

# **RETURN**

**A SHORT STORY**

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# PROLOGUE

**So here we stand, in the center of the massive Companion Hall, amid Companions and Keepers from across the galaxy. I could see each ledge above occupied by a Companion, (in their true size), and their Keeper, many of which I personally knew. Each Companion had answered the call; some unknown desire that had risen from their inner depths urging them to return to their home world. Never in Companion history had a call gone out like this - summoning all the Companions in the Galaxy.**

**So, as I said...here we stood. We were urged to climb the stairs to the top of the center platform and step upon the Circle of Truth. Our minds would be opened to all in attendance.**

***Begin at the beginning... came an inner command.***

**We closed our eyes and seemed to float in a relaxing sea of safety and love.**

**We were called Peacekeepers, created to enforce the Law of the Galaxy. After the devastating war of Argosis VI and the unexpected annihilation of an entire race of beings, the Galaxy was shocked to their senses. In the aftermath of that horror, the planets united in the formation of a Guild, and pledged that never again would we allow ourselves to engage in war on such a level. Never again would we allow evil to so corrupt us.**

**The governments of all the planets in the Guild agreed that a special police force, with extraordinary powers, was needed to maintain the Law in the Galaxy; and so the Peacekeepers were created. This force would be independent of any planet; they would have total authority to make final decisions in all disputes. They would be answerable only to the governing Guild; a body of legal representatives from all the worlds involved. These Peacekeepers would be incorruptible, dedicated to the law, and totally impartial in settling disputes.**

**Training for the Peacekeeper Corps was rigorous and long, requiring the Keeper to be proficient in all forms of combat, physical and metaphysical. The individual Keeper himself would have to be conversant in all forms of the Law and graduate with a Law Degree of the 5<sup>th</sup> Level. Training would then begin to allow the Keeper to be matched with a Companion. The intensive bonding with the Companion would turn the Keeper's hair white if successful. With a successful matching, the Keeper and Companion would then be assigned an area of the Galaxy to patrol.**

**Matching with a Companion was vital, for it was the Companion who insured that the Peacekeeper's decisions would be accepted and followed. Knowledge of the power and impartiality of the Companions was Galaxy wide; and no one ever wanted to anger one.**

**An ancient evil saw his own doom fast approaching and decided to forestall it. The usurper hired the evil assassin Rubik to kill the 'Anointed' before the Companions could find him. This was unacceptable in accordance with the Law and a warrant was issued to hunt the assassin down and arrest him. Word reached the evil Rubik and the first thing he did was kill everyone who knew him; then he ran.**

The Peacekeeper assigned to go after him was killed, along with his Companion, in a horrific brutal ambush. To kill a Peacekeeper was bad enough, but to slay a Companion was to invite death. The deaths were a terrible blow to the Guild, and roused the ire of the entire Companion family. This Rubik was no sentient being... he was pure evil, a brutish killer. The sentence handed down was a rare one; he had to be brought to 'final' justice.

Mya and I were given the order to track him down. Arrest him if possible - eliminate him if necessary. We accepted the warrant and set out after the rogue. Mya and I had been working together for ten years. During that time we had earned ourselves a respected name in the Peacekeepers Guild. Mya had shown her power only four times during all that time, but it was enough to spread the word around the quadrant. Many who called for a Peacekeeper would request us, for they knew they would be treated justly.

We missed Rubik by days on one planet, and hours on another. His trail was leading directly towards the forbidden system. Normally the Milky Way was out of bounds for everyone, but I was given special permission to enter the system. I reported back to the Guild that Rubik's trail lead directly towards the planet known as 'Earth'. This was considered a hands-off planet; a still evolving world with scattered wars across its surface; it had not yet learned to come together as one. Worlds such as this were to be avoided; the Law stated all contact was forbidden. Because of this unexpected turn of events, I was required to get clarification on the Law. The information I provided to the Guild now changed the game; they issued an order for the immediate liquidation of Rubik.

