Hawk pulled the bushes out of the way and walked inside. It opened up to a large cavern. Further in he saw that it divided into two more small caverns. He walked around and noticed there were handmade carvings on the wall.

"Did you do this?" Hawk asked.

"No, they were there when we first came up here. My father told me that the first of our kind did that when they first arrived on Acklon," Quill replied.

"Acklon is that old?" Tiercel asked.

"I remember my father telling me stories about when his father first arrived here. This could be the cave that my grandfather lived in," Quill said.

"Okay, let's go look at the smaller ones," Hawk said smiling as he was leaving the cave.

They made their way over to the two smaller caves. Hawk walked into the first one and saw that it was even too small for the wolves. He walked over to the next one and found it to be a bit bigger.

"Are there any more caves?" Hawk asked.

“I don’t know. There could be more on the other side,” Quill replied.

Hawk looked towards the sky and saw that the sun was setting.

“We had better head back,” Hawk said as he started back down the mountainside.

Quill and Tiercel followed Hawk down the ledge and into the clearing where Hawk had landed the War Hawk.

“If we miss Karri and Saleena’s signing of the diploma, I’ll never hear the end of it,” Hawk said climbing into the War Hawk.

Within moments he had the engines started and was lifting off. He pushed the throttle forward and felt a little thump, as if something hit the hull of the ship.

“What was that?” Quill asked.

“I don’t know. I might have clipped a tree branch, I’ll check it later ,” Hawk replied.

Hawk guided the War Hawk safely back to the hangars and landed with another small thump. “I didn’t like the sound of that,” Hawk said with concern.

Chapter 36

They exited the War Hawk and Hawk started to look over the hull of the ship for the noise that had him concerned. Quill and Tiercel walked around with him. 'Did you find anything?' Quill asked.

'No, not yet. I'm pretty sure the sound came from the landing gear compartment though. I'll check it later. We have to hurry so we don't miss the signing of Karri and Saleena's diplomas,' Hawk replied wiping his hands off.

They made their way to the center of town. People had already started to gather. In the center was a raised platform. Hawk turned to look down the street to see if he could see Karri and Saleena coming.

'I wonder where they are?'" Hawk asked.

'Maybe they got called out on an emergency,'" Tiercel replied.

'No, Dennis said that they had gone out to see Raven earlier. But that was several hours ago. They should be back by now,'" Hawk said.

Hawk saw someone who looked like Karri and Saleena walking towards him, but it wasn't them. Hawk, getting a little more concerned, turned to Tiercel and Quill. 'I'm going to the house to see if they're there. If you see them before I get back. Tell them I'm here and that I'll be right back,'" Hawk said.

'Okay Hawk,'" Tiercel replied.

Just as Hawk was turning to leave he heard someone call his name. He turned to see Aslana and Ashla walking towards him. Ashla ran and jumped into his arms. Aslana walked up to him and gently kissed him on his cheek.

'Have you seen Karri and Saleena?'" he asked.

'Yes, they're right behind me. They had trouble finding something that is appropriate for this kind of ceremony,'" Aslana replied laughing lightly.

'Uncle!'" Hawk heard a soft voice calling out from the crowd of people in front of him.

Making their way through the crowd walked Karri and Saleena. They were wearing a soft brown and cream color dress, like their ancestors used to wear, with a pattern design Hawk had not seen for a very long time. The pattern was that of Make Make embroidered with beads.

'You both are so beautiful,'" Hawk said as they approached him.

'Aslana helped us pick them out,'" Karri replied.

Quill and Tiercel walked over and stood next to their potential mates and gently kissed them on their cheeks. Hawk stood with his arm wrapped around Aslana's small waist and smiled.

“The ceremony is about to start,” they heard someone say in the crowd.

They looked up and saw that all of the elders and Dennis were walking up the few steps of the platform. Karri and Saleena smiled at Hawk, Aslana, Quill and Tiercel and walked over to the stand and waited at the foot of the stairs.

White Eagle approached the front of the platform first. “May I have your attention please,” White Eagle said.

Everyone became quiet and faced the platform.

“These two young women came to us a little over a year ago. Survivors from our homeland and from a planet where our people and their parents were met with death. They came here to find a new beginning. During their time on our planet, they proved many times over, that even though cruel humans took their families away from them, they still had love in their hearts for everyone, and everything. At first I was against them working on their medical degree. But as time went by, I realized that they were different in so many ways. One in particular, Karri. Karri is the daughter of Falcon and Kala. She has gained the abilities to see into the souls of everyone and every living animal she has come in contact with. All the females in her family had this ability, including her uncle’s mate Koori, who met with a terrible accident while on Throm a few years ago.

Hawk found her and Saleena on Serenity, being cared for and loved by their adoptive human parents. Then tragedy struck again for these children: their adoptive parents were murdered trying to protect them from an evil and greedy man.

I’ve seen them take over the clinic for Dennis when he lost his dear friend and coworker Dr. Hanson a few months ago. They put their personal lives on hold for almost two weeks. Then when our new friends came here from Serenity a week ago, again it was Karri and Saleena who gathered the women and friends to help cook and feed them. It was Karri and Saleena who tended to Raven, who was badly hurt when her mate pushed her on to a branch that cost the life of their unborn child.

Yes my friends, these women have earned the right to become doctors in our community. Now, it is my pleasure to call up Dr. Dennis Roland, who will put the final signature needed for these young women to become full-fledged doctors. Doctor, if you please,” White Eagle said.

Dennis smiled and walked up to the front of the platform.

“First of all, I’d like to thank these young women for taking on the responsibilities of the clinic and all my patients while I was gone. And also was a great honor to assist Dr. Hanson in the training of them as well. I know he would be proud of you girls if he were here,” Dennis said with tears forming in his eyes. “Karri, Saleena, please come up and hand me your diplomas,” Dennis said.

Karri and Saleena walked up the few steps and over to Dennis. They handed him their diplomas. Dennis pulled out a stamp of some kind.

“This stamp I’m putting on your diplomas shows that you have completed medical training in all areas and are hereby medical doctors,” Dennis said as he stamped both of their diplomas. “You are now doctors, congratulations,” Dennis said reaching out to shake their hands.

Karri shook his hand first, then Saleena.

“Now, I have an announcement to make,” Dennis said with sorrow in his voice.

Everyone stopped applauding and turned their attention back to Dennis.

“At the time when I signed those diplomas, I retired.” Dennis hesitated for a moment. “Karri, Saleena, I told you once before that I wanted to find someone to take my place so I can retire and go back to Throm. You, my dear girls are now the only doctors on Acklon. With your wisdom, love of people and knowledge of medicine, I can retire in peace knowing you’ll be here to take care of these fine people when I’m gone,” Dennis said with tears running down his cheek.

Karri and Saleena started to weep softly. They embraced their teacher that had taught them so much. White Eagle walked back up and stood next to Dennis, Karri and Saleena.

“We, the elders of Acklon would like to extend our congratulations to Karri and Saleena, and our fond wishes for many years of peace to Dennis and his mate Judy,” White Eagle said glancing over at Karri, Saleena and Dennis.

“Now, I have another important announcement to make. Hawk, please come up here and join me,” White Eagle said.

Hawk glanced over at Aslana for a moment then walked up onto the platform.

“Hawk, Dennis has told me many times how you protected Throm and the people there for many years. We, the elders would like to ask you if you would become the guardian and protector of Acklon?” White Eagle asked.

“It would be an honor sir,” Hawk replied.

“Let it be known throughout Acklon that Hawk is now the legal guardian and protector. He will have all the rights and privileges that come with it.” White Eagle faced Hawk. “You may live where you want. You will also receive a food allotment, which we will discuss with you later. Are there any questions you would like to ask?” White Eagle asked.

Hawk gazed at Aslana.

“Yes sir. You said I may live anywhere, is that right?” Hawk asked.

“That’s right, anywhere you wish,” White Eagle answered.

“Sir, I would like to live up on the mountain. There’s a large cave there with plenty of room for future mate, my children and myself. Would that be permissible?” Hawk asked.

“Yes Hawk. We know you and your mate Koori had a cave up on the mountainside on Throm. If that is what you wish, you may have it,” White Eagle replied.

“Is there anything you would like to ask someone?” White Eagle asked looking over towards Aslana.

Hawk watched White Eagle’s eyes as he said that and knew he was talking about asking Aslana.

“Yes sir, there is one other thing I would like to ask. But it would be for someone else to answer,” Hawk replied smiling.

“Go ahead,” White Eagle said trying to encourage Hawk.

Hawk jumped down off the platform and approached Aslana. He took her hand and gently kissed it. “Aslana, ever since I met you I’ve been deeply in love with you. I didn’t think I would be able to have these feelings anymore since the death of Koori, but since you came into my life, you and your daughter have been on my mind every day. I want to ask you something very important. I want to ask you, will you marry me now, and be my mate till death do us part?” he asked looking into her eyes.

Aslana blushed. “Hawk? What are you doing?” she asked looking around at all the people watching them.

“Aslana, will you marry me and be come my mate for life?” Hawk asked again.

Aslana looked up at the elders, and saw them nodding their heads. She looked into Hawk’s eyes and smiled. “I will,” she replied.

Hawk placed his fingertips under Aslana’s chin, gently tipped her head up and pressed his lips to hers. The elders and everyone started to applaud.

“Hawk, I’m afraid you have one more duty to perform,” White Eagle said.

Hawk’s lips parted from Aslana’s and he looked up at the elder who was standing there watching.

“You have two nieces here that are being courted by these two young men. Tiercel, Quill, will you come up here,” White Eagle asked.

Tiercel and Quill walked up the steps and stood next to White Eagle.

“They have something to ask you,” White Eagle said backing away from them.

“Hawk, I know you haven’t known me for long, but I’m in love with Karri and I’d like her to be my mate,” Quill said looking at Karri for a moment then looking back at Hawk. “I swear to love, protect and give my life for her. I’m asking you for your permission to marry her?” Quill asked.

Hawk being lost for words at that moment could only stand there. Then Tiercel walked up and stood next to Quill.

“Sir, I know you are not Saleena’s real uncle. But I respect that you cared for and loved her as if she was your family member. I too have fallen in love with your niece, Saleena. I am asking for her hand in marriage?” Tiercel asked.

Hawk was at a total loss for words. He didn’t know whether to be furious or happy. “I liked both men, and knew that one day they would make good mates for the girls. But, this soon?” he thought to himself.

“Hawk? Do you have any questions or answers for these men?” White Eagle asked.

Hawk slowly started to walk towards them. He reached the platform and held out his hand to Karri. She took it and he gently guided her up the platform. He walked her over to Quill and handed her hand to him.

“Karri? Do you wish to marry this man?” Hawk asked.

“Yes uncle, I do,” she replied in a soft voice.

“Quill, I give you my permission to marry my niece Karri,” Hawk said backing away.

Hawk then walked back down and took Saleena’s hand, then walked over and took Kalee’s hand and walked them up the steps and over to Tiercel.

“Tiercel, I am not Saleena’s blood relative, so I cannot give you permission. This is Saleena’s half sister. She is the only living family member and as an elder, she has the right to approve or deny you,” Hawk said as he backed away.

Kalee was surprised by Hawk’s position on Saleena.

“Hawk, you have been Saleena’s guardian and protector since you found her on Serenity. You have seen her through a lot of bad times, and you’ve always been there for her. I’m asking you to take this responsibility. You know this young man, and you know Saleena best,” Kalee said backing away from Hawk, Tiercel and Saleena.

“Hawk, you are the guardian of these young women. Kalee has declined the responsibility. Do you accept it?” White Eagle asked.

Hawk looked at Saleena, then at Tiercel. “Yes sir, I accept it,” he replied.

Hawk walked back over to Saleena and Tiercel. He gently picked up Saleena’s hand and gently kissed it. “Saleena? Do you wish to marry this man?” Hawk asked.

Saleena smiled at Hawk and gently kissed him on his cheek. “Yes uncle, I do,” she replied.

“Tiercel, I give you my permission to marry my niece Saleena,” Hawk said placing her hand in Tiercel’s. He then turned and walked back down the steps.

“These matches have been approved by the guardian and by the elders of Acklon,” White Eagle said as he left the platform.

Chapter 37

Karri and Saleena walked down the steps and over to Hawk.

“We knew that was hard for you uncle, but we’re grown women now. Now, it’s time for you to be happy,” Karri said softly.

Hawk smiled and returned their embrace.

“It’s going to be hard not having to look after you two now. It will be up to your mates,” Hawk replied.

“Uncle, we know you’ll always be there for us,” Saleena said with a smile.

“Yes, I’ll always be there for you if you need me. But remember, you will also have your mates to care for and protect you also,” Hawk replied.

Karri and Saleena wrapped their arms around Hawk’s neck maybe for the last time.

“When are you and Aslana going to marry?” Quill asked.

“I haven’t got to talk to her about it yet; I’m hoping soon. I promised Buck that we’d have a family started before he returned,” Hawk replied chuckling.

Quill and Tiercel laughed softly.

“We were wondering, would it be all right with you if we were married the same day as you and Aslana?” Quill asked.

“Don’t you think that’s a little too soon for you to marry?” Hawk asked.

“No, we love each other very much and as with you and Aslana, we’d like to start our own family,” Quill replied.

Hawk was a little surprised to hear the word family coming from his mouth so soon. After all this time, Hawk had also protected Karri and Saleena. Now for him to let go of them and watch them raise a family of their own...

“We were thinking about having a triple wedding. That is, if it’s all right with you and Aslana?” Quill replied.

“How do you girls feel about that?” Hawk asked.

“Oh uncle, we would love to share your wedding day,” Karri and Saleena replied.

“Aslana? How do you feel about it?” Hawk asked.

“Hawk, they’re your nieces. It would be an honor to share our wedding day with them,” Aslana replied.

Hawk turned to face Tiercel, Quill, Saleena and Karri.

“If the elders approve it, it’s all right with us,” Hawk said.

Karri and Saleena started to blush. “We’ve already asked them uncle. They said, if it was all right with you and Aslana, they can perform a triple wedding,” Karri replied smiling.

“Well, I guess we’ll be having a triple wedding then,” Hawk said gently kissing Aslana on her cheek.

“Hey, what are you two doing over here? The party is over there,” Dennis said as he walked towards them. “Is everything all right?” he asked.

“Yes, we were just making plans for a triple wedding,” Karri replied.

“A triple wedding?” Dennis asked with a surprised expression on his face.

“Yes. Karri, Quill, Tiercel and Saleena are going to join us in a wedding,” Aslana said.

“We have to make plans,” Aslana said.

“Well, those plans can wait till after the party. There are all sorts of food over there that the storeowners brought for your graduation. If I were you, I’d go get some before it disappears,” Dennis said laughing.

“I’m too excited to eat right now,” Karri said.

“Aslana? Where do you think we should have the weddings? I was thinking maybe in that field by the stream,” Karri asked walking over to Aslana.

“That sounds like a wonderful idea Karri. It’s large enough for everyone, and if I’m not mistaken it’s also large enough for your friends up on the mountain,” Aslana replied.

“Karri! Saleena!” a voice called out from the crowd.

They turned to see Marie and Carl walking over to them.

“Congratulations girls. I’m so proud of both of you,” Marie said embracing them.

“Marie, Carl, did you hear the news?” Saleena asked.

“No, what news?” Carl asked.

“We’re having a triple wedding,” Karri replied.

“Really?” Marie asked.

“We have so many plans to make, we better get started,” Aslana said as she, Karri, Saleena and Marie walked off.

Hawk, Quill, Tiercel, Carl and Dennis stood there looking at one another. "It looks like we have some planing to do also. Like, where are we going to have our wedding night?" Quill said.

"I know where we're going to have our wedding night." Hawk said with a smile. "I'm going up to that large cave and I'm going to fix it up for Aslana and myself for our bonding night," Hawk said looking up at the mountain.

"That's a wonderful idea, and we can use the smaller ones," Quill said.

"We have a lot of work to do in them before that day comes. I'm going up first thing in the morning and start getting things ready; if you two need a ride," Hawk said.

"Hawk, don't you think you should send a message to the Searcher?" Dennis asked.

Hawk stood there for a moment smiling. "I'd better; the Admiral, Buck and Wilma would want to be here for the wedding, if they can make it. I'll be right back," Hawk replied.

Hawk walked away smiling to himself. "I can't believe the day will be here soon. I'll marry Aslana and we'll have a family of our own. I already have a stepdaughter," Hawk thought to himself. Hawk's steps started to slow down. "What about Koori? I know she's gone, but how is she going to feel to see I'm wedding another?" Hawk asked himself.

Hawk slowly walked over to the communications center, and requested permission to send a message to the Searcher. Without any problems the request was approved within moments. Hawk sent the message to the Searcher. He slowly started to walk back to the party that was already in full swing. People dancing in the street, eating and having a good time. Off in the corner stood the women talking.

"Am I doing the right thing?" Hawk asked himself. "Is it going to be fair to Aslana? Or to Ashla? I do love her deeply and I want to spend the rest of my life with them on this planet. I need to know how Koori feels about it though," Hawk thought to himself.

"Hawk? Are you okay?" someone asked.

Hawk turned to see Dennis and White Eagle standing there.

"Sir, I didn't see you there," Hawk replied lowering his head.

"You had a far away look in your eyes my son. Is everything all right?" White Eagle asked.

"Yes sir, I was thinking of Koori. I was wondering if I was doing the right thing marrying another?" Hawk asked.

"Hawk, walk with me," White Eagle said.

Hawk nodded and started to walk next to White Eagle. They walked down the street and towards the fields on the south side of town.