Mya and I were now told the real reason the Guild and the Companions were so upset. It seems that they have been waiting for a very long time for a being to evolve and rejoin the 'Waiting One'. The being was discovered on Earth and had been guided thru the centuries to the present. The being had reached total awareness and was ready to evolve and claim his rightful place. We were given special coordinates and told to land and seek out a 'teacher' named Tobruk. He would introduce us to the being and we were to escort him to the Companion home world.

All well and good, but it seems that Rubik had other plans for us. As we came around the moon Mya shouted a warning just as a barrage of fire hit our ship. Rubik was making sure we would be unable to complete our mission. I returned fire and then all hell broke loose; it was nothing short of all out mayhem. One good thing, Rubik's ship was destroyed in a fiery explosion.

My cloaking device had been damaged in the fight and Ship was losing the ability remain hidden. The COM Center was in a shambles; wires were hanging down and sparking all over. I had no way to inform the Guild about what had happened, or call for help. Mya tried to use her abilities but we were too far away for her to reach any of the other Companions. With my engines on impulse power I attempted to limp out of the area, but the ship would not turn. Soon we were caught in Earth's gravity, slowly being pulled towards the planet's surface; I thought to myself, "what else could possibly go wrong?" Maya then informed me that unfortunately, it was a sure bet that Earth's satellites had picked up the firefight. Great, just great!

**DOWN, BUT NOT OUT**

Lazily riding a thermal, the large red-tailed hawk silently glided over the valley below hoping for a light evening snack. Spotting a rabbit scampering across the snow, he called out knowing his cohort below would flush out the rest of the herd. They would soon have a great game of chase, before enjoying the taste.

The man watched from the mountainside, having been witness to this 'play' many times. He had been on the mountain going on six years now - nearest neighbor was eight miles away and he preferred it that way. He visited the local general store maybe four times a year. No one in the small community cared a twit who he was or why he was there; they each had their own reason for seeking the solitude of the mountain. For him it was simple; he had found peace on the mountain.

He had almost lost his mind after the death of his entire family. The wrong choice by a teenager having one more for the road - driving with a buzz on an icy road. The papers had a field day afterwards; 'Family of six wiped out as father watches', 'Drunken teen to blame survives'. The teenager survived the crash yes, but he would live out the rest of his life in a wheelchair as a paraplegic.

Months later at his trial the man had stood up and asked to speak. A hush had fallen over the courtroom as everyone expected him to lash into the boy. Instead he asked the judge to be lenient. God had punished the boy already he said; it was enough. The boy knew the depth of his error; it was time for everyone to heal. The judge gave the boy 5 years probation, with the stipulation that he go and speak to fellow teens at High Schools.

The boy had broken down sobbing as the man passed, begging him for forgiveness saying he was so, so sorry. The man had looked into the boy's eyes and recognized his anguish. He had knelt beside the boy putting his arms about him telling him he was forgiven. He could not go on hating him for what amounted to a horrible accident. He told him to be strong, and even wished him well. Then he walked away amid flashing cameras and reporters shouting questions. They hounded him, wanting 'his' story; wouldn't leave him alone no matter where he went. He finally had to get a court order to keep them away.

As time went by he could feel the panic rising; knew that he had to get away from people; from civilization. So he set a plan in motion; he took courses from the local junior high college; woodworking, survival skills, learned the use of a bow and arrow, (became a pretty decent shot), and learned to shoot a gun, and a rifle. He took a beginners course in horticulture, farming, etc. and also studied the religions of the world and their effects on society. When he felt he was ready, he cashed in his IRA and 401k, bought an old truck, packed his things, his wife's favorite quilt, and the kids cat, and headed for the mountains.

**It took him nine months to find the right place, when he saw the small valley in the hills of Montana, he knew. He bought two acres on the mountainside just above the small lake, and set his cabin not far from the lake. The work erecting the cabin helped him to heal; the long hours of toil kept his mind busy, and in the evenings he would fall into bed exhausted. He settled into a routine and was comfortable with his life.**

**He had worked thru his pain and accepted what had happened. The way he accepted it might be considered strange, but then he had always looked at things differently.**

Finishing up the evening meal Brent rose from the table and cleared away his plate. A meow from Rusty told him that he was finished also and wanted out. He opened the side door and saw Red waiting in the tree across from the cabin. He chuckled as Rusty ran out and headed for the woods with the large bird following.