“Hawk, why do you think of Koori now? Do you think she would be upset that you are about to wed another?” White Eagle asked.

“Yes sir. I know she’s gone, but my heart and soul won’t let her rest. I love Aslana with every breath I take, but I would feel a lot better knowing she approves of my marriage to Aslana,” Hawk replied lowering his head.

“You never know, maybe she can see what Aslana and Ashla means to you. Maybe she does approve of her and the wedding. What I’m saying is that, if Koori didn’t approve of your happiness with Aslana, she would have found a way to tell you. Maybe in a dream, or even in spirit,” White Eagle explained.

“Do you think so sir?” Hawk asked.

“I’m sure. Now let’s get back to that party, I’m a little hungry,” White Eagle said jokingly.

Hawk escorted White Eagle back to the party.

“Go enjoy yourself. Think of the beautiful woman you’re about to make your mate. And you can also think of those two beautiful young nieces of yours, that are going to share your wedding day,” White Eagle said smiling as he turned to walk away.

“Thank you sir,” Hawk said.

White Eagle smiled and walked over to the food table and started to place things on his platter.

Hawk, walked over to Aslana and the girls and gently kissed Aslana on her forehead. “What was that for?” she asked.

“Because I love you, and I can’t wait to spend the rest of my life with you,” Hawk replied.

The party continued till almost sunrise. People started to leave and head home to get ready for another day of work. Karri, Saleena had fallen asleep in the arms of their soon to be mates. Hawk and Aslana sat and talked about their wedding day. Hawk told her how he felt about Koori, and that he knew that she would be happy that he found a wonderful, kind and caring woman to fill his life once again.

“I wish I could have met her,” Aslana said softly.

“You two are one of a kind. You’re both loving, caring and understanding. I know she would have liked you,” Hawk said trying to stand with his legs numb from sitting so long.

“Where are you going?” she asked.

“I have something to do today. I might be gone all day, but I’ll be back this evening,” Hawk replied.

Hawk reached down and gently pulled Aslana to her feet. They stood toe to toe, looking deep into each other's eyes. He leaned into her and kissed her with the love and warmth he could find at that moment.

"Are you going to wake the girls?" she asked.

"I'm going to have to. They fell asleep in Quill and Tiercel's arms and I need them to help me today," Hawk replied gently shaking Quill. "Are you two coming with me?" he asked.

Quill opened his eyes and smiled. Hawk then started to shake Tiercel. Tiercel opened his eyes, and seeing Hawk standing there he turned his head the other way.

"Come on, time to get up and get things done," Hawk said softly.

Quill and Tiercel struggled to their feet, waking Karri and Saleena in the process.

"What's going on?" Saleena asked in a sleepy tone of voice.

"You girls go on back to the house. I'm taking Tiercel and Quill with me. We have some important things to take care of today," Hawk said.

Tiercel and Quill gently pulled the girls to their feet.

"We won't be gone long. You ladies did your planning last night; we have something to tend to also," Tiercel said kissing Saleena on her forehead.

"We'll be back soon," Quill said kissing Karri.

"It must be very important for you two to get up this early," Aslana said giggling.

Quill and Tiercel could only laugh softly.

"Okay, we women have more plans to make also. So, we'll see you tonight," Aslana said as she and the girls walked off.

"I'm afraid we're going to have to walk up the mountain this time. I haven't had the time to find and repair my ship," Hawk said.

"It's all right, we could use the exercise anyway," Tiercel replied.

"Did you send a message to the Searcher last night?" Quill asked.

"Yes, I'm hoping they get it soon. And I hope they'll be able to make it back in time for the weddings," Hawk replied.

Up on the Searcher, Admiral Asimov did receive the message from Hawk.

"Communications, patch me through to all sections," Asimov ordered.

"Yes sir. Go ahead sir."

"This is Admiral Asimov, I have a few announcements to make. I just received a couple of messages from Hawk on Acklon. First, Karri and Saleena have received their full medical degrees; they are now doctors." The crew on the bridge started to applaud.

"Then second, we are invited to several weddings, all of which will take place at the same time. Hawk and Aslana, Tiercel and Saleena, and Quill and Karri are all being married at the same time. They will be taking their vows in one week. I'm going to make a request to the Galactic Council, allowing us to return to Acklon in time for their wedding. Oh Buck, this part is for you. It says something about you already making a promise to be there, something about being the best man?" Asimov asked looking over at Buck.

"Yes sir, I promised I would be there for the wedding, he wants me to be his best man and I couldn't say no," Buck replied.

"Well, you can't break a promise...can you?" Asimov said smiling.

"Set course back to Acklon," he ordered.

"Sir, shouldn't we wait to hear from the council first?" Wilma asked.

"I know what they'll say, they'll tell me to wish Hawk and his new family all the luck in the world. Besides, I already informed them before we left Acklon of the possible wedding. They told me that when the time comes, permission was granted to return to Acklon, just to let them know. So, I'm letting them know," Asimov replied smiling.

Wilma smiled and shook her head.

"Sir, are we heading back to Acklon right now?" Buck asked.

"Yes Buck, Hawk will need help getting things ready," the Admiral replied.

Within a few moments a new course was set, the Searcher was returning to Acklon. Back on Acklon, Hawk and the boys were making their way up the mountainside.

"What do we need to gather?" Tiercel asked.

"We'll need to gather branches and large leaves for our beds. Firewood to keep us warm and food for us to eat after we get there," Hawk replied.

"I'll take care of hunting for food," Tiercel said.

Hawk looked at him with disappointment in his eyes.

"We'll all help find the building material, making of the beds and gathering of the food and firewood," Hawk said.

Tiercel hung his head. He knew Hawk was a little disappointed in him.

"I know you're worried about your upcoming wedding. You will need to learn how to do all these things. You're going to be Saleena's provider. You'll be helping her and supporting her," Hawk said looking into Tiercel's eyes.

"I know. I'm sorry," Tiercel replied.

"To tell you the truth, I'm a little nervous myself," Hawk admitted.

"Really? You don't sound like it," Tiercel replied.

"I'm very nervous right now. I'm worried that I won't be able to care for Aslana and Ashla the way they should be cared for. I'm nervous for you two as well. This will be Karri and Saleena's first marriage. I want to make sure you'll be good providers," Hawk explained.

Tiercel and Quill looked at Hawk with understanding eyes.

"Tell us what we have to do," Quill said.

Hawk smiled. "First, I'll show you what to look for in the material we need to make the beds. Then, we'll gather the firewood. And finally the nuts and berries," Hawk said. "I know your parents probably taught you how to do these things, but it's still good to have a refresher course," Hawk said smiling.

"My parents didn't teach me anything," Tiercel replied. "They were always working. I spent most of my time alone," Tiercel said.

"Well, they did something right. They raised a great son," Hawk replied trying to lift his spirits.

Tiercel hung his head even lower. "My parents didn't raise me, Black Hawk did."

Hawk lowered his head. Not in shame, but out of respect for Black Hawk.

"Tiercel, let me ask you something. Did Black Hawk raise you to quit?" Hawk asked.

"No, he taught me to have respect for all living things, how to build, and how to care for people. Whether they're humans or bird people," Tiercel replied.

"Then you were taught well. My niece has chosen a good mate," Hawk replied.

Tiercel looked up. His and Hawk's eyes met, and he knew Hawk was right.

"Are your real parents still living?" Hawk asked.

"No, they died a few years ago. There was a cave-in up in the mountains where they were working. They and about eight other people died," Tiercel replied.

"I'm sorry to hear that," Hawk said.

“Come on you two. We have a lot of work to do. We have to get these beds made,” Hawk said turning his attention back to the construction of the beds.

They followed Hawk out of the cave and into the fields. He showed them the proper way to remove the branches and leaves from a bush so they wouldn’t kill it. He then showed them how to bend and curve the branches to make the frame of the bed. Finally, he showed them how to layer the leaves to make the bed comfortable.

“Now, you try it,” Hawk said with a smile.

The boys left the cave and started their hunt for the branches and leaves that would make their beds for their wedding night.

Chapter 38

Down below the women were also making plans for their wedding day. Karri, Saleena and Aslana were sitting in the house when there was a knock at the door. Aslana walked over and started to open it.

“Hello Aslana,” a voice from the outside said. There standing in the doorway was Kalee.

“Kalee, please come in,” Aslana said lowering her head.

Kalee entered the house and walked into the living room where Karri and Saleena were sitting. Karri stood quickly and lowered her head.

“I came over to see if you needed any help planning your wedding day?” she asked with a smile.

Saleena ran over and embraced her half sister. Aslana motioned for Kalee to sit.

“Where are Hawk, Quill and Tiercel?” she asked.

“They said they had something important to do today. They’ll be back later this evening,” Aslana replied.

Kalee smiled.

Saleena knew she was up to something. “Kalee? Are you okay?” she asked.

“I’m fine. I have some good news. I wanted to come over right away and ask you something,” Kalee replied.

“What is it?” Saleena asked.

Kalee lowered her head then looked up at Aslana, Karri and Saleena. “I was wondering if it would be all right with you if Kestrel and I shared your wedding day?” she asked smiling.

“What? Did Kestrel finally ask you to be his mate?” Aslana asked with excitement.

Kalee smiled. “Yes,” she replied smiling.

Saleena squealed with delight. “I’m so happy for you,” Saleena replied embracing Kalee.

“We were hoping we could share your wedding day?” she asked.

“It would be an honor,” Aslana replied.

Kalee smiled.

“We had better start getting things ready, the men should be home soon. We want to have the wedding in one week. That will give the Searcher plenty of time to get here,” Aslana said.

“The Searcher is coming back?” Kalee asked.

“Yes, Hawk wants Buck to be his best man,” Aslana replied.

“That’s wonderful . How much have you got planned so far?” Kalee asked.

“We have almost everything planned or done, except for the food. We still have to talk to the store owners about that,” Aslana said.

“Let me talk to them, please? I want to help out, somehow,” Kalee said.

Saleena, Karri and Aslana smiled. “All right, that will be your part for the wedding,” Aslana said.

“I was wondering, do you have any traditional wedding clothes to wear?” Kalee asked.

“Oh my, we forgot all about that. What are we going to wear?” Aslana asked with concern.

“I’ll take care of that also,” Kalee said smiling.

“Are you sure?” Karri asked.

“Yes, don’t worry about it,” Kalee replied.

Kalee thought for a moment. “Are you sure it would be all right with Hawk?” she asked.

“I’m sure it would be. After all, you’ll be marrying a family member,” Karri replied.

“And he wants you to be happy,” Saleena said.

Kalee smiled and walked over to Karri and embraced her. “You’ll always be a member of mine and Saleena’s family,” Kalee said.

They sat down and started to talk about what kind of food was going to be at the wedding.

Back up on the mountain Hawk, Quill and Tiercel had just finished gathering all the firewood for all three caves.

“We had better head back down. It’s just about sunset,” Hawk said.

The boys nodded and they started back down the mountainside. As they approached the small new community, they were greeted by Raven and her children.

“Hawk, congratulations on your and Aslana’s upcoming marriage,” Raven said cheerfully.

“Thank you. You and the children are going to come, aren’t you?” Hawk asked.

“We wouldn’t miss it for the world.” Just then someone called out her name.

“Raven! What are you doing? You’re supposed to be taking it easy,” the voice said.

Hawk turned to see Carl walking towards her. ‘Hello Carl,’ Hawk said greeting him.

‘Hello Hawk, Quill, Tiercel,’ Carl replied.

‘Raven, you know what Karri and Saleena told you had to do. You’re going to pop open those stitches again if you stay on your feet and keep doing all this work,’ Carl said holding up some clothes that were hanging out to dry.

‘I’m sorry Carl. I had to see Hawk and the boys. I promise, I’ll take it easy the rest of the day,’ Raven replied smiling.

Hawk stood there and watched as Carl helped Raven back to her house. Carl turned around and smiled. ‘I’ll be right back,’ he said.

Hawk and the boys stood there and watched as Carl carefully walked Raven into the house. A moment later he came back out and walked towards Hawk. ‘That woman, she won’t do anything that the girls told her to do. She’s already popped the stitches twice now. She won’t stay in the house and relax,’ Carl said looking towards the house.

‘Carl? Are you and Raven...together? I was wondering, because you’re tending to her like a mate would,’ Hawk asked smiling.

Carl started to blush.

Hawk smiled. ‘I think that’s great. She needs someone to care for her and the children the right way,’ Hawk said.

‘So you’re not angry with me caring for one of your kind?’ Carl asked.

‘Carl, why should I be angry? You’ve already proved to me and almost everyone here that you are nothing like your brother. You have true and honest feelings for my people. You care for them as much as I do. If Raven, the children and you are happy together? That’s the main thing,’ Hawk said.

‘Thank you Hawk,’ Carl replied.

‘Now, if you’ll excuse us. We have to get back to our future mates before sunset,’ Hawk said.

‘I saw Karri, Saleena, Aslana and Kalee in town today buying all sorts of wedding stuff,’ Carl replied.

‘Kalee was shopping with them?’ Hawk asked a little puzzled.

‘Didn’t you hear? Kalee and Kestrel are getting married also,’ Carl said.

‘They are? That’s wonderful,’ Hawk replied smiling.

‘I think they were talking about who was going to walk out first, where everyone was going to stand. Oh and what to wear,’ Carl said chuckling.

“Carl? Did they say anything about Kalee and Kestrel getting married with us?” Hawk asked.

“Yes they did. You didn’t know that? I was told that Kalee went over and asked Aslana and the girls if it would be all right if her and Kestrel took their vows with you,” Carl said watching the expression on Hawk’s face.

“No, I didn’t know that,” Hawk replied.

“Hawk, you’re not mad, are you?” Carl asked.

Hawk looked at Carl. “No, I’m not mad. ” Hawk thought for a moment. “This is going to be one very big wedding,” he chuckled.

“Well, I better get back to Raven. Knowing her she’s probably in the kitchen baking or cleaning,” Carl said looking towards the house.

“Yes, we too have to get back. Thank you Carl,” Hawk said reaching out to shake Carl’s hand.

“Good night Hawk. Good night Quill and Tiercel. I’ll probably see you tomorrow,” Carl replied.

Hawk, Quill and Tiercel started to head for town. As they got into town Quill and Tiercel glanced over and saw Karri, Saleena and Aslana coming out of the bakery.

“Hawk, there they are,” Quill said pointing towards the women.

The women saw the men approaching and started to smile. Karri and Saleena started to walk towards Quill and Tiercel and greeted them with a warm embrace. Aslana walked over to Hawk and smiled.

“Did you get all your work done?” she asked.

“Yes. Are Kalee and Kestrel joining our wedding ceremony?” Hawk asked.

Aslana looked into Hawk’s eyes. “Yes, she asked us and we told her that it would be great if they shared our day with us,” Aslana replied.

Hawk smiled. “I think that would be wonderful also,” he said embracing Aslana.

“Are you hungry? We have a nice dinner cooking at home,” Aslana said.

“To tell you the truth, I’m starving. What are we having?” Hawk asked.

“Karri and Saleena prepared a chicken, vegetables, and I bought some seed bread, and some fruit,” Aslana replied.

Tiercel and Quill gazed at Karri and Saleena. “You fixed chicken?” Quill asked.

“Yes, my adopted mother taught me,” Karri replied.

“This ought to be good,” Tiercel said chuckling.

Hawk turned and stared at them. Tiercel knew Hawk wasn’t pleased with the remark he made.

“I think it’s going to be wonderful,” Quill said.

Karri smiled. “I think you’ll like it,” she said as she walked off.

Hawk looking at Tiercel, took a deep breath and walked away.

Everyone got back to the house and sat seated at the table waiting for Karri and Saleena to bring in the main course. Saleena entered carrying the vegetables and sliced seed bread. A moment later Karri brought in the chicken. The aroma of the chicken started to fill the air. Tiercel smiled as did Hawk. Quill smelled the chicken and watched as she placed the beautifully cooked bird on the table.

“Little one, that smells great,” Hawk said.

“Uncle,” Karri said blushing.

“Little one?” Quill chuckled.

“I called Karri ‘little one’ when I first found her. She was so small,” Hawk replied. Hawk slowly and carefully started to carve the chicken. He sliced off a nice piece and slid it onto Karri’s plate first, then he did the same for Saleena. Tiercel and Quill watched as Hawk served the women first. He turned and saw that they were watching him serve the women first.

“You will learn, the male always serves the women first. These women do more work in six hours than we do all day. They clean, hunt, cook, care for the young, and tend to us twenty four hours a day, seven days a week. In this household, the women are served first,” Hawk said.

Tiercel smiled. “Then that’s the way it will be in our home,” he said looking over at Saleena.

They were eating their meal when someone started to bang on the front door. Hawk jumped up and drew his weapon out of instinct. Realizing it was the door he placed his weapon back into the holster. Aslana walked over and opened the door.

“Is Hawk here?” a voice asked in terror.

“I’m here,” Hawk replied walking to the door. “Phoenix, what’s wrong?”

“Hawk, he’s back! My father is back at the house and he’s trying to take my mother.” The scared boy looked over at Karri and Saleena. “He shot Carl,” he said.

Without hesitation, Hawk ran out of the house and down the street. Some of the townspeople watched and started to run after him. He ran past Phoenix and was about ready to approach

the small village when he heard screaming coming from one of the houses. He ran straight to Raven's home and busted down the door. There lying in a pool of blood was Carl. Raven was kneeling next to him holding his hand.

"Where is he?" Hawk shouted.

"He went out the back door. Hawk, Carl is dying," she cried.

Hawk knelt down next to Carl. He felt for a pulse, and found a slight one. "Karri and Saleena will be here shortly. Tell them I've gone after Peregrine and to get Carl to the clinic. I'll be back after I find him," Hawk said with anger as he ran out the back door. Hawk ran as fast as he could, trying to catch up to Peregrine. After ten minutes of running Hawk stopped; he couldn't see or find him anywhere. He turned around and headed back to the house. By the time he got there Karri, Saleena, Tiercel and Quill were carrying Carl down the path towards town.

"Did you find him?" Tiercel asked.

"No. But I swear... I'll find him if it takes all night," Hawk replied with frustration. "How is Carl?" he asked.

"I don't know uncle. He's lost a lot of blood," Karri replied.

Raven and the children were walking next to Carl. Raven was holding his hand as she was doing in the house.

"Raven, come with me. We're going back to the house and get yours and the children's belongings. I'm moving you and the children into town," Hawk said.

A few of the townspeople followed Hawk and Raven back to her home. As they entered their thought they heard a noise coming from the back of the house. They looked at Hawk, who must have heard it also. Before they could say anything, he was out the door again. Soon they heard what might have been a fight going on outside. A couple of the men ran out the back door. They saw Hawk standing there while a few of the younger men of the small town were fighting Peregrine.

"Hawk, aren't you going to do anything?" one of them asked.

"No, these people deserve first shot at this so-called man. If they were beating him with a stick yes, I would stop it," Hawk replied.

"I thought you were the protector of Acklon?" one of them asked.

"Yes, I am the protector of Acklon. But this man was warned not to come back here for what he did to his mate and their unborn child. After these people are finished, I will take him to the elders. If he survives," Hawk replied.

Soon after that the three men stopped and walked over to Hawk, dragging Peregrine with them. "We're sorry Hawk, but after what he did to Raven and now, shooting her friend and companion we wanted some retribution," the man said.

Hawk nodded.

"I'll take him to the elders now. This will be the last time anyone will ever see him again," Hawk said. Hawk grabbed Peregrine and pulled him to his feet. "You should not have come back," Hawk said.

All Peregrine could do was stagger alongside Hawk as they headed back to town. Hawk took him right away to the elders and explained what happened.

"Are Raven and the children all right?" White Eagle asked.

"Yes, they're fine. He shot Carl though," Hawk replied.

"He shot a human?" White Eagle asked.

"Yes. Carl is a friend and companion to Raven and her children," Hawk informed White Eagle.

White Eagle walked over to Peregrine.

"Peregrine, first you caused the death of your own unborn child, now you shot and seriously injured an human with a weapon. You will be incarcerated until your hearing. I will remind you that you were ordered off this planet and never to return. You broke our law. You returned and injured a human, and maybe your old mate. I will have to talk to her children about what you did to her while you were there." White Eagle walked away. "Guards, take this man to the holding cell," White Eagle ordered.

The guards escorted Peregrine out of the meeting hall and down the stairs to the holding cells.

"Hawk, how bad is Carl wounded?" White Eagle asked.

"I don't know sir. Karri and Saleena are with him at the clinic right now. Raven and her children are there also," Hawk replied.

"Let me know how he's doing, would you?" White Eagle asked.

Hawk nodded. "Yes sir."

"I want to talk to Raven and the children. Please bring them here tomorrow at noon," White Eagle said as he turned and walked out of the room.

Hawk walked quickly out of the great hall and headed for the clinic. He arrived to find Raven and the children outside crying. "Raven? Where's Carl?" he asked.

"Karri and Saleena and Dennis are working on him right now. Oh Hawk, what have I done?" she cried.

Hawk knelt down next to her. "Raven, you didn't do anything wrong. It was Peregrine that did this to Carl, not you," Hawk said trying to reassure her.

“Hawk!” someone called out from across the street.

He turned to see Marie running across. “Is she all right?” she asked.

“Marie, could you take Raven and the children to your house and let them stay there for a while?” Hawk asked.

“Of course,” she replied helping Raven to her feet. “Come with me, children.” She slowly walked Raven across the street and into her house.

Hawk went inside to check on Carl. He saw Edna was standing by an exam room door. “How is he?” he asked.

“I don’t know, they chased me out a while ago,” she replied.

Hawk gently knocked on the door, he got no reply. Hawk sat down in the hall and waited. About an hour later the door opened and out walked Dennis. Hawk jumped up and walked quickly over to him. “How is he?” Hawk asked with concern.

“It was close, but I think he’ll be all right,” Dennis replied.

“May I go in and see him?” Hawk asked.

“Give the girls time to clean him up, and get him into a room. I’d say about thirty minutes,” Dennis said.

Hawk nodded. “Thank you Dennis.”

“Don’t thank me. Those girls took complete control of things in there. I was only in there to assist,” Dennis replied.

Hawk smiled. “Did they do all right?” he asked.

Dennis smiled. “They did a great job. They even showed me a few new things,” Dennis said chuckling.

The door opened, Karri and Saleena pushed the portable gurney out into the hall and down another hall to another section of the clinic. Hawk followed closely.

“Is he going to be all right?” he asked Karri and Saleena.

“We sure he’ll be okay. It came close to his lungs; another half inch and he wouldn’t be here. What he needs now is a lot of rest,” Karri replied.

“Can I speak to him for a minute?”

“Make it short, uncle. He probably won’t be able to talk too much, he’s still sedated,” Saleena said.

“I won’t be too long,” Hawk replied sitting down next to Carl’s bed.

Carl opened his eyes for a few seconds, just enough to see Hawk sitting next to him. ‘Hawk,’ he said in a very weak voice.

‘I’m here, Carl. Raven and the children are safe. The newcomers caught and almost beat Peregrine to death. How are you feeling? Can you tell me what happened?’ Hawk asked softly.

‘Was sitting next to Raven, the door burst open, when I stood up I heard a loud pop. Last thing I remember was Raven screaming and the children crying,’ Carl replied.

‘Raven and the children will never have to worry about him again. He’s in a holding cell, waiting for the elders to decide what his fate will be,’ Hawk said.

Carl smiled. ‘As long as Raven and the children are safe,’ he muttered before falling asleep again.

Hawk stood and quietly walked out of the room. Outside the door Karri and Saleena were waiting to enter the room again to check on him.

‘He fell asleep just now,’ Hawk informed them.

‘Good. He needs the rest. You can come back tomorrow, uncle,’ Karri said.

Chapter 39

Hawk slowly made his way back to Aslana's house. Just as he was about to enter, the door opened.

"Is Raven all right?" Aslana asked.

"Yes, she and the children are doing fine. Carl was badly injured though. Karri and Saleena got to him in time," Hawk replied sitting down on the sofa, rubbing his hands through his head feathers.

Aslana walked over to him and sat down next to him. "Was it Peregrine?" she asked.

"Yes. But thanks to some of the newcomers, they found him before I did. They caught him out back and started to beat him within an inch of his life. I just stood there and watched. I knew if I got hold of him, I probably would have killed him," Hawk said.

"You need to sleep, my love. White Eagle came by and asked me to tell you that the hearing for Peregrine will be tomorrow evening. He said something about wanting to talk to Raven and the children first," Aslana said rubbing Hawk's shoulders.

Hawk nodded.

"Are you hungry? I saved you some dinner," Aslana said.

"Yes, I am kind of hungry," Hawk replied.

"I'll be right back. I'll get you something," she said as she stood and walked out into the kitchen.

She was gone for about five minutes. When she returned with a plate full of food, she noticed that Hawk had fallen asleep sitting on the sofa. She walked back into the kitchen and put the plate of food into the cooling unit. She then walked past Hawk and removed a blanket from out of the cabinet and laid it across him. She gently and softly kissed him on the forehead and retired for the night.

The next morning Hawk was awoken by noises coming from the kitchen. He stood and stretched. Looking over the divider he saw Aslana putting some seed bread and fruit on a plate.

"Good morning my love," he said.

Aslana smiled and handed him the plate. "Did you sleep well?" she asked.

Hawk took a bite of the seed bread. "No, I kept dreaming of Peregrine attacking Carl and Raven. Did you say something last night about his hearing being this evening?" Hawk asked.

"Yes, I believe White Eagle said something about sunset," she replied.

“I want to go check on Carl, then go talk to Raven about what happened. I’ll be back soon,” Hawk said placing the empty plate down on the divider.

“I’ll see you later then?” she asked.

“Nothing could keep me away,” Hawk replied smiling. He walked around the divider and reached his hand out to her. She placed her small delicate hand into his. He pulled her closer and gently kissed her. “I love you with all my heart and soul,” Hawk whispered softly in her ear.

“I love you,” she replied.

Hawk parted from their embrace and smiled. He turned and started to walk towards the door. He stopped, smiled and then left. He headed right to the clinic. As he arrived he saw Raven entering also.

“Raven,” he called out.

She stopped and saw him walking towards her. “Good morning Hawk,” she said.

“How are you and the children doing?” he asked.

“I had trouble sleeping last night. I kept thinking about Carl. Hawk, he blocked that shot from hitting me,” Raven said with tears swelling in her eyes.

“What? Raven, now think, was Peregrine aiming the weapon at you or Carl? This is every important,” Hawk said with concern.

Raven thought for a moment. “When the door burst open, Carl stood and I noticed he had a strange look on his face. He stepped to my side and pushed me down and ... Hawk, Peregrine was trying to kill me,” Raven said crying.

“Raven, I need you and the children to come with me to the meeting hall today at noon. The elders want to ask you what happened. Peregrine’s trial starts at sunset,” Hawk said.

“All right Hawk. Could you come and get us? I don’t really know where that is,” Raven replied.

“Will you be here or at Marie’s?” Hawk asked.

“Most likely here,” Raven replied.

Hawk nodded and opened the door for her. They both walked in and Edna greeted them with a smile.

“Good morning Hawk, good morning Raven,” she said.

“Good morning Edna. Would it be possible to see Carl right now?” Hawk asked.

“He’s been waiting for you,” she replied.

“Is he all right?” Raven asked.

“He’ll be fine. Please follow me, I’ll take you to him,” Edna said as she stood and walked towards the door that lead back to the clinic.

Raven and Hawk followed Edna to the room where Carl was trying to eat breakfast.

“Edna, this stuff is terrible,” he said loudly.

“Oh be quiet now. You have some company,” she replied stepping aside to allow Raven and Hawk to enter the room.

“My darling,” Raven said running to his side.

Hawk smiled. He knew now that they would be together as a couple. “How about if I come back later?” Hawk said turning to leave.

“No, Hawk. I want to talk to you,” Carl said.

Hawk nodded and entered the room. He pulled up a chair on the other side of Carl and seated himself. “How are you, my friend?” Hawk asked.

“I’m doing okay, I guess. It’s a little hard to breathe sometimes though. But Karri and Saleena told me that was normal for being shot in the upper chest. They are great doctors, Hawk. You must be very proud of them,” Carl said.

“Carl, I want to ask you something. I need you to tell me the truth. Do you think Peregrine was after you or Raven?” Hawk asked.

“Hawk, he didn’t know I was there. I think he might have been after Raven and maybe even the children,” Carl replied.

“That’s all I need to know, my friend. I’ll leave you two alone now. Raven, I’ll pick you up about fifteen minutes till noon,” Hawk said as he stood to leave the room.

“All right Hawk. I’ll be here; the children will be coming shortly,” Raven replied.

“Hawk, what’s going on?” Carl asked with concern.

Hawk stopped and turned to face Carl. “The elders want to talk to Raven and the children about what happened last night, that’s all.” Hawk hesitated for a moment after seeing the concerned look on Carl’s face. “Don’t worry, some of the men around Raven’s home last night caught Peregrine. His trial begins at sunset,” Hawk said smiling.

Carl made what appeared to be a big sigh of relief.

“Raven and the children are staying at Marie’s house for a while,” Hawk informed Carl.

Carl nodded. “Thank you Hawk, for everything,” Carl said.

Hawk smiled and left the room. He walked out into the waiting room to find about six to eight newcomers sitting in the lobby.

“Hawk? How is Carl?” one of them asked.

“He’s doing okay. He’s sitting up and eating the food here, so he must be doing better,” Hawk replied jokingly.

“Can he have visitors?”

“It would be better if you ask the doctors about that. I just left him and Raven is with him right now,” Hawk said.

They smiled, as did Hawk.

“If you’ll excuse me now. I have to help Aslana get things ready for the weddings,” Hawk said as he opened the front door.

“Weddings? Who else is getting married?” Kite asked.

“There will be four weddings at the same time. Mine and Aslana, Tiercel and Saleena, Quill and Karri and Kalee and Kestrel,” Hawk said.

“They are all your family members, aren’t they?” Kite asked.

“Yes, Karri and Saleena are my nieces and Kestrel is my brother-in-law. I hope to see all of you there,” Hawk said with a smile.

“When is the great day?” one of the women asked.

“In six days. I’m waiting for some friends to arrive,” Hawk said.

“They will announce it, won’t they?” Kite asked.

“Yes, the elders will have everyone gather in the town square, like they did for Karri and Saleena’s graduation. But I’ll make sure all of you find out before that. Well, I must leave now, goodbye,” Hawk said as he left. Hawk walked quickly back over to Aslana’s home. He walked in and called out. “Aslana, are you home?” he asked.

There was no answer. “She must be out shopping.” He thought to himself.

Hawk walked back out the door and headed for the stores where he thought Aslana might be. He walked into the little store owned by Ben, Kalee’s adopted grandfather.

“Hawk, it’s good to see you. How have you been?” Ben asked.

“I’m doing well. Have you seen Aslana today?” Hawk asked.

"I saw her a little while ago heading for Marie's house. How are the wedding plans going?" Ben asked.

"They're going good. We're waiting for the Searcher to return. They should be here within the week," Hawk explained.

"I'm so happy you found someone. I remember when you first came to Acklon. You were excited but unsure also," Ben said.

"Unsure? What do you mean?" Hawk asked.

"About Kalee. I knew you loved or thought you loved her. But as time went by, you realized it was more caring than love," Ben replied.

Hawk smiled. "You're coming to the wedding, aren't you?" Hawk asked.

"I wouldn't miss it for the world," Ben replied smiling.

Hawk looked out the window and saw Karri and Saleena across the street.

"I have to leave. I'll stop by again later," Hawk said reaching out to shake Ben's hand.

Ben reached his hand out and shook Hawk's hand. "I'll talk to you soon. Goodbye Hawk," Ben said.

Hawk walked out the door and across the street. He looked in the store that he thought the girls might have gone into. No Saleena or Karri in there. He walked further down to the next store. Still again, no Saleena or Karri. Hawk stood there for a moment trying to gather his thoughts. "They must be over at Marie's house," he said to himself. He made his way over and knocked on the door. The door slowly opened, and there standing in the doorway was Carl.

"What are you doing here?" Hawk asked surprised.

"I talked Karri and Saleena into letting me stay here for my recovery. It's close to the clinic, and I'll feel more comfortable here," Carl replied.

"Are the girls here?" Hawk asked.

"Yes, come in. They came over to make sure I wasn't doing anything foolish," Carl chuckled.

Hawk walked in and saw Karri and Saleena sitting at the table with Raven and Marie.

"Raven, it's almost time to go see the elders," Hawk said.

"Uncle, may Carl go with her?" Karri asked.

"Are you sure he's up to the walk?" Hawk asked.

"I'll make it. I might walk a little bit slower than you, but I'll get there." Carl looked over at Raven. "Besides, they should hear my testimony of what happened also," he said.

Hawk looked at the girls. "Would it be all right if he walked that far?" Hawk asked.

"Not really. Carl, you shouldn't be walking that much," Karri replied.

"I have an idea. I'll be right back," Hawk said as he walked out the front door. He headed for the meeting hall. He entered the room where they were supposed to meet with the elders. White Eagle walked out from the back room and over to Hawk.

"Where's Raven?" he asked.

"Sir, she's with Carl right now. Sir, he wants you to hear his testimony as well, but he's unable to walk this far. Would it be possible for the elders to go to Marie's for the testimony of Raven and Carl?" Hawk asked lowering his head.

"I'll talk to the other elders. Wait here," White Eagle replied. He walked out of the room and through a door behind the long table.

Hawk stood and waited for what seemed forever. Finally the door opened again and out walked all of the elders. They walked over to Hawk.

"Hawk, seeing Carl would like to testify, we will go to Marie's home with you," Grey Falcon said.

Hawk lowered his head. "Thank you."

The elders walked out with Hawk. They slowly walked towards Marie's home. Along the way, humans and bird people bowed their heads as the elders passed. They arrived at the house. Hawk knocked. A moment later, Karri answered the door. She saw the elders and immediately lowered her head. "Please, come in," she said. The elders walked in. Marie, her children, Saleena and even Carl lowered their heads as they entered.

"Raven, Carl, we are here to listen to your testimony about Peregrine. But first, Carl, how are you feeling?" Grey Falcon asked.

Carl raised his head. "I'm doing well, sir. Thank you for asking and for making that long walk here," Carl replied.

The elders smiled. The elders walked over and seated themselves on the sofa and the chair. "We're sorry, but the children will have to testify also. They saw what happened. Raven, please come with me," Kalee said standing and walking towards the back room.

Raven followed. Inside the room Kalee asked Raven what exactly she had seen and what had happened after Peregrine fired the shot that hit Carl. Raven told her everything that happened, right down to the part where she sat with Carl till her son returned with Hawk and the doctors. Kalee thanked her and they both left the room.

“Phoenix, come with me please,” Kalee asked. Phoenix walked behind Kalee. They stood and talked about what he had seen his father do. Kalee didn’t want to frighten the children too much, so she didn’t talk to them as long. The rest of the children went in one at a time, telling Kalee what they had seen and what Carl had done to protect their mother. Each one said basically the same thing: that Carl pushed Raven out of the way from being shot.