Ever since settling here he had watched the lazy red tabby slowly revert to his wild side; the large cat had come back to life in the mountainside. He began by chasing butterflies, then mice, soon squirrels followed, and then rabbits. Over the years his skills had sharpened, and so had his physique; hard muscles and sinew under that fluffy red coat. He was very fast and had improved to the point that one-day he came prancing home proudly displaying a red hawk in his mouth – alive. It took the man a devil of a time getting the bird from him, but he did; and after caring for the bird he released it back into the wild.

The damn bird came back time and again landing on the weather vane and calling out in its high-pitched voice. The cat would come running and the bird would take off just as he struck; he would taunt the cat all afternoon like this – his revenge.

And then one day a cantankerous, old raccoon twice his size attacked Rusty. The cat held his own pretty good, but he was no match for the razor sharp claws of the coon. High above the large hawk circled and watched what was taking place below. As the raccoon pinned the cat the hawk screeched loudly and dove straight down. It struck the raccoon with such force that it knocked it down and sent it rolling. The hawk's talons made short work of the raccoon's head and eyes. The hawk then flew to the cat and seeing the blood headed to the cabin screeching wildly. Brent seemed to understand something was amiss and followed the hawk back to the cat.

It took Rusty two weeks to heal properly, the hawk coming every day to check on him from the large tree at the side of the cabin. The man began to call him Red and put small bits of meat out for him; the magnificent hawk allowed the man to come close, but not to touch him. When Rusty was fully healed and back outside, Brent discovered the cat and the hawk had become fast friends.

Watching them go off to do God knows what, he took a deep breath.

*Fresh air, honey, the sweet scent of wild jasmine; mmm, glad I brought the plant with me. It's going to be a great evening. Should be clear, plenty of stars out tonight; I might get to see some new ones.*

He went back in the cabin taking the plant with him and putting it on the window ledge on the east side of the house. Then he washed and dried his plate and glass. He took down and filled his canteen, went to a side room and returned with his telescope and tripod. He grabbed his camera, jacket and walking stick and set out for his evening perch. It wasn't far, but it gave him a magnificent view of the valley below; this evening was particularly beautiful. The valley was covered in a soft blanket of snow; it reflected the bright moonlight like a thousand glittering stars.



*You certainly do have a way with nature, Lord. Just when I think you can't outdo yourself, you come up with a scene like this. It evokes deep feelings within; not sure I like that. Anyway, thank you for allowing me a glimpse into your world.*

He set up the tripod, mounted the telescope, and began refining the angle and trajectory. He was so intent that he didn't see the bright flash out in space until it was almost gone. He tried to bring the image into sharp focus but it seemed to be moving. He looked and then looked again; he could have sworn it looked like a ship of some kind. He became excited as he looked away and wiped his eyeglasses and then looked back. Whatever he thought he saw up there was gone.

*Are you yanking my chain Lord? Did I see what we both know I think I saw?*  
He looked again and slowly panned across the night sky.

*Aha! What the...?*

The image of two dark shapes firing on each other in front of the moon was there for only a few seconds, but he had seen it. He blinked and the images disappeared.

*Oh I am on to you guys... something happened up there. Last night it was a strange set of lights flying around and buzzing the planet. Tonight it appears something blew up – what is going on? I wonder if the space lab is still up there; they would surely have seen it.*

He stayed up for several hours looking for what he believed to be a spaceship. Finally he gave up and took down the telescope and headed back towards the cabin. He put everything away, called Rusty in, drank his tea and thought about what might have happened up there. When his eyes began to droop, he closed everything up and went to bed. He called out during the night as many strange dreams engulfed him.