Kalee thanked each child, then walked them back out into the living room. The other elders asked Kalee to escort the children outside so they could talk to Carl and Raven. After about two hours the elders stood and walked towards the door.

“We thank you for all your testimonies. The hearing will be thirty minutes before sunset,” Grey Falcon said as they left the house.

As before, everyone lowered their heads as the elders left. Hawk walked over to Raven.

“You have some very brave children to come forward like that, be proud of them,” Hawk said.

“I am very proud of them,” Raven replied.

“As am I,” Carl said.

Karri, Saleena and Marie stood up and started to walk towards the kitchen. “Is anyone hungry?” Marie asked.

“I’m starved,” Carl replied.

“Carl, you just ate over at the clinic a few hours ago,” Karri said.

“I know, but I never could refuse a home cooked meal,” he replied.

Everyone started to laugh. Hawk started to walk towards the door. “Hawk? Where are you going?” Carl asked.

“I have a prior engagement,” Hawk replied.

“We’ll see you at the trial, uncle,” Karri said.

Hawk nodded and walked out the door. He headed right for the house, hoping Aslana would be home by the time he got there. He walked into the house and saw she was cooking dinner. He walked over to her and turned her around and gently but passionately kissed her.

“What was that for?” she asked.

“Because I love you,” Hawk replied, kissing her again.

Aslana and Hawk stood in each other’s embrace for a very long time, exchanging warm, loving kisses and embraces.

“You know about the trial at sunset?” Hawk asked.

“Yes, it’s all over town. Are Raven and Carl going to be there?” Aslana asked.

“Yes. I just left them at Marie’s. The elders made a special trip over there to gather the information they will need for the trial against Peregrine. Those children of Raven’s are brave. They told the elders everything: what they saw, and what Carl did to protect Raven. They know that their father might get a death sentence for what he has done, but they held their heads high,” Hawk explained.

“Do you think he’ll get the death sentence?”

“That, I don’t know. It will be up to the elders alone,” Hawk replied.

The rest of that afternoon Hawk and Aslana sat close to each other, talking about the upcoming wedding. Over at Marie’s, everyone was enjoying a full dinner, especially Carl. It was almost time for everyone to gather in the main part of town to hear the verdict on Peregrine. People and bird people started to gather.

Just about sundown the elders of Acklon emerged from the meeting hall, followed by two guards who were escorting Peregrine out to the square.

“This trial will now begin,” White Eagle said out loud.

Everyone became quiet.

“Bring the accused before the town,” Grey Falcon said.

The two guards walked Peregrine up the steps and into view of everyone.

“Peregrine, count one, you have been accused of attempted murder of Carl. Count two, you returned to Acklon after being banished for causing the death of your unborn child that Raven has named Kalana.

The following is our judgment: you, Peregrine, are sentenced to life on our prison planet Capta 3. There you will live out the rest of your life,” Grey Falcon said.

Peregrine hung his head. Raven stood next to Carl showing no feelings and no emotions for her ex-mate.

“Your sentence will take place at sunrise tomorrow,” White Eagle said.

“This trial is over.” The elders turned around and walked off the platform and towards the meeting hall. The guards escorted Peregrine back to his cell to wait for the transport vessel that was to arrive in the morning.

Hawk walked over to Raven.

“It’s over. You and your children can now live in peace with no more fear of him,” Hawk said.

“Thank you Hawk,” Raven replied with tears in her eyes. The tears were not for losing her ex - mate, but for the freedom to start a new life, perhaps with a human.

Chapter 40

Bright and early the next morning, the guards escorted Peregrine to the transport vessel. Peregrine looked around hoping to see someone, anyone that might show him some kind of mourning. But no one was out; the stores were still locked. He lowered his head and climbed into the transport vessel.

“Peregrine, what you did to Raven and Carl was unforgivable. You will spend the rest of your life on a planet where no one cares whether you live or die,” one of the guards said. Peregrine raised his head and looked at the guard who spoke to him.

“Tell me, is Raven happy with Carl?” Peregrine asked.

The guard smiled. “Yes, she found a man who cares for her and her children, and he’s a human. He cared and maybe even loved Raven enough to protect her with his own life. Tell me Peregrine, would you have done that?” the guard asked.

Peregrine lowered his head and didn’t say a word.

“I thought not,” the guard replied as he fastened the harness around Peregrine.

The guards exited the vessel, the doors closed and the engines started up. A moment later, Peregrine was gone for ever.

The guards walked over to the bakery and knocked on the door. The old man opened the door and smiled.

“Is it time?” he asked.

The guards nodded. “Yes, we will need our regular order. Oh, and inform Hawk the Searcher will be here today,” the guard said.

The old man handed the guards their order. “He’s going to be so excited to see his friends again. Thank you, I will tell him within the hour,” the old man replied.

The guards walked off. The old man closed the door and started yelling for his mate. “The Searcher is coming today,” he yelled out.

“Are you sure?” his mate asked.

“Yes, the guards just told me.”

“Then we have to start baking. We will have a lot of hungry bird people and humans to feed,” she replied.

The old man started the flame in the old-fashioned baking oven. His mate started to make the dough.

“We’ll need a lot of seed bread as well as human bread,” she said.

The old man turned and gazed at his mate. "I know woman, the big day will be here soon. So quit yapping and start baking," he said jokingly.

His mate smiled.

Back at Aslana's home, Hawk and Aslana were just waking up. Aslana walked out of the bedroom and saw that her soon-to-be-mate was awake and folding the blankets that kept him warm throughout the night.

"Good morning my love," she said as she approached him.

Hawk looked into her big brown eyes and smiled. "Good morning, my soon -to-be-mate," Hawk said as he dropped the blanket and embraced her.

"I'll get you some breakfast," she said pulling away after kissing him gently on his cheek.

He pulled her back. "I don't need any breakfast, I just need you," Hawk said gently kissing her back.

There was a knock at the door. "Who can that be this early in the morning?" she asked.

"I don't know," Hawk replied walking over to open the door.

"Good morning Hawk," came a familiar voice.

Aslana walked over to join her soon-to-be-mate. Standing at the door was Ben.

"I hope I didn't wake you?" he asked.

"No, we were awake," Aslana replied smiling.

"Good. Hawk, I've got some news for you. The Searcher will be here today," Ben said.

Hawk looked at Ben.

"Are you sure? Where or who told you this?" Hawk asked.

"The guards that escorted Peregrine to the transport vessel. They come by every morning to get their seed bread. They told me that the Searcher was going to get here today. They wanted me to tell you," he replied.

Hawk turned and looked at Aslana.

"They'll be here today," he said with excitement in his voice.

Ben smiled and walked off.

"Thank you," Hawk yelled out.

Hawk closed the door, picked up Aslana and started to spin her around.

“Hawk, stop that. I’m getting dizzy,” she said laughing.

Hawk stopped and put her down.

“Don’t you think you should go tell the girls?” she asked.

“Yes, I had better tell them,” Hawk said as he opened the door. He started to leave when he stopped and walked quickly back to Aslana. “I’ll be right back,” he said kissing her on her cheek. He then took off at a full run. It didn’t take him long to get to Karri and Saleena’s home. He knocked on the door. No answer. He knocked again, and finally the door started to open slowly. Karri stood at the door, rubbing her eyes.

“Uncle? What is it?” she asked.

“Buck’s on his way. The Searcher will be here today,” he said with the same excitement in his voice.

“They’re on the way? Are you sure?” she asked.

“Yes, where’s your sister?” he asked.

“She stayed over at Marie’s, just to make sure Carl didn’t try to do too much,” Karri replied.

“We have to finish all our plans for the wedding today. Get dressed and go let your sister know. I’m going over to Kalee’s,” Hawk said smiling.

Karri smiled and closed the door. Hawk made another fast run over to Kalee’s home. He knocked on her door. The door opened and there stood Kestrel.

“Hawk, what are you doing here so early?” he asked.

“The Searcher is on its way back; they’ll be here today. Could you let Kalee know?” Hawk asked.

“Of course, she’s fixing breakfast if you’d like to tell her yourself,” Kestrel replied.

“No, I have too much to do in too short a time. I still have to finish the caves for our wedding night,” Hawk replied smiling.

Kestrel smiled. “All right my brother, I’ll let her know,” Kestrel said with a smile.

Hawk smiled. As he started to walk away he realized something. That was the first time Kestrel had ever called him brother. Even when he was married to Koori, he had never called him brother. Hawk’s smile got bigger.

“This is going to be the day,” he said to himself as he walked back to Aslana’s.

He suddenly stopped. “I completely forgot about the repairs I have to do to the War Hawk,” Hawk thought to himself.

He turned and started to head towards the hanger where his ship was stored. He entered the hangar to find a couple of maintenance men walking around his ship. They looked up and saw him walking towards them.

“Hawk, we were wondering when you might show up. We found something leaking from under your ship,” one of them said.

“Leaking? Where?” Hawk asked.

The men took Hawk towards the middle of the War Hawk and pointed underneath to a rather large spot on the floor of the hangar.

“I knew it was my landing gear,” he said loudly.

“Would you like some help?” they asked.

“That would be great. I don’t have much time before the Searcher returns. And the wedding is just a day or so away,” Hawk replied with a smile.

The maintenance men walked over and gathered tools, while Hawk crawled underneath the War Hawk to see if he could tell exactly where it was leaking from. It didn’t take him long to find a small hole on the inside of the hydraulic line. “I found it,” he said.

“Where is it located?” one of the maintenance men asked.

“It’s a small hole located on the inside of the hydraulic line, close to the hull of the ship,” Hawk explained.

“That shouldn’t take too long to replace,” one of them replied.

“I don’t know, these lines were made special for my ship,” Hawk said.

“We have all sorts of supplies in the storage room in the back of the hangar. Maybe we can find one that will hold you over till we can get another one. Where did you have this one made?” one of the maintenance crew asked.

Hawk lowered his head. “On Throm,” he replied.

“Do you think the Searcher could make one for you?”

Hawk raised his head, and looked at the maintenance personnel who asked. “Maybe.” He thought for a moment. “Yes, they can build me another. When I was taken to the Searcher, after my fight with Buck, the repair crew informed the Admiral that my landing gear hydraulic line had ruptured. They built another one and replaced it,” Hawk replied smiling.

“Well, you won’t have to wait too long. Look,” one of them said pointing to the sky just south of Acklon.

Hawk looked up and saw what might be a shuttle coming towards the city. Hawk took a deep breath.

“Is that one of the shuttles from the Searcher?”

Hawk watched as it came closer and closer. “Yes, it is one of the shuttles,” Hawk said with relief in his voice.

“Hawk, you’d better go let your nieces and your mate know,” one of them said.

Hawk stood up and walked past them, patting them on their shoulders as he left, while keeping an eye on the shuttle. He walked quickly to where the shuttle might be landing and watched. The townspeople started to gather around him. One of them ran towards the home of Marie. A few minutes later Karri, Saleena, Marie and Carl were walking through the crowd, trying to reach Hawk. The shuttle started to set down in the middle of town. Aslana came running up to Hawk and gently grabbed his arm. “Is it them?” she asked.

“Yes,” Hawk replied.

The shuttle’s engines shut down, the door started to slowly open.

“Don’t you know it’s not safe to stand in the middle of the road?” a voice said coming from inside the shuttle. A moment later Buck exited the shuttle. Hawk walked over to him and extended his hand.

“It’s good to see you again, my friend,” Buck said extending his hand to Hawk.

They shook hands; then to everyone’s surprise, Hawk embraced Buck like a long lost brother. “I’m glad you made it,” Hawk said with a smile.

“Uncle!” a voice called out from the back of the crowd.

Buck turned to see Saleena and Karri running towards him. He extended his arms and they leaped into them.

“Oh uncle, we’re so happy to see you,” Karri said embracing Buck.

“I’m happy to see you two also,” Buck replied.

“Hello Buck,” another familiar voice said from the crowd.

Buck looked around but couldn’t see where the voice came from. A moment later Carl came walking very slowly out and over to him.

“Carl, what happened?” Buck asked.

“It’s a long story. I’ll tell you about it later,” Carl said. Just then Raven walked up, stood next to Carl and placed her arm gently around his.

“So when is the big day?” Buck asked looking at Hawk.

“We’ve been waiting for you to arrive. Now since you’re here, it could be any time now,” Hawk replied.

“Uncle? Is the Admiral coming?” Karri asked.

“He’ll be down shortly. You girls should know by now, he wouldn’t miss this for anything,” Buck replied.

“Welcome home Buck,” came another voice for the crowd. Buck turned and saw Aslana and Marie walking through the crowd.

“There’s the two most beautiful women in the world,” Buck said smiling. “How are you Aslana, Marie?” he asked.

“Oh Buck, you haven’t changed a bit, have you?” Marie said smiling.

Aslana walked over to Buck and gave him a quick kiss on his cheek. “How are you Buck?” she asked.

Blushing, Buck looked at Hawk and smiled. “I’m doing great, now,” he chuckled.

“Come with me, my friend. I want to show you something,” Hawk said pointing towards the hangars.

Buck nodded and started to walk alongside Hawk. “Really, how have you been?” Buck asked.

“I’ve been good. The past few days have been busy. How are the Admiral and Wilma?” Hawk asked.

“The Admiral is walking around like a peacock. He’s so proud of Karri and Saleena. You should see Dr. Goodfellow, he’s even worse,” Buck replied laughing.

“Is he ill?” Hawk asked with concern.

“No,” Buck chuckled. “He’s worse when it comes to the girls becoming doctors. He walks around all day saying how proud he is of them.” Buck looked around. “Where are we going anyway?” Buck asked.

“Do you remember the day we fought and how my ship damaged yours with my landing gear talons? And how the crew on the Searcher repaired it? Well, I guess several years of deep space flying wore out the hydraulic line on it. They don’t have anything like that here. It was made special for my ship to withstand the pressure of grasping. I was wondering if the crew on the Searcher would make me another?” Hawk asked.

“You know the Admiral will be more than happy to have them make you another. Let me look at it and then we’ll return to the shuttle and put a call into the Admiral and request it,” Buck replied smiling.

“Why do you need your ship repaired? This planet is so peaceful, who would try to cause trouble?” Buck asked.

“Well, it’s not just for protecting Acklon. It’s so I can take Aslana up to the caves for our marriage bonding ceremony,” Hawk replied.

Buck smiled.

“In that case, we’d better get you back to the shuttle and make that call right away,” Buck replied smiling.

They turned and walked back to the shuttle. Inside Hawk looked around. “It looks the same, nothing has changed,” he said.

Buck chuckled. “Buck to Searcher.”

“Go ahead Buck. How are Hawk and the girls doing?”

“They’re doing fine, Admiral. Sir, Hawk is here with me, he has a slight mechanical problem. Permission to assist?”

“Permission granted. What is the problem?”

“Sir, when the next landing party comes down to Acklon, could they bring a hydraulic line to fit Hawk’s ship? This one is damaged beyond repair. The maintenance crew should have the diagram to replace it.”

“Understood. I’ll inform them to make one, and the next shuttle will be in two hours. I’ll make sure they have it ready and on that shuttle.”

“Thank you Admiral,” Hawk said loudly enough for the Admiral to hear him.

“Inform Hawk, there is no need for a thank you. It is a pleasure. Searcher out.”

“Buck out.”

“Okay my friend, that’s been taken care of. Now, where is the wedding going to be held?” Buck asked smiling.

Hawk chuckled. “That’s the only thing you have on your mind right now, isn’t it?” Hawk asked.

“You bet. It’s not everyday a true friend, his nieces and a woman he rescued get married on the same day,” Buck said.

Hawk looked at Buck with a puzzled expression on his face. “How did you know about Kalee and Kestrel’s wedding?” Hawk asked.

“She sent us a transmission a day or so ago, informing us that she too was going to wed on that day,” Buck explained.

Hawk smiled. “It’s really good to see you again, Buck,” he said.

“Are you going to be staying here on Acklon, or going back up to the Searcher?” Hawk asked.

“I was hoping to stay on Acklon until the wedding. That is, if it’s all right with the protector of Acklon?” Buck asked.

“You’ll always be welcome here my friend. Come, let’s get you settled in,” Hawk said.

They left the shuttle and headed for Aslana’s house. Along the way a lot of the people and bird people came up and patted Buck on the back and told him welcome home. Buck smiled, and thanked them. On the way, Hawk was telling Buck about the cave Quill and Tiercel showed him a while back.

“Are you sure you want to live that far away from town?” Buck asked.

“It’s not really that far. When you walk out, you look down and see the town. It’ll be the perfect place to raise a family,” Hawk said with a sparkle in his eye.

“Hawk, that’s the first time I’ve heard you say the word family. I’m truly happy for you, my friend,” Buck said.

They were interrupted by a whistle blowing.

“What was that?” Buck asked.

“The elders are calling a meeting in the center of town. Come with me,” Hawk replied.

They walked over and stood close to the platform. The elders approached and smiled as they walked up the few steps. Grey Falcon approached the center.

“May I have your attention.”

Everyone became very quiet and watched as the other elders walked up and stood next to Grey Falcon.

“We have waited a long time for this special day. Tomorrow at noon, the wedding of Hawk and Aslana, Quill and Karri, Tiercel and Saleena and Kestrel and Kalee will take place at the stream on the outside of town.” Grey Falcon looked over at Tiercel. “After the wedding, we the elders of Acklon will be making a special announcement. It will concern one of the newlyweds. This meeting is over.” Grey Falcon, White Eagle and Kalee turned and walked off the platform and approached Hawk and Buck.

“Welcome back to Acklon, Buck.”