The International Space Lab did indeed see what had occurred; in fact they had some grainy pictures, a little out of focus yes, but still proof that we were not alone in the universe. The scientists on the Lab held discussions on the momentous impact this was going to have on the world and the ramifications this could have on the different religions around the world. There was a sense of jubilation on their part until the military told them not to discuss this or say a word to anyone about it. It was to be regarded as national security and they were forbidden, under penalty of prosecution for treason, from discussing it even among themselves.

Repairing the ship was proving to be more difficult than first thought; Rubik's attack had done a lot of damage. I could kick myself for not being prepared; I should have expected an ambush. Now my ship was severely damaged, and our lives were in mortal danger.

The first barrage of fire from Rubik's ship severed all of the major cables that led to the power conduit. He had planned his attack well, but seemed to have neglected my response. He was out gunned and out matched and lost in the end... or did he? Something nagged at the back of my mind... damn I couldn't remember. So I filed the thought away for later and concentrated on the work at hand.

Mya and I were splicing wires left and right just to keep in space. It soon became very clear that we could not repair the ship in space; we had to land somewhere, and repair it from the outside. We managed to get some power back online but were barely able to keep the ship from breaching the planet's atmosphere.

Mya, extremely upset, kept going back and forth down the hallway to the engine room and back again urging me to cloak and land on the planet before the engines quit permanently. I tried to explain that I had no control over the ship, let alone any cloaking ability. Besides, in all reality we would crash if we attempted it now. I had to get a few more wires spliced together, it might give us some control, and hopefully enough so we could land.

Mya turned black upon hearing the desperation in my voice; she knew I was racing the devil. She quickly offered to help solder the wires together, which I accepted, and about two hours later we had the control we needed. How long it would last was anyone's guess... hopefully long enough to breach the atmosphere and land.

"Mya, I need co-ordinates to the most remote place you can find within the parameters we have. If I am to remain cloaked until the last second, I have to have precise numbers."

*Have I ever failed you my friend? We are landing in an area they call Montana. There is a snowstorm moving in; I believe we can land in the midst of it.*

*She was haughty in her explanation, but then she was always haughty, it was just her way. The snow should cover our arrival and keep us off their radar.*

"As ever Mya, you are one of a kind."

*Of course I am!*

Tam began to pull several levers and push some buttons. The ship shuttered and began a slow descent into the Earth's atmosphere. It remained cloaked except for a few brief seconds when they altered their course by one degree. The cloaking device was brought back on line and none too quick as it only appeared as a shadow on the military radar; a new and inexperienced monitor didn't even notice it.

Down below Brent was scanning the sky, calculating how long before the snowstorm arrived.

*Maybe I can get one last look before it hits, he thought to himself.*

He grabbed the telescope and headed towards the ridge above the frozen lake. By the time he reached the ridge snow was falling pretty heavily, and the wind was picking up. He might get a quick look, but at this rate it would only be for a minute or two. In the end he decided against it; he didn't want to take a chance of the wind blowing the telescope over. He headed back towards the cabin as the snowfall increased and the wind doubled. As he reached the cabin he opened the large front door and turned to the hawk in the tree just outside and to the left about five feet.

“We got a nasty ice storm coming Red, you want to spend the night with us?”

The hawk keened once, flew thru the door, and perched up in the rafters of the open cabin. It knew if this human offered sanctuary, it was wise to accept. Besides, it would be nice and warm, and the human would offer meat. Of all the humans the hawk had dealt with in its lifetime, he found this one to be trustworthy.

The cabin was one large room, sectioned off into three main areas: the kitchen area, the sitting area, and bedroom area. When building the cabin he found it easier to just keep it simple, one large room he could partition off with furniture. He situated the cabin backed up smack into the mountainside. He hollowed out a large 12' x 12' room inside the mountain itself, accessible only by the back door of the cabin. He used this space as a storeroom and root cellar, and expanded it over the years. A large front porch wrapped around the cabin half way, leaving a space for the woodpile for the stove. The front door was extra wide with three 'U' shape slots on it. When shut, a bar could be run thru the slots and seal the door from the inside. The same with the windows, they could be shut tight in seconds.