Buck lowered his head. “Thank you, it’s good to be back,” he replied.

“You, the Admiral and this Dr. Goodfellow will be joining us for dinner this evening. We have already extended the invitation to the Admiral and he has accepted. We take it that you will be staying with Hawk and Aslana?” White Eagle asked.

“Yes sir, and thank you,” Buck replied lowering his head.

The elders smiled and walked away.

“What was that about?” Buck asked confused. “Usually it’s the ones that are to be married to attend a dinner with the parents, not the guest,” Buck said.

“Buck, here the special guests are the ones that have dinner with the elders. Or as you called them, the parents. It’s an honor to be invited to share a meal with the elders. They always put on a feast, as you would say,” Hawk said smiling.

“Tomorrow is the day, my friend,” Buck said draping his arm across Hawk’s shoulder.

“Yes, tomorrow is the day,” Hawk replied with a look of contentment in his eyes.

Chapter 41

That evening Buck, Admiral Asimov and Dr. Goodfellow sat down to dinner with the elders of Acklon. Over dinner Kalee was telling Buck and the Admiral about Peregrine and what he had done.

“That’s why Carl was having trouble walking?” Buck asked.

“Yes. From what I heard from Karri and Saleena, another half inch and he wouldn’t be here today,” Kalee replied.

White Eagle smiled. “Those young women are a blessing to Acklon,” he said smiling.

“What happened to Peregrine? If you don’t mind me asking?” Asimov asked.

“He had a fair trial, Admiral. We found him guilty of attempted murder of Carl and causing the death of Raven’s unborn child. We banished him, but somehow he was able to return. We sentenced him to life on our prison planet of Capta 3,” Grey Falcon replied.

“I see,” Asimov replied.

“Now enough talk of the bad, let’s discuss the wedding. As the adopted family of Hawk, all of the crewmembers of the Searcher are invited to the wedding. The women I hear are going to wear the traditional clothing of our ancestors. The men usually wear the traditional also, but we granted Hawk permission to wear what he felt comfortable in. Buck, we have been told that you were asked by Hawk to be his best man. Since the other men have no male family members, it falls to you to assist all of them as well. That means helping them prepare for the wedding. At the time of the wedding, you will stand between Hawk and Kestrel. But the best thing about being the best man is that you get to dance with their new mates first, even before they do,” Grey Falcon said smiling.

Buck blushed a little then smiled.

“Admiral, you are the special guest of Hawk’s. You will be allowed to stay here in the great hall, if you so desire. It is not required, but you are welcome to stay,” Grey Falcon said.

“Thank you, but I have to tend to my ship. But I would like to ask if it would be all right if Dr. Goodfellow could stay in my place?” the Admiral asked politely.

“Your request is granted. We would be honored to have Dr. Goodfellow stay with us. Welcome doctor,” White Eagle replied.

Doctor Goodfellow smiled. “Thank you elders of Acklon. I’m looking forward to seeing your beautiful planet and all your people,” Goodfellow said.

The elders nodded and stood. Asimov, Buck and Goodfellow stood also.

“It’s getting late. Doctor, when you wish to retire our head guard will show you to your room. Good evening,” Grey Falcon said as they started to walk out of the room.

“Good evening,” Asimov replied.

“Follow me, I’ll show you the way out,” the head guard said.

“Thank you,” Buck replied.

After the guard showed them out of the meeting hall, Hawk and Aslana were there to show them around the town.

“Did the elders inform you of your duties Buck?” Hawk asked.

“Yes, it doesn’t seem too bad.” Buck laughed. “I get to dance with your new mate before you do,” he chuckled.

Everyone laughed.

“Come, I’ll show you what those building supplies you were gracious enough to give did for our new residents,” Hawk said.

They followed Hawk to the outside of town and saw a small but nice community. Children were playing and laughing on the path, the women were hanging clothes that they had just washed and some of the men were working in a newly planted garden.

“Hawk, this is amazing. They all look so happy,” Asimov said watching the children playing.

“And it’s thanks to you, Admiral, that this was made possible,” Hawk replied.

Some of the children ran up to Hawk and grabbed hold of his arm. They started to pull him over to a swing they had partially put up, but had not been able to finish hooking the other side.

“Please Hawk, could you help us? We can’t get the other side hooked.”

Hawk smiled and climbed into the tree. “Hand me that end,” he said .

The tallest child handed Hawk the other end of the rope and smiled. Hawk looped it around several times, then tied it off.

“That should hold for a while,” he said as he climbed down.

A small girl, barely able to walk, made her way over to Hawk and held her arms up to him. “Up,” she said giggling.

Hawk smiled and picked her up and cradled her. He started to swing her around in his arms. She squealed with delight.

“All right, that’s enough for now, little one. I have to go,” Hawk said putting her back down.

“I’ll be back later,” he said as they were about ready to leave.

“Bye -bye,” the little girl said smiling and waving.

“Is she one of the new residents?” Asimov asked.

“Yes, her mother and father live in that house right there. She had a baby brother, but he passed away about three months ago,” Hawk replied.

Asimov, Goodfellow and Buck hung their heads.

“What happened?” Goodfellow asked.

“Peregrine took almost all of their food. The child was too young to eat whole foods. The mother and father tried everything, even grinding what food they had to feed it. But it didn’t get enough. Basically, he starved to death. That’s why these people didn’t care if Peregrine was sentenced to death or exiled to prison. They’re happy to be free of him,” Hawk replied.

“Hawk, who feeds these people now?” Asimov asked.

“Well, about everyone in Acklon. Some of the men found jobs, sometimes the women work the fields so the men can work. They get a small amount of money, but it helps. They all have food in their homes now. And Karri and Saleena make sure everyone is healthy, including the old ones,” Hawk replied.

“How far is it to this stream where the weddings are to take place?” Buck asked.

“It’s right over there,” Hawk said pointing towards the trees.

“Hawk, what happened to Carl?” Buck asked.

As they were walking back to town Hawk told them how Peregrine somehow returned and did that to Carl. “We believe he was trying to kill Raven and maybe even the children,” Hawk said.

“The elders said that Raven named the child Kalana. Is that normal for your people to name a deceased child?” Goodfellow asked.

“Yes, doctor. We have to name the child before our burial ritual. That way other family members that have already crossed over will know and welcome the child into their world,” Hawk replied.

“I see. Thank you dear boy. You’re teaching me a lot about your ways and customs,” Goodfellow said placing his hand on Hawk’s back.

Hawk smiled. “I had better get you back. It’s getting late and I have a lot to do yet before tomorrow comes,” Hawk said.

“Yes, like replacing the hydraulic line on the War Hawk before tomorrow’s wedding,” Buck replied.

“I forgot all about that,” Hawk said.

Hawk returned Dr. Goodfellow to the great hall and Buck to Aslana's house. The Admiral returned to the Searcher.

"I'll return soon," Hawk informed Buck.

"Take your time. I'll talk to Aslana for a while," Buck said smiling.

"Oh Buck, I forgot to tell you. Aslana will not be home tonight. That is one thing you and I have in common. On the night before the wedding, the bride and groom stay apart until the ceremony. If you'd like, you can help me work on the War Hawk?" Hawk asked.

"I'd like that," Buck replied.

Together they started to walk towards the hangar, talking about what had changed and what had not.

"We really miss you on the Searcher, Hawk. But we're also very happy that you found a new home and with your own people. And now you're about to be married again and hopefully have a family," Buck said.

Hawk stopped and turned towards Buck.

"Thank you Buck. You know you are and always will be part of my family," Hawk replied.

"I know, my friend," Buck said. "Now, let's get to work on that ship of yours. I don't want Aslana to have to walk up the mountain to the cave for your marriage bonding ceremony," Buck said smiling.

Hawk laughed. "That wouldn't be the right way to start a marriage now, would it?" Hawk asked chuckling.

They arrived at the hangar to find a large container full of supplies for Hawk's ship.

"Where did all this come from?" he asked.

"Some men from the Searcher dropped it off a while ago. They said that there were enough parts in there to almost rebuild your whole ship. Everything from sealers to engine parts. Including about five or six hydraulic lines," one of them replied.

Hawk and Buck started to pull parts out of the container and examine them. "He's right, there are enough parts to rebuild my ship," Hawk said.

"Well, let's just take care of the small one first. You can rebuild it later if you want," Buck said jokingly.

Hawk grinned.

Hawk crawled underneath the War Hawk and started to disassemble the hydraulic line. About an hour later he crawled out from under it.

“Now, let’s get the new one in place,” Hawk said picking up the replacement part.

Buck watched and was amazed on how skillful Hawk was. “I didn’t know you could work on your own ship? Where did you learn that from?” he asked.

“When I lived on Throm, the old man that sold it to me showed me some things. But the hull was made by another old man, who passed away a few weeks after he finished it,” Hawk replied.

Hawk took his time connecting the hydraulic lines back together. Two hours later Hawk crawled out from under the War Hawk. “It’s finished. But first thing in the morning, I’m going to have to test it. I want to make sure everything is working properly. The only thing I have left to do is replace the fluid it lost,” Hawk said reaching for the hydraulic fluid. He carefully poured it in and measured it every once in a while. Finally, he was done.

“Are you ready to go home?” Hawk asked.

“Yes, you’re the one that was doing all the work, but I’m the one that is exhausted,” Buck replied laughing.

Hawk laughed. “Come on. I have to get up early,” Hawk said.

They walked out of the hangars and headed for the house. After they got there, Hawk showed Buck where he’d be sleeping. Hawk excused himself and went to get cleaned up. “I’ll see you in the morning, Buck,” he said.

“Good night Hawk,” Buck replied.

Hawk turned out the lights and retreated to his bedroom. He sat up for a while thinking of his upcoming wedding day. “If I only knew how Koori was truly feeling about this? I know deep down inside she would want me to marry again, but there’s also a part of me that wants to know for sure,” Hawk said softly to himself.

Hawk lay down on the bed and was looking out the window when he heard a light knock at the front door. He opened his bedroom door and was walking out into the living room when he heard Buck talking to someone. Hawk walked over to the front door and saw Carl standing there.

“Carl? What are you doing here? You should be at home resting,” Hawk asked.

“Well, I was until the wedding party came over. The women decided to stay at Marie’s house. So me being a man, I had to leave. You wouldn’t happen to have a place I can sleep, would you?” Carl asked.

“Come in. I’ll find you a place,” Hawk said.

Carl eyed the sofa. “If no one is sleeping on the sofa, that will work for me,” Carl replied.

“Are you sure? I’ll be more than happy to give you my bedroom for the night,” Hawk said.

“No, thank you Hawk. It’s one thing to intrude on a man the night before his wedding, let alone take his bed. I’ll be more than comfortable on the sofa,” Carl replied slowly sitting down.

Hawk walked into the back room and gathered some pillows and a blanket and brought them back out to Carl. “Do you think you’ll need more blankets?” Hawk asked.

“Oh no, this one is enough for me,” Carl replied.

“I don’t understand it. The women had two houses they could have gone to. Why did they choose Marie’s house?” Hawk asked.

“I guess Karri and Saleena wanted to keep an eye on me. But when it came to their ritual, they figured it would be best if I came over here so you and Buck could watch over me,” Carl replied blushing.

“I forgot all about the ritual,” Hawk replied.

“What is the ritual?” Buck asked.

“The women go and bathe in the pond out back,” Hawk replied.

“Bathe? What’s wrong with that?” Buck thought for a moment. “Oh... sorry I asked,” he said blushing.

“Well, if you need anything in the middle of the night, feel free to wake Buck or me up,” Hawk said.

“Thank you Hawk,” Carl replied covering himself up with the blanket.

“Good night,” Hawk said turning off the lights.

“Good night Hawk, good night Buck,” Carl said.

“Good night,” Buck replied.

It seemed like it had been only an hour later when Hawk was awakened by someone making noises in the kitchen. He climbed out of bed to find Buck and Carl attempting to make breakfast.

“What are you two doing?” he asked.

“Sorry, did we wake you?” Buck asked.

“Yes. What time is it anyway?” Hawk asked.

“About nine in the morning,” Carl replied.

“Nine? I still have all sorts of things to tend to. Why did you let me sleep so long?” Hawk asked.

“Hawk, you were exhausted, you needed to sleep. Besides that’s what I’m here for, remember? I’m the best man, I’m supposed to help you and the rest of the men get ready for the wedding,” Buck said. “Besides that, it’s your wedding day. You should only be thinking about Aslana today,” Buck said smiling.

Hawk started to smile. “Yes, it is my wedding day, isn’t it?”

“Yes it is. Now, when are the other men supposed to come over?” Buck asked.

“They should be here by ten,” Hawk replied.

“Good, that gives you plenty of time to eat some breakfast,” Carl said trying to carry a plate full of food to Hawk. He put it down in front of him. “Now eat. You’ll need all the strength you can get for your marriage bonding tonight,” Carl said blushing.

Hawk blushed as did Buck. Hawk sat there and ate every bite of his breakfast.

“I have to go take the War Hawk out on a test run. I’ll be back shortly,” Hawk said as he carried the plate out to the kitchen.

Hawk walked out the door and down the street to the hangars. Inside, one of the maintenance men was washing the War Hawk.

“Hawk, I wasn’t expecting you for a while yet. I hope you don’t mind, I cleaned your ship,” the maintenance man said.

“No, I don’t mind. Thank you,” Hawk replied putting in the code to unlock the hatch.

“Are you doing a test flight to check the landing gear?” he asked.

“Yes,” Hawk replied looked at this young man, who was looking the War Hawk over from top to bottom.

“Would you like to go for a ride in it?” Hawk asked.

“Yes, please,” the young man said smiling.

“Well, climb in,” Hawk said.

The young man climbed into the War Hawk and seated himself in the back and buckled himself in. Hawk started the engines and ran a check on all the instruments, checking the hydraulic fluid level. He pressed the throttle forward a little way to clear the hangar doors.

“Hawk to Acklon.”

“Go ahead Hawk, this is Acklon control.”

“Control, requesting permission for a test flight.”

“Permission granted Hawk. Have a safe flight. Control out.”

“Thank you control. Hawk out.”

Hawk leaned on the throttle a little more and before the young man knew it they were airborne. He looked out of the window and could see the whole city and half the valley on the north side.

“This is wonderful. I’ve never seen the city from up high before,” he said.

“Do you know where there’s a wrecked ship so I can check the hydraulics?” Hawk asked.

“Yes, there’s an old wreck about two miles on the other side of town,” the young man replied.

Hawk turned and leaned on the throttle a little more and headed for the wreck the maintenance man told him about. Before long Hawk spotted the wreck.

“Is that it?” he asked pointing at what he believed might be it.

“Yes, that’s it.”

“Okay, hold on,” Hawk said.

Hawk guided the War Hawk over the wreck and started to extend and lower the talons. The control light said that the talons were extended and locked into place. He grasped the wreck with the talons and flipped the switch to close them; then he started to climb. He kept a close eye on the instrument panel, making sure he wasn’t losing any fluid. He climbed higher and higher. The talons were still holding, with no drop in fluid pressure. Hawk smiled. “It works just fine, no loss of pressure,” Hawk said.

He started to lower the War Hawk. Placing the wreck back on the ground, he retracted the talons, ripping the top of the wreck off.

“That’s amazing. I’ve never seen anything like that before,” the young man said.

“I only use them for protection. There have been many lives lost because of them,” Hawk said lowering his head and thinking of Koori.

“It’s time to return. I have to get ready for my wedding,” Hawk said turning the War Hawk towards home.

“Hawk to control.”

Go ahead Hawk.”

“Requesting permission to land in hangar 3.”

“Permission granted. Control out.”

“Thank you control, Hawk out.”

Hawk landed the War Hawk with a light thump and opened the hatch. First the young man climbed out, then Hawk. He closed the hatch and set the locking device.

“Thank you Hawk, for taking me up with you,” the young man said.

Hawk smiled.

“Thanks for helping me with my ship. You will be at the wedding, won’t you?” Hawk asked.

The young man nodded. “At noon today, right?” he asked.

“Yes, down by the stream,” Hawk replied smiling.

Hawk shook the man’s hand. “Goodbye,” Hawk said as he was about ready to leave. Hawk made his way back to the house where Buck and the other grooms were waiting.

“It’s about time you got back. Hawk, do you know what time it is?” Buck asked.

Hawk looked around and saw that Quill, Tiercel and Kestrel were already dressed and ready for the wedding.

“I was only gone a little while. Why, what time is it?” he asked.

“You’ve been gone for an hour and a half. Hawk, it’s ten thirty. You still have to bathe and get dressed for the wedding,” Buck replied.

“Ten thirty! I had better hurry. We’re getting married in less than two hours. Is everything ready out by the stream?” Hawk asked as he was heading towards the bathroom.

“Yes, the townspeople set everything up out there early this morning,” Buck replied.

Hawk stopped and glanced back at Buck.

“How did you know they had it done at first light?” Hawk asked.

Buck started to blush.

“You got up early and went out there to help, didn’t you?” Hawk asked.

“That’s my job. And my main job right now is to get you ready for your wedding. Now, get in there and get ready,” Buck said in a dominant voice.

Hawk smiled.

“Buck, this is the first time since we’ve known each other that you spoke to me in that tone of voice,” Hawk said.

Buck looked around at the other grooms; each one of them was smiling.

“That’s the way the best man should act, Buck. You are in control until the time of the wedding. We are to do as you say. Yes, we are the grooms, but we can be forgetful and sometimes even a little nervous or scared,” Kestrel said.

Buck smiled. “So I’m doing the right thing?” he asked.

Everyone nodded, including Hawk. Buck turned to look at Hawk once again. Hawk saw that same look in Buck’s eyes. He quickly walked back into the bathroom and closed the door. A moment later the water was running. Buck walked back over to the other grooms and started to finish getting them ready. About fifteen minutes later Hawk exited the bathroom and walked into the living room, all dressed and groomed. Buck walked over to him to check and see that everything was done. Buck backed up and smiled at the grooms.

“Let’s go get married,” Buck said smiling.

Chapter 42

Hawk, Tiercel, Quill, Kestrel and Buck walked out the door and down the street. They were joined by other men as escorts. The grooms were tucked away in the center, so not to be seen by their new mates.

The brides...Karri, Saleena, Kalee and Aslana were encircled by other females right outside the door of Marie's home to hide them from the men. They walked at a slow pace to the stream on the outside of town where the wedding was to take place.

The men and their escorts stepped over to the right side, still keeping the grooms hidden. The women slowly made their way and escorted the brides to the left. The elders stood at the front of them with their backs to the stream.

After everyone was in place, up on the small hill where Saleena first met Tiercel stood four birdmen. The elders glanced over to them and nodded. The four birdmen raised horns that they had grasped in their hands. A moment later they started to blow the horns; a symbolic start for the wedding.

The escorts for the grooms walked them over to stand in front of the elders, then opened up so Hawk, Tiercel, Quill and Kestrel could be seen. Quill, Kestrel and Tiercel wore the ancestral clothing of a first marriage, a cream color tunic and cream color pants showing the signs of their first marriage, while Hawk, having been married before, was allowed to wear his black clothing. The escorts backed away and stood with the rest of the guests. Buck took his place between Hawk and Kestrel.

Then the four birdmen raised the horns once again to their lips and blew. This time the bride's escorts and brides approached the elders. They opened up to reveal the brides. They too backed away and stood with the rest of the guests. Karri, Saleena, and Kalee wore their ancestral wedding dresses: full length, cream color for the sign of purity and first marriage. Aslana wore an off white full length. Hawk and the others smiled when they looked over and saw the women.

"She's so beautiful," Hawk whispered to Buck.

Buck smiled and nodded.

The elders stepped forward.

"Go to you potential mate and take her by the hand," Grey Falcon said.

Hawk, Tiercel, Quill and Kestrel walked over and took their potential mates by their hand. Grey Falcon smiled and motioned for White Eagle to start the ceremony.

White Eagle started to speak the words of their ancestors, going through the life and death of many that had fallen, then to the births of the grooms and brides. Grey Falcon and White Eagle walked over to Hawk and Aslana.

"Hawk, do you take Aslana as your mate for life?" White Eagle asked.

“Yes,” Hawk replied.

“Aslana, do you take Hawk as your mate for life?”

“Yes,” she replied.

“This is the golden twine of marriage that I wrap around your hands. This twine shows that from now on you will be as one,” White Eagle said wrapping the gold color twine around their hands.

Grey Falcon stood in front of Saleena and Tiercel.

“Tiercel, do you take Saleena as your mate for life?” Grey Falcon asked.

“Yes,” Tiercel answered.

“Saleena, you are the half sister of Kalee. Do you take Tiercel as your mate for life?”

“Yes,” Saleena replied with a smile.

He then repeated what White Eagle had told Hawk and Aslana.

White Eagle walked over and stood in front of Quill and Karri.

“Quill, you are the son of Black Hawk. Do you take Karri as your mate for life?” White Eagle asked.

Quill turned and gazed into Karri’s eyes.

“Yes, with all my heart and soul,” he replied.

White Eagle smiled and turned to Karri.

“Karri, you are the niece of Hawk. Do you take Quill as your mate for life?” he asked.

“Yes,” Karri replied smiling.

White Eagle wrapped the gold color twine around their hands.

Grey Falcon stood before Kalee and Kestrel.

“Kestrel, do you take Kalee as your mate for life?” Grey Falcon asked.

“Yes,” Kestrel replied gently squeezing Kalee’s hand.

“Kalee, you are the daughter of Snow Hawk. Do you take Kestrel as your mate for life?”

“Yes,” Kalee said softly.

Grey Falcon wrapped their hands with the gold color twine.

The elders turned and walked back to the stream, turning around to face the brides and grooms.

“That twine stands for a bond that can never be broken. We the elders of Acklon, have now sealed your love for each other. You may now kiss your mates,” Grey Falcon said.

The grooms turned to their new mates and affectionately kissed them.

Hawk felt something warm touch his face. At first he thought it was Aslana’s hand, but soon realized that her hands were on his waist. After they had kissed to seal their love, Hawk saw a light fog forming over them. He watched as it soon took form. There in the fog stood his grandparents, his mother and father and Koori. Hawk smiled.

Koori smiled and gently nodded. Hawk knew then that Koori approved their marriage. Hawk smiled and lowered his head. Soon the fog disappeared. Hawk looked at Aslana and kissed her again.

“Now, we have something important to tell Quill. Quill, you are the youngest male of your family. Normally this would go to the oldest male, but he has proved he is not worthy of this title. Quill, your father Black Hawk was an elder of Acklon. Therefore, Quill you will stand before us tomorrow at noon and take your father’s place as an elder,” Grey Falcon said.

Quill’s mouth dropped.

“Sir, I appreciate the offer, but it should go to my brother Kree, he is the oldest,” Quill replied.

“Quill, please come with us,” White Eagle said. The elders started to walk away with Quill following. Grey Falcon, White Eagle and Quill stopped and started to talk a little way off. “I’m sorry Quill, we didn’t want to tell you this until after the wedding, but your brother killed a young female a few nights ago. He made improper advances towards her and she refused. He got mad at her for her rejection, so he killed her. He was going to be arrested, but the female’s friends killed your brother this morning. We’re sorry,” White Eagle said lowering his head.

Quill lowered his head.

“Was she a young female?” he asked.

“Yes, she was,” White Eagle replied.

Quill looked up and gazed at the elders with tears in his eyes.

Hawk and the rest of the newlyweds knew something was wrong, so they walked over to Quill and gathered around him. Quill stood tall and looked at the elders once again.

“It would be an honor to become an elder like my father,” he said proudly.

The elders smiled.

“Since you and Karri have just been married, wait until you return from your bonding night before you stand before us,” Grey Falcon said.

Quill lowered his head. “Thank you sir,” Quill I replied.

The elders walked away leaving the newlyweds standing before the many friends and guests.

“Quill? Are you all right?” Hawk asked softly.

“Yes. I knew it would happen one day.” He turned to Saleena. “I’m sorry I introduced you to him,” he said looking into Saleena’s eyes.

“Quill, it wasn’t your fault. If you hadn’t introduced us, I never would have met Tiercel,” Saleena said softly. “I thank you for that.”

Quill looked into her eyes again and smiled.

“That’s better,” Saleena said. “This is your wedding day. You are married to a beautiful woman who loves you very much,” Saleena said smiling.

Quill turned to Karri. “I’m sorry my love. Saleena’s right, this is our wedding day. We should be celebrating,” Quill said, gently kissing Karri’s lips.

Hawk, still not used to the idea of a male kissing his niece, smiled. “This is going to take some getting used to,” Hawk said.

“What’s that uncle?” Karri asked.

“You being married and having a mate,” Hawk replied.

Karri smiled, walked over to Hawk and lightly kissed him on his cheek.

Hawk smiled.

“Okay, why don’t you women go back and get changed and meet us by the hangar. We have a surprise for you,” Hawk said.

Buck stood there looking a little lost. Hawk turned to Buck and smiled.

“I’m sorry my friend, but you will be staying here and enjoying the party,” Hawk said.

“Not quite,” a voice said behind them.

They turned to see Grey Falcon standing there with a plate of food.

“You forget Hawk, Buck has the right to dance with each one of the brides. He must do that before you go on your bonding night,” Grey Falcon said.

Buck walked over to Karri first. “May I have this dance?” he asked.

Karri giggled. "Why yes sir, you may," she replied smiling.

A small group of bird people started to play some soft music.

Karri gave her hand to Buck. He escorted her out to the middle of the field and started to dance with her.

"Uncle? Will you ever be returning to Acklon?" she asked.

"Some day, Karri. But until then, you have your mate and your uncle to watch after you," Buck said softly.

Karri parted from Buck and smiled. "I love you, uncle," she said with a tear rolling down her cheek.

"And I'll miss you too," Buck said pulling her back to him.

When they had finished their dance, Buck escorted Karri back over to Quill. "Take care of her, Quill," Buck said.

"I will sir," Quill replied.

Buck then held out his hand to Saleena. "Would you care to dance?" he asked.

"I'd like that uncle," Saleena replied with tears already in her eyes. Buck then escorted Saleena out to dance with her. She held on to him tightly.

"I'm going to miss you terribly uncle," she said weeping and burying her face into Buck's chest.

"And I'll miss you, little one," Buck replied. "You have grown up so much. Now here you are with a mate," Buck said.

The dance ended and he escorted Saleena back over to her mate. He gently kissed her hand and handed it to Tiercel and smiled.

"Same goes for you Tiercel, take good care of her," Buck said.

Tiercel nodded. "I will sir. That I promise."

Buck smiled and nodded. He then held his hand out to Aslana.

"May I have this dance?" he asked.

Aslana smiled and gently kissed Hawk on the cheek. She held out her hand to Buck, and he walked her out to the area where he had danced with his nieces.

"You're sad Buck, why?" she asked.

"Is it that obvious?" Buck asked.

“You look like you’re losing your best friend, when really you’re gaining a whole new family,” Aslana said looking into Buck’s eyes.

“I know Aslana, but I will still miss all of you very much. I don’t know when the Searcher will be returning to Acklon,” Buck said lowering his head. “Maybe not for years,” he said softly.

Aslana held on tightly to Buck. “I hope you know and remember, you’re family. You may come back anytime you want and you’ll always have a home. In fact, three homes,” Aslana said smiling.

Buck looked up and into her eyes. He could see that she meant every word she said. Her eyes sparkled like the stars in the sky. The dance ended, so he escorted her back to Hawk and gently kissed her hand. He turned to Kalee.

“May I have this dance?” he asked. Kalee smiled and placed her hand into Buck’s hand. He escorted her out into the fields and started to dance with her.

“I’m going to miss lowering my head to you every time you enter a room or I see you on the street. Take good care of that beautiful little girl of yours. And do me a favor? Don’t go to any more planets that might have big wild rodents running around,” Buck said trying to hide his tears.

Kalee laughed. “I promise,” she replied smiling. “I’m going to miss you Buck. You will come back someday, won’t you?” she asked.

“Nothing will keep me away. I’m happy for you and Kestrel. I know you and he had a relationship before,” Buck said as the music ended.

He escorted Kalee back to Kestrel. Buck reached out and shook each one of the men’s hands, including Hawk’s.

“Congratulations. May your marriages last a life time and may you bless me with lots of nieces and nephews,” Buck said chuckling.

“Hawk, you and the rest may now leave to go on your bonding night. Buck, you are more than welcome to stay at the great hall, if you’d like?” White Eagle said.

“No thank you sir. The Admiral said we will have to leave after the ceremony,” Buck replied.

“Where is the Admiral?” Karri asked.

“Right here my dear,” Asimov replied standing behind them. They turned to see the Admiral, Dr., Goodfellow and Wilma.

“I thought you might have missed the ceremony?” Karri asked.

“No, we were standing towards the back with some friends of yours,” Asimov said .

“What friends?” Karri asked.

The Admiral pointed towards the back of the crowd to the wolves that were sitting there watching and waiting patiently. Karri and Saleena ran through the crowd and knelt down next to them.

“Oh my friends,” she said loudly. The other guest turned to see her and Saleena embracing a pack of wolves. They started to applaud. Hawk and Buck walked over to join them. The female lay down and rolled over to show her underbelly. Hawk knelt down and started to rub her stomach. Buck petted some of the pups that had grown a lot from the last time he saw them. The elders walked over and gazed at how the wolves allowed them to pet and play with them.

“Are they tame wolves?” White Eagle asked.

“Yes sir, in a way. This is the wolf pack that I rescued one of their pups from a steel trap on Serenity. They protected me and my sister from a mother bear, which cost the life of this female’s mate,” Karri replied petting the female.

“They will be safe of Acklon. No one will harm them,” Grey Falcon said.

Karri and Saleena smiled.

“All right, it’s time to leave,” Hawk said standing up.

He walked over to Aslana and took her hand.

Karri and Saleena petted and kissed the wolves goodbye and then joined their mates.

“Go change, we’ll wait for you at the hangar,” Hawk said.

Just as the women were about to leave, Kite walked up to Hawk.

“Hawk, I made something for you and the others. I know it’s not required to give wedding gifts, but I wanted you and your new family to have it,” Kite said as he motioned for a couple of young men to carry something over.

They placed it next to Kite and lifted the old blanket. There, sitting on pedestals, were four wooden hand carved statues of Make-Make, and four perfectly hand carved statues of each of the married couples.

“Kite, they’re beautiful,” Aslana said.

“I wanted you to have something special to remember this day. And maybe to remember me,” Kite said in a low soft voice.

“Thank you old friend. We will show them proudly. They will be placed outside each home,” Hawk said shaking Kite’s crippled hand.

Kite smiled.

"I've taken up enough of your time. Goodbye my friends," Kite said as he turned to walk away.

Hawk, Quill, Tiercel and Kestrel escorted their new mates to Marie's home so they could change. The men walked over to Aslana's home to change also, each one carrying a statue and a carving of Make-Make.

While they changed, Buck approached Hawk and extended his hand.

"You take care my friend, it's time for me to leave," Buck said with sorrow in his voice.

Hawk removed his glove and shook Buck's hand.

"One day you will return, and maybe settle down here on Acklon," Hawk said.

"Someday," was all Buck said. He turned to the others and extended his hand to each and every one of them.

"It was an honor to meet you Buck. We do hope that one day you and the Searcher will return," Kestrel said.

"It was an honor to meet all of you. Maybe one day I'll find another Jennifer and we too will return to Acklon," Buck replied. "Take care my friends," Buck said as he walked out the door.

Hawk, with a sad expression on his face, watched as his friend walked out.

"Don't worry Hawk. Someday he'll return," Quill said.

"It's not that, it's the name he said. Jennifer was his future mate on the old Earth," Hawk replied.

"Why didn't he marry her?" Quill asked.

Hawk turned and looked at Quill, Tiercel and Kestrel.

"The old Earth was destroyed over five hundred years ago," Hawk replied.

"How can that be? Buck wouldn't be here now," Quill said looking out the window watching Buck walk down the street.

"One day I will tell you. But for now, our mates are waiting for us. Come, it's time to join them," Hawk said pulling his glove back on.

The men walked out the door and down the street to the hangar. There, waiting outside, were Karri, Saleena, Aslana and Kalee.

"Hawk, I know you, Quill and Tiercel prepared three caves up on the mountain for your bonding night. Kalee and I will stay in town at the house. Marie is going to care for Ashla for the night, so we may have our bonding night," Kestrel said.

“Are you sure? There is plenty of room in my cave,” Hawk replied.

“I’m sure my brother, we will see you tomorrow,” Kestrel said.

Hawk, Tiercel, Quill and Kestrel reached their mates. Kestrel explained to Kalee about the caves and asked her if she would like to go up there or stay in town at the house.

“I think it would be better if we stayed here,” she answered. She walked around to Saleena, Karri and Aslana and embraced them. “We’ll see you tomorrow,” she said as they started to walk back to the house.

Hawk knew he couldn’t transport everyone up to the mountain caves at one time.

“I’ll have to make several trips. First I will take Quill and Karri up. Then when I return, it will be Tiercel and Saleena’s turn. He looked over at Aslana. Then it will be you and I, my love,” Hawk said.

Hawk took Quill and Karri up first, then he took Tiercel and Saleena up. When he came back down he climbed out and assisted Aslana into the War Hawk. He gently kissed her as he helped her secure her harness. She smiled. Hawk climbed into his seat and restarted the engines.

“Hawk? During our wedding, you had this far away look in your eyes. Is everything all right?” she asked with concern.

Hawk turned around and smiled. “Yes, my love. Everything is fine now,” he replied. He took off and started to head for the mountains, but not before he made a flyby pass of the party down below. Everyone waved. They arrived at the small clearing just below the caves. Hawk shut down the engines and climbed out. Holding his hand up, he assisted Aslana out of the ship.

“Hawk, it’s beautiful up here,” she said looking around.

Hawk smiled and took her hand. Carefully and slowly they walked up the small embankment leading to the cave. Hawk looked over to the other two smaller caves; he could see the fires glow. He gently pulled Aslana closer to him and gently kissed her lips. They stood at the opening of the cave embraced in each other’s arms looking out over the valley below. Aslana pulled away and slowly walked into the cave, looking back occasionally, as if enticing Hawk to follow. It didn’t take Hawk long to follow. They entered the cave and a few moments later a fire’s glow danced on the ceiling of their cave.

Chapter 43

The next morning Hawk was the first to emerge from the cave. Standing by the opening he stretched and looked out over the valley and smiled. "It feels like home," he said.

"Yes, it does," a voice behind him replied. Aslana walked out and embraced Hawk.

Hawk looked into her eyes and smiled. "How would you feel about living up here?" he asked.

Aslana looked out over the valley and the mountains and sighed. "When can we move up here?" she asked.

Hawk gently kissed her again. "How soon can you get yours and Ashla's belongings packed?" he replied.

Aslana laughed. "It will take some time. Maybe a few days?" she replied.

"Good, I'll start bringing my things up here today. That way I can get the beds made properly, and gather enough fire wood," Hawk said.

Hawk stood behind Aslana and wrapped his arms around her holding her as they looked out over the valley together.

"Good morning," they heard a voice say.

Hawk looked down the slight hill and saw Karri standing outside. "Good morning," Hawk replied.

"Oh uncle, this is wonderful," Karri said smiling .

Hawk just smiled, not knowing if she meant the bonding or the view.

"Is your mate awake?" Hawk asked.

"Yes, but he left for work about two hours ago," Karri replied.

"Same with Tiercel," Saleena said out loud.

Hawk smiled and shook his head.

"What's wrong Hawk?" Aslana asked.

"Here it is, the day after they were joined and they went off to work," Hawk replied.

"It's all right uncle. They wanted to stay, but we told them they should go to work. After all, they will be providing for us now, right?" Karri and Saleena said as they walked up the small path.

Hawk smiled. "Yes, I did say that, didn't I?" he replied.

The girls nodded.

“I hope you plan on continuing your doctoring?” Hawk asked.

“Uncle, nothing can take us away from what we love doing. Not even a mate,” Saleena replied.

“Speaking of being doctors, I had better get you back down the mountain, so you can go to work,” Hawk said.

“Work? Oh my, we forgot about the clinic,” Karri and Saleena said looking at one another.

Hawk chuckled. “Go get your belongings, I’ll take you back down.”

The girls smiled and ran back down the small embankment to their bonding cave.

Hawk turned to Aslana. “I’ll be back soon,” Hawk said holding Aslana close and gently kissing her.

“I’ll be waiting,” she replied with a smile.

Hawk walked down the hill and to the War Hawk. He climbed inside and started the engines. A few moments later Karri and Saleena came running towards it. They climbed in and Hawk closed the hatch. Within a few seconds they were on their way back to town. Hawk sat his ship down on the outside of town, opened the hatch and assisted the girls out.

“I’ll be back later,” he said as he climbed back in.

The girls smiled and waved as he lifted off again. They turned and ran towards the clinic. Opening the door, Edna smiled.

“Welcome back newlyweds,” she giggled.

Karri and Saleena blushed.

“Sorry we’re late. We overslept,” Karri said.

“Dennis is in his office. I don’t think he was expecting you in today,” Edna said.

The girls looked at one another and walked into the back. There, sitting at his desk, was Dennis going through some papers and forms.

“Good morning Dennis,” Karri said.

“What are you two doing here? You should be up on the mountain with your mates,” Dennis said in a surprised manner.

“Tiercel and Quill went to work this morning. So we decided to come down and see if you needed any help,” Saleena replied.

“No, you girls go home. I don’t want to see you back here until next Monday. This is your marriage bonding time. You shouldn’t be working,” Dennis said.

“All right Dennis. If you should need us, we’ll be at home,” Karri replied.

That day at noon Quill went and stood before the elders of Acklon. They handed him the medallion that had once belonged to his father Black Eagle. At that time he became an elder. He was the youngest male that ever held the title of an elder.

Months later...Karri and Saleena were working full time as the doctors of Acklon. Only now they were missing one person. One night while he slept, Dennis quietly passed away. He never made it back to Throm. Judy, knowing how much he wanted to return, made arrangements for his body to be taken back home and buried in the Valley Of Eagles. She stayed on Acklon and helped in the clinic occasionally.

Then one day Aslana entered the clinic.

“Aslana? What are you doing here?” Edna asked.

“I was wondering if I could see one of the girls for a moment,” Aslana asked.

“Of course. Just a minute, I’ll see which one is available. Please sit down,” Edna said with a concerned look.

She quickly went in and checked to see which one of the girls were available. “Karri, Aslana is out in the waiting room. She wants to see or speak to you or Saleena for a moment,” Edna said.

“Is she all right?” Karri asked walking out of the office.

“I don’t know,” Edna replied.

Karri walked out into the waiting room and over to Aslana.

“Aslana? Are you okay?” Karri asked with concern.

“May I speak to you in private?” Aslana asked quietly.

“Come into the office,” Karri said.

Aslana followed Karri into the back and into the office. Karri turned around and closed the door. “Aslana? What’s wrong?” Karri asked.

“Karri, I think I ...” Just then the door to the office opened, and Saleena walked in. She saw Aslana sitting there with a worried look on her face.

“I’m sorry, did I interrupt something?” Saleena asked.

“Aslana was going to tell me something. Aslana? What is it? Are you okay?” Karri asked again.

Aslana looked down at the floor, then she looked at Karri and Saleena.

"I think I might be pregnant," she said softly.

The girls squealed.

"Really? That's wonderful," Karri said with excitement in her voice.

She looked at Aslana who didn't seem too excited about it, but more worried.

"Aren't you happy about it?" Karri asked.

"Oh yes. But I don't know if Hawk wants a child," she said starting to weep.

"Aslana, he loves you and Ashla very much. He would love to have a child with you." Karri looked over at Saleena, then back to Aslana. "Can I tell you something?" she asked.

Aslana nodded as did Saleena.

"I'm going to have a child also," she said smiling.

Saleena looked at Karri and Aslana and hung her head.

"Saleena? What's wrong?" Aslana asked.

"First we had four couples getting married. Now we have three couples that are going to have a child," Saleena said.

"Three couples? Who's the third?" Karri asked.

Saleena looked up and smiled.

All of a sudden there was a very loud squeal coming from the office. Edna, not knowing if anything was wrong, hurried back and quickly opened the door to find all three embracing each other. She smiled and gently closed the door.

"How did you find out?" Karri asked looking at Aslana.

"Well, I'm not positive, but I have all the symptoms. I was wondering if you could confirm it for me? I don't want to tell Hawk until I'm positive," Aslana said.

"I'll check you right now," Karri replied.

Aslana gave a small smile. "How about you two? Have you told your mates yet?" she asked as she was getting undressed.

"No, we don't know how to tell them. Aslana? How did you tell your first mate?" Karri asked.

“I made a nice dinner for him, then we sat and talked about children. You know like the neighbors’ children or some children in town. Then I just came right out and said, ‘I’m going to have a baby.’”

Karri and Saleena looked at one another and giggled.

“That’s the way I was going to tell Quill,” Karri replied.

“Same here,” Saleena said.

Karri started the exam of Aslana. Within a few moments she had Aslana sit up again.

“Well, you are pregnant. I’d say you are due about the same time as I am,” Karri said removing her exam gloves.

They looked at one another for a moment, then started to laugh.

“The mountain, on our bonding night,” Saleena said.

“All right sister, you’re next. I know you’re pregnant, let’s see if you’re due about the same time as Aslana and myself. Which I’m sure you will be,” Karri said.

Saleena removed her clothing and hopped up on to the exam table.

A moment later, “You, Aslana and I are due about the same time,” Karri said smiling.

“Why don’t you come to my home for dinner tonight. We can tell the men together,” Aslana said.

The girls agreed. That day after Quill and Tiercel came home from work. Karri and Saleena told them that they had been invited to the cave for dinner with Aslana and Hawk. Tiercel and Quill thought it was a great idea, seeing they hadn’t been able to see Aslana and Hawk for some time now. Aslana told Hawk that she had invited the girls and their mates to dinner that evening.

“That’s a good idea. I’ve been wanting to talk to Quill and Tiercel about helping me expand the cave a little more,” Hawk replied.

Aslana could only smile, thinking about the child she was bearing. She started to prepare dinner. Hawk came and stood behind her and gently wrapped his arms around her waist.

“What are we having tonight?” he asked kissing her neck.

“We’re having rabbit with potatoes and a nice fresh salad, and of course seed bread,” she replied.

“Sounds good,” Hawk said gently nuzzling her neck.

Aslana laughed. “That tickles,” she said.

Hawk smiled and did it again.

“Hawk, I’m trying to prepare dinner. Go look and see if you can see them coming yet,” Aslana said.

Hawk gave her another quick nuzzle and walked outside. He looked down the path leading up to the caves; nothing. He was just about to go back inside when he caught a glimpse of someone or something moving. He watched for a moment, then about halfway down the path he saw Karri and Saleena.

“They’re here,” he called back into the cave. He quickly walked down the path and walked up to them, not seeing Quill or Tiercel.

“Where are your mates?” he asked, taking the bag of food the girls were carrying.

“They’ll be here shortly. They wanted to get cleaned up first,” Karri replied.

Hawk walked with the girls up to the cave and inside.

“Where are Quill and Tiercel?” Aslana asked.

“They’ll be here soon,” Saleena said.

“I’ll go out and watch for them. That way I’m out of you ladies’ way,” Hawk said with a small chuckle.

Karri and Saleena watched as Hawk left. “Does he know yet?” Karri asked.

“No, but when he wrapped his arms around me I thought for sure he would notice the extra weight,” Aslana replied.

“I know Quill said I was gaining weight. I told him it was probably from all the food we’ve been eating,” Karri said giggling.

“How about Tiercel? Has he noticed your extra weight?” Aslana asked Saleena.

“No, he’s with the elders for several hours after work. Then when he gets home, dinner is already there waiting for him. I do the dishes, then we go to bed,” Saleena said.

“We won’t be able to hide our condition much longer. We have to tell them tonight,” Aslana said.

The women finished preparing dinner and walked out into the main part of the cave. “Have they arrived yet?” Aslana asked Hawk.

Hawk looked down the path and saw Quill and Tiercel almost running up the path. “Yes, they’re coming up the path now,” Hawk replied.

The women finished setting the table and started to bring the dinner out. Quill and Tiercel walked into the cave and quickly walked over and embraced Karri and Saleena.

“We’re sorry we’re late,” Tiercel said.

“It’s all right. Dinner is just about done. Go ahead and seat yourselves, we’ll be right back,” Karri said walking back into another chamber where the kitchen was.

“They’re here,” Karri announced.

“Okay, I’ll take the rabbit in first, just to get them in a good hungry mood. You follow carrying the potatoes, salad and seed bread,” Aslana said picking up the platter with the rabbit on it.

The girls nodded and smiled. Aslana entered the main chamber and placed the platter on the table.

“That looks wonderful,” Hawk said.

Quill and Tiercel nodded in approval. Karri and Saleena entered carrying the rest of the meal. They placed it on the table and seated themselves next to their mates.

“You made an excellent dinner. I haven’t had rabbit for some time now,” Hawk said carving into the rabbit.

“I hope you like it. I used my mother’s ingredients,” Aslana replied glancing over at Karri and Saleena smiling.

“How are the children in the outer part of town doing? I heard Raven’s children are helping their mother a lot, since Carl can’t move too well right now,” Aslana said.

“They’re doing well. Carl is mending quite well, from what Marie has told me,” Hawk replied.

“Saleena and myself delivered another three babies this past week,” Karri said.

“Really? I didn’t know there were that many pregnant women on Acklon,” Hawk replied taking another bite of rabbit.

“Oh yes, there’s a lot of pregnant women on Acklon. Some haven’t even started to show yet,” Karri said smiling.

Quill and Tiercel looked at one another with a confused look on their face.

“Are you trying to tell me you want to have a child?” Quill asked.

Karri and Saleena smiled.

Quill looked at Karri. “Or are you trying to tell me that you are going to have a baby?” he asked swallowing hard.

“Yes my love. I’m with a child,” Karri replied smiling.

“When?” was all he could say.

“Not for a few months yet,” she replied.

Quill started to smile. “I’m going to be a father,” he said with a smile on his face.

Saleena turned and smiled to face Tiercel.

“Tiercel, I’m going to have a child also,” Saleena announced.

Tiercel dropped his fork and looked at Saleena.

“You are?” he asked.

“Yes,” Saleena replied.

Tiercel started to smile. “But when, how?” he asked.

“Tiercel, we figured it happened during our bonding night up on the mountain,” Saleena replied.

Hawk sat there with mixed emotions. Here were his two young nieces with mates, and now they announced they were going to have children of their own.

Karri and Saleena looked over at Hawk. “Uncle? Are you upset with us?” Karri asked.

“Why should I be upset with you? You two are married women now, you have mates. I just didn’t think it would happen so fast,” Hawk replied.

“Um Hawk? There’s something you should know. We’re going to have a child also,” Aslana said looking into her mate’s eyes.

Hawk dropped his fork. “We’re what?” he asked.

“We’re going to have a baby,” Aslana repeated.

Hawk’s expression changed from a concerned uncle to a proud father in a matter of seconds.

“I’m going to be a father?” he asked wanting to make sure he heard it right.

“Yes my love. We’re going to have a baby,” Aslana said with a smile.

“Do you know what it is?” Hawk asked.

Aslana giggled. “No, but I bet you will want a male child,” she replied.

Hawk smiled.

The rest of that evening went to the men caring for the women. They cleared the table and even did the dishes. The men sat with their mates and talked about what they wanted and the names they wanted the child to have.

“Let’s wait on the names until after the child is born. You never know, they might be all girls or all boys,” Aslana said laughing.

After several hours of taking about children Saleena, Tiercel, Quill and Karri decided it was late and that they should start heading home.

“No, it’s late and it’s dark. You will stay here tonight,” Hawk ordered.

“But uncle...” Saleena started to say something but Hawk cut her off.

“There will be no discussion about it. I will not allow you to walk down this mountain in the dark when you are with child,” Hawk said.

Aslana smiled. “Come with me, I’ll show you to your sleeping rooms,” she said walking towards the back of the cave.

Tiercel, Saleena, Quill and Karri followed her. A few minutes later Aslana emerged back out to the main room. Hawk walked over and embraced his mate. “This is the best surprise you could have ever given me,” Hawk said kissing his mate passionately. Hawk gently picked up his mate and carried her into their sleeping room.

Early the next morning Tiercel, Saleena, Quill and Karri started down the mountain. At the foot of the mountain Quill and Tiercel kissed their mates and headed for work. Saleena and Karri headed for home to get cleaned up to go to work themselves. Later that day, Hawk and Aslana came into town. They were approached by several people.

“Is it a boy or a girl?” they would ask them.

Hawk turned to Aslana. “How did they find out so quickly?” he asked.

Aslana shrugged her shoulders. “I don’t know. Maybe one of the girls told a few people as they came into town,” she replied.

“Maybe,” Hawk said.

“What would you like for dinner tonight?” Aslana asked.

“Something easy. I don’t want you to wear yourself out,” he replied rubbing Aslana’s stomach.

Aslana started to giggle. “Hawk, that tickles,” she said giggling.

Hawk laughed and started to rub her stomach even more. Aslana started to laugh so hard that some of the townspeople started to laugh with her.

“Hawk, now stop it,” she said laughing.

Hawk finally stopped and embraced her. "I love the way you laugh. You laugh with your heart and soul," Hawk said holding her close.

"I wish there was a way to find out what it is," Aslana said.

"Maybe there is. Come with me," Hawk replied.

Hawk led Aslana to Ben's store. As they walked in Ben started to smile.

"I think I know why you're here, Hawk. You want to know if it's a boy or a girl, don't you?" Ben said smiling.

"Yes, do you think you could tell what it is?" Hawk asked.

"I can try. But I can't promise you anything," Ben replied.

Ben placed his hand on Aslana's stomach and closed his eyes. Gently rubbing her stomach he moved his hand from the left to the right and then up and down. He opened his eyes and smiled. "She's far enough along I could tell what it is. Are you sure you want to know?" Ben asked.

"Yes," Hawk replied.

"Hawk and Aslana, your child is going to be a..."

Chapter 44

Ben stopped.

“Are you sure you want to know what it’s going to be? Half the joy of having a child is the waiting, the excitement and finally the delivery. I know whether it’s a boy or a girl, it’s going to be loved very much by you two, am I right?” Ben asked.

Aslana smiled. “Yes, no matter what the child is, he or she will be loved with all our heart and soul,” Aslana replied.

Hawk looked at Aslana. “Are you sure you don’t want to know?” he asked.

“I’m sure my love. Like Ben said, it’s the joy of waiting and wondering,” Aslana answered.

“All right, if that’s what you want, that’s what we’ll do,” Hawk replied with a smile.

Aslana embraced him. “Thank you Ben,” Aslana said as she gave Ben a small kiss on his cheek.

Ben blushed. “I hear your nieces are also bearing a child, is it true?” Ben asked.

“Yes, Saleena and Karri both are with child. They say they will have their child about the same time,” Hawk replied.

Ben thought for a moment. “Isn’t that going to be a little difficult if all three of you go into labor at the same time? Who is going to help deliver the babies?” Ben asked.

Hawk looked at Aslana and Aslana looked at Hawk.

“We never thought of that. What happens if all of us do go into labor at the same time?” Aslana asked.

“I think we had better go talk to the girls. They might have to train a couple of women to assist in delivery,” Hawk said.

“My mate was trained in child delivery, maybe she can help?” Ben said.

“That would be wonderful. We’ll go talk to them right now about it. Maybe there are a couple more women that have some experience in childbirth,” Aslana said.

“You might check with Marie. I heard she delivered some babies on Serenity,” Ben suggested.

“Really?” Hawk asked.

“Yes, I believe it was just before you went back to bring the others here,” Ben replied.

Hawk gazed at Aslana. “I would trust that woman with my life,” Hawk said.

“As would I,” Aslana replied.

Ben smiled.

“Thank you, dear friend for all your help,” Hawk said, reaching out to shake Ben’s hand.

Ben shook Hawk’s hand. “Just let my mate know when it’s time and she’ll be over. And Aslana, when you go into labor, send Hawk down to retrieve her or Marie,” Ben said.

“I will, thank you,” Aslana said.

Hawk and Aslana turned and walked out of the store and headed for the clinic. They arrived at the clinic and walked in. Edna, sitting behind her desk, looked up and smiled.

“Good morning Hawk, good morning Aslana. Are you here to see the girls?” she asked in a cheerful voice.

“Yes, if they’re not too busy,” Hawk replied.

“I’ll go check. Please sit down,” Edna said as she headed for the door to the back room.

Hawk and Aslana seated themselves and looked around at the people there. Each one of them was smiling. Hawk and Aslana smiled back. Edna opened the door and entered the waiting room.

“You can go in now. They’re in the office,” Edna said.

Aslana and Hawk stood and walked into the back. They found Karri and Saleena sitting at their desk filling out some papers.

“Are you busy?” Aslana asked.

“No, come in,” Karri said standing.

Hawk and Aslana entered the office and they closed the door behind them. They told Karri and Saleena what Ben had said about training a couple of people in child birthing, just in case. “We found out that Marie and Ben’s mate have already had some training and have delivered a few babies. If you can train one or two more women, we’ll be all set in case all three of you do go into labor at the same time,” Hawk said.

“That’s a great idea, uncle. But who?” Karri replied.

They sat and thought of a couple of women who might be capable of learning. But it kept coming back to one person. Karri, Saleena, Hawk and Aslana agreed.

“We’ll talk to her here shortly. We know she’s had some training,” Karri said.

“She’s a good choice,” Hawk replied.

“Well, we’ll leave you to your work. Will you be home at the regular time?” Aslana asked.

“Yes. A little after six,” Saleena replied.

Hawk and Aslana stood and left the office and walked out into the waiting room where Edna was standing to escort the next two patients in.

“Good day Edna,” Aslana said as they walked out the front door.

“Good day Hawk, Aslana,” Edna said still with a smile on her face.

As Hawk and Aslana were walking over to the bakery, they saw Raven and Carl walking hand in hand down the street.

“How are you feeling, Carl?” Hawk asked.

“I’m feeling much better. Thank you,” he replied.

Hawk and Aslana stood there and looked at them holding hands. Carl and Raven glanced down at their hands and smiled.

“We’re courting now,” Raven said.

“That’s great. When is the big day?” Aslana asked.

“We were thinking next month sometime. We already have the approval from the elders,” Carl said.

“I don’t mean to sound cruel, but how do the children feel about having Carl as their step-father?” Hawk asked.

“They love Carl. They already call him father,” Raven replied smiling.

“That’s great. We’re so happy for you two,” Hawk said smiling.

“Well, if you’ll excuse us. We have some shopping to do. Tomorrow is Phoenix’s birthday, so we’re trying to find him a nice gift,” Carl said.

“Tell him happy birthday for us. We’ll see you soon,” Aslana said.

They started to walk down the street.

“They make a great couple,” Hawk said watching as they walked down the street.

“Yes, they do,” Aslana replied smiling.

Hawk and Aslana headed for the bakery across the street. They purchased their bread and headed back towards the landing bay. Back at the clinic the day was coming to an end. Edna stuck her head in the office door as she had done many times before. “Do you need me for anything else, doctors?” she asked.

Karri and Saleena smiled. "Yes, Edna, may we speak to you for a moment?" Karri asked.

Edna entered the office and stood looking at the girls. "Is anything wrong?" she asked.

"No," the girls smiled. "Edna, you've worked with Dennis for many years, right?" Karri asked.

"Yes, I've been with them for almost twenty years now," she replied with a puzzled look on her face.

"Edna, you've had some medical training working here all that time, haven't you?" Saleena asked.

"Yes," Edna replied looking a little worried. "Did I do something wrong?" she asked.

"Oh no Edna. You see, Saleena, Aslana and myself are due about the same time. If we go into labor at the same time we won't be able to deliver the other's baby. We were wondering if you've ever delivered a baby?" Karri asked.

"Yes, I've assisted both doctors in any home deliveries." She looked at the girls and smiled. "Are you asking me if I could deliver your babies if it came down to that?" she asked smiling.

"Yes Edna. We have two other women that are capable of delivering, but we need a third, just in case. Would you want to deliver one of our babies?" Karri asked.

Edna smiled then walked over and embraced both of the girls. "It would be an honor," she said almost crying.

"Good, we don't know when we'll go into labor. It could be any time, day or night," Karri said.

"When the time comes, just send someone and I'll be there," Edna replied smiling.

Another four months had passed. The women had gotten bigger and more irritable. Hawk, Quill and Tiercel understood their moods and helped out as much as they could. Hawk made his security sweeps shorter, Quill was spending less time at work and with the elders, and Tiercel was working less. They stayed very close to their mates. A couple of times they thought they had gone into labor. Karri and Saleena had reduced their hours at the clinic. They were still available for emergencies any time of the day. Hawk, Quill, and Tiercel stayed by their mates' sides every day, watching. Then one evening a knock came on Karri's door.

"Karri! Saleena has gone into labor," Tiercel said in a frantic voice.

"Are you sure?" she asked.

"Yes, the baby's head is coming out. What do I do?" he cried.

"First of all, calm down. Then I want you to go get Marie. Have her meet me over there," Karri said as softly as she could to calm Tiercel.

Karri closed the door and was going to the kitchen to retrieve her medical bag when she doubled over in pain. "Oh no, not now!" she cried out.

Quill was in the bedroom when he heard his mate cry out in pain.

"Karri?" he called out.

"Quill, Saleena's in labor." She hesitated for a moment. "And I think I'm having labor pains also," she cried.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked.

Karri took a deep breath and exhaled. "First, go tell Marie she'll have to deliver the baby alone; take this bag to her. Then go get Edna or Ben's mate, tell them it's time. " She cried out as another contraction came. "Bring one of them here... hurry," she cried.

Quill grabbed the bag and ran down the street and over to Marie's. He informed her that Saleena and Karri had gone into labor and that she will have to deliver Saleena's baby alone.

"How is Karri?" she asked as she closed the door behind her.

"She's in a lot of pain. I have to go get Edna or Ben's mate," he said as he started to run towards town.

He arrived at Edna's home and knocked frantically on the door. Edna opened the door and could see something was wrong. "Are they in labor?" she asked. Quill, being short-winded, nodded. "Both are," was all he could say.

"I'm on my way," Edna replied as she grabbed a medical bag that once belonged to Dennis. She took off at a dead run heading for Karri's home, with Quill right behind her. She ran inside and found Karri laying on the floor in full labor.

"Oh my dear girl, I've got you," she said as she lifted Karri up and carried her to the bedroom.

Quill stood there amazed at the strength this older woman had. Edna turned and looked at Quill.

"Who is with Saleena?" she asked.

"Marie is. Is there anything else I can do?" he asked.

"Yes, how fast can you run up the mountain to get Hawk," was all she got out. Before she finished Quill was out the door and running at full steam down the main part of town. Some of the townspeople called to him and asked what was wrong.

"They're in labor," he yelled as he passed them.

Quill didn't stop running; he was about half way up the mountain when he heard Hawk's voice.

“HAWK!” he yelled out.

Hawk heard someone call his name. He looked down the side of the mountain. Just about twenty-five feet below him was Quill, still climbing the mountainside trying with all his might to get to the top. Hawk slid down the side and reached him.

“Quill! What’s wrong?” he asked looking around.

“Karri... Saleena... in labor... come quick,” Quill said trying to catch his breath.

“Are you okay?” Hawk asked.

Quill nodded and waved his hand for Hawk to go. Aslana heard Hawk yell for her, so she exited the cave.

“Karri and Saleena are in labor. We must go, now,” he said.

“Hawk, you go ahead, I’ll be okay here,” Aslana said.

“No, I’m not leaving you here alone,” Hawk replied.

Aslana started to walk down the small path that led to the War Hawk. By the time she reached it Hawk had it already started and was ready to go. He jumped out and assisted her in and made sure she was buckled in.

“What about Quill?” she asked.

Hawk turned to see Quill partly running and partly sliding back down the mountainside. “He might get there before we do,” Hawk chuckled.

Hawk lifted off and headed for town. He sat the War Hawk down in the middle of town and jumped out, turning around to assist Aslana.

He looked up the street and saw Quill still running, but at a slower pace.

“Where is Marie?” Hawk asked.

“She’s with Saleena...at home. Edna is with Karri at home,” Quill said gasping for air as he caught up with them.

Hawk looked at Aslana. “Go; I’ll go over to Saleena’s and check on her. You go to Karri’s side,” he said.

Hawk nodded and took off at a dead run. Reaching Marie’s house he ran inside. There in the living room, on a bunch of blankets laid Saleena. In her arms was her newborn daughter. Tiercel was sitting next to her gently caressing her and the baby.

“It’s a girl,” Tiercel said with pride in his voice.

Hawk slowly walked over and knelt down next to Saleena. He gently kissed Saleena on the top of her head and gazed at the baby.

“She’s so beautiful,” Saleena said with sweat still running down her face.

Hawk smiled, tears were starting to swell in his eyes.

“Where’s Karri?” she asked.

“She went into labor about the same time as you did, I think,” Hawk replied.

“She’s in labor right now?” she asked with concern.

“I don’t know. I came here first; Aslana’s gone over to check on your sister,” Hawk replied.

“Uncle, you should go be with her. I’m fine, as is the baby,” Saleena said gently touching Hawk’s hand.

Hawk smiled. “I’ll be back soon,” he said as he walked out the front door.

He made his way over to Karri and Quill’s home. Inside Karri was having a hard time with the delivery. Hawk went to her side and took hold of her hand.

“I’m here, little one,” he said softly.

“It’s a large baby, that’s why she’s having troubles delivering it. I might have to cut her open a little to give the baby some room. I’ll have to ask everyone to leave, except you Aslana. I could use your help,” Edna said.

Aslana nodded. “What can I do?” she asked.

Hawk looked over his shoulder as he and Quill left the room.

Edna asked Aslana to just hold Karri’s hand and don’t let go. “There will be some pain, but it will make it easier on the baby,” Edna said as she started to make a small incision.

Karri cried out in pain.

Hawk and Quill stood just on the other side of the closed door, listening, waiting.

“All right Karri, I want you to push with all your might.” Edna waited a moment.

“Push...now,” she yelled out.

Karri started to push. Hawk and Quill could hear nothing but silence. Then a slap, and shortly after that a baby crying. Aslana opened the door and motioned for them to come in. Quill ran to his mate’s side. There in her arms was a baby girl.

“It’s a girl, and they’re both doing fine,” Edna said.

Quill sat down on the bed next to Karri and kissed her softly.

“Uncle? How is Saleena?” Karri asked.

“Your sister had a baby girl also,” Hawk replied smiling.

Hawk wrapped his arm around Aslana and embraced her.

Karri looked up at Aslana. “Okay, it’s your turn,” Karri said jokingly.

Aslana smiled. “Soon,” she replied.

Hawk looked at his mate with concern.

“Why did the girls go into labor before Aslana did?” Hawk asked.

“It could be that Karri and Saleena have been more active. They basically induced labor themselves,” Edna replied.

Marie had a few of the townspeople assist Tiercel carry Saleena over to Karri and Quill’s, while she carried the baby. The door opened and in walked Marie carrying the baby, followed by Tiercel and the townspeople carrying Saleena.

“Karri?” Saleena called out.

Hawk walked out of the bedroom and smiled.

“What are you doing here? You should be at home resting,” Hawk scolded Saleena.

“I wanted to be with my sister. Is she all right? Did she have her baby yet?” Saleena asked.

“Yes, she had a little girl just a few moments ago,” Hawk replied as he motioned for the townspeople to carry Saleena into the bedroom where Karri was. They gently placed her on the bed next to her sister.

“What are you going to name them?” Aslana asked.

Karri looked over at her mate. “We decided to name our little girl Katana. After Quill’s mother,” Karri said.

“Saleena? What’s your daughter’s name?” Aslana asked.

“Her name is...” Saleena hesitated. “Her name is Lola, after our adopted mother,” Saleena replied looking over at Karri.

“They’re beautiful names for two very beautiful little girls,” Edna said.

There was a light knock on the bedroom door. Everyone turned to see who it was. Standing at the door were the elders of Acklon. Everyone lowered their heads as they entered.

“We were informed that Karri and Saleena have given birth. May we see the new ones?” White Eagle asked.

Karri and Saleena held their new members to Acklon up a little for the elders to see.

“They’re both girls?” Grey Falcon asked.

“Yes sir,” Tie rcel replied.

“What are their names?”

“Karri’s daughter is Katana, after Quill’s mother. And Saleena’s daughter is Lola, after their adopted mother on Serenity,” Hawk replied.

“Two names that will always be remembered,” White Eagle said smiling.

Aslana walked slowly to the chair that was in the bedroom and seated herself, taking a deep breath trying to hide her pain. But it was soon noticed by one of the elders.

“Aslana, are you in labor?” White Eagle asked.

“No sir, just a little too much excitement,” Aslana replied still trying to hide the pain.

White Eagle walked over to her and knelt down next to her.

“You are trying to keep from having your child on the same day as Karri and Saleena’s, aren’t you?” he asked.

Aslana looked at him and hung her head. “Yes, today is their day. It should remain that way,” Aslana said taking another deep breath.

White Eagle stood up and walked over to Marie and pulled her to the side. He whispered something in her ear. Marie turned to see Aslana was trying everything possible to keep from having the baby.

“I’m going to have to ask all of you to leave. It looks like we’re not done having babies yet,” she said looking over at Aslana.

Hawk turned to see Aslana double over in pain. He got to her side and held her hand. “Why didn’t you say something?” Hawk asked.

“Because this is Karri and Saleena’s day,” she replied holding her stomach.

“My dear and loving mate. Do you know how special this day would be to me if all three of you gave birth on the same day?” Hawk asked gently kissing her on her head.

Marie walked over. “Take her to the other bedroom. The way she’s going, there will be another child here within the next few minutes,” Marie said.

The townspeople that were still there offered to carry her into the other bedroom, but Hawk said that he would carry his mate. He gently picked her up and carried her into the other bedroom. Marie and Edna were right behind him.

“Hawk, do you want to remain in here with her?” Marie asked.

“I wouldn’t leave her side for anything,” Hawk replied still holding Aslana’s hand.

Within a few minutes Aslana was in full labor. She wouldn’t have been able to stop it no matter what she did. Hawk stayed by his mate’s side through the whole thing, holding her hand and comforting her.

“Okay Aslana, I can see the head. When you feel the next contraction, I want you to push with all your might,” Marie said. Edna stood close by with towels and a blanket.

It didn’t take long before the next one started.

“Push Aslana,” Marie said loudly.

Aslana started to push. Hawk couldn’t take his eyes off watching his child being born. Aslana took another deep breath and started to push again.

“That’s it, keep pushing. You’re doing great,” Marie said.

Aslana let out a small but loud scream. Hawk turned his head to look at his beautiful mate lying there in so much pain, and he was helpless to do anything about it.

Marie looked at Aslana. “Okay, one more,” she said.

“I can’t,” Aslana said with sweat pouring down her face.

“Aslana, one more good push and your child will be here. Now push!” Marie ordered.

Aslana mustered up what strength she had left and with one hard and strong push the baby was born. Within seconds the baby was crying. Aslana tried to sit up to see her child, but exhaustion took its toll on her. She couldn’t move.

“I want to see my child,” she said.

Marie and Edna cleaned up the child and placed it in her arms. Hawk looked at this small person that he and his mate had created. He glanced over at Marie and Edna and smiled.

“What is it?” he asked.

“Hawk, you and Aslana have a beautiful little boy,” Marie replied.

“A son?” Hawk asked to make sure he understood her.

“Yes, a son,” Marie replied with a smile.

Hawk sat there for the longest time looking over every inch of their baby. Aslana could see how proud he was. She handed the baby to Hawk. "Show the others," she said with a tired expression on her face.

Hawk gently picked up his son and walked into the other bedroom where Karri, Saleena and the others were waiting.

"What is it uncle?" Karri asked.

Hawk smiled and held the child up. "It's a boy," he said with tears in his eyes.

"What are you going to name him?" White Eagle asked.

"His name will be... Night Hawk."

THE END.....

All my stories are dedicated in loving memory to,
Coco, Pebbles, Buck, Falcon and Spot.

May their spirits fly forever

Epilogue

Within four years, Aslana bore Hawk two more children. Another son, whom they named Red Eagle, and a daughter they named Morning Dove.

Karri gave birth to a son about six months after the birth of Morning Dove. She and Quill named him Black Hawk, after Quill's father.

Saleena and Tiercel also had another child, a son by the name of "Freedom".

Kalee and Kestrel never had a child of their own. They adopted three orphans. One a human female by the name of Amy. And two bird people by the names of Cassie and Koran.

Raven gave birth to Carl's son eighteen months after Peregrine was sentenced to Capta 3. They live in the once small community on the outside of Acklon, which has since blossomed into a town. The newcomers agreed to name the new town "Kalana" after Raven's lost child.

Marie remained unmarried, but was content with her adopted daughter Robin. Marie now assists Karri and Saleena at the clinic.

Edna became a physician's assistant, but passed away a year later. She was 79 years old.

Ben and his mate retired from the bakery. They and their ten year old grandson moved to Sector 205. Kite's family took over the bakery.

Kite passed away shortly after Hawk's wedding to Aslana. They found him slumped over the last carving he did, his own headstone. He was laid to rest by the stream, under the weeping willow where the weddings took place.

Judy returned to Throm to be with her husband. One morning, she had gone out to his grave as she often did. When she did not return by late morning, a few of her neighbors walked out to the valley at the foot of the mountains where Dennis was buried. There they found her lying across her husband's grave; she was gone.

The Searcher finally returned five years after the wedding. The crew and Admiral Asimov were ecstatic to hear that Hawk, Karri and Saleena had children of their own. Especially Buck.

Hawk looked at his friend. "Now it's your turn," Hawk said with a smile.

Buck smiled. "Some day my friend, some day."