During his first year on the mountain, he was overrun by two hungry bears just as winter set in. They turned the place into a shambles and made off with most of his food. He learned a bitter lesson the hard way, (best way to learn a lesson), and reinforced the cabin doors and windows. He hadn't had a problem since. Brent closed up everything knowing the storm would pass during the night. He laid extra wood by the fireplace and built up the fire; it was going to be a very cold night. Rusty was already curled up on his rug by the fire. He made his tea, changed into some warm PJ's, and climbed into bed. He read for about an hour and then turned off the light, slid down under the covers, and drifted off to sleep.

Outside the wind howled, and the storm began to rage as it moved into the valley.

From far away a loud voice was intruding into Brent's dream...

“What?”

Brent jolted awake, he sat up and looked around clearing his mind. A loud screaming sound had woken him, or so he thought. He listened for a moment but all he heard was the storm howling outside the cabin. Maybe it was just a dream of someone calling.

*TAM!* (there it was again!)

Brent's head was throbbing; he sat and rubbed his temples for a bit. He drew his legs up and leaned on them for a moment, rocking. Finally he threw the heavy quilt aside and got up and went for a glass of water. On his way to the kitchen he heard it again.

.....*Tam?*

He grabbed his head and stopped for a moment, reeling with pain.

“Good God!” He exclaimed in momentary alarm as he slammed his back into the wall and slid down to the floor. He waited for a second and Rusty came to his side meowing with concern.

“It's okay boy, I'm having a moment... I'll be alright.”

He slowly got up and went to the sink, worked the pump and got a glass of water. Five minutes went by and nothing. He grabbed his coat and slippers and went out front and listened... nothing. It was bone chilling cold out there and except for wind, nothing. He decided he must have been dreaming; he turned to go in when he heard it clearly...

*Mya... where are you?*

He froze in mid-step.

*Mya?*

*Tam?*

Brent immediately felt the urgency in the voices. A ‘flash’ came into his mind of a long dark hallway; smoke all round. There was another flash of a smoky room, and a lot of dials on a long dashboard in front of him. He went inside and sat down holding his head, his mind racing with thoughts. He tried to calm himself, but he had several more ‘flashes. He tried to figure out what was happening.

“... it's in my head; I'm hearing it in my head!”

He had studied metaphysics and various religions and even dabbled in mind-altering experiments. In the end he had found his own truth about the world, God, and Life. It brought him the peace he so earnestly had been seeking. Now he was applying that knowledge to what was happening.

*I am not mad, this I know; so I must be picking up something telepathically.*

*Ok, calm yourself man; center yourself.*

A deep breath and a long slow release and peace of mind returned. Brent took another deep breath and sent his mind out ever so slightly. Listening to the storm outside, he got an immediate 'feeling' of unexpected mayhem and something akin to fear.

*Mya, where are you? I've been hurt; I can't--- can't find you.*

*Tam... Tam, I am trapped... a beam has me pinned!*

*Mya?*

Brent had the distinct 'feeling' that there was a link to what he saw the previous night and what was happening now. He couldn't explain how he knew, he just knew. He made a conscious decision to do something about it.

He changed clothes and dressed warmly right down to his boots. He took his backpack out and filled it with the first aid kit, some rope, and a flare gun. He grabbed a flashlight, several blankets, and pulled on his hat and goggles. He turned up the collar of his coat, wrapped a warm wool scarf around his neck, and headed out towards the shed on the side of the cabin. He had to shovel some snow out of the way so he could open the door and drag out the sled. He also grabbed his snowshoes and put them on. He threw the blankets and an extra sleeping bag in the sled and headed for the lake. The wind was blowing pretty hard and the snow was falling heavily, but the sled glided easily and he made good time. As he came around the side of some large boulders he stopped in his tracks and stared at the scene before him. Something had landed at the far end of the frozen lake and skidded into a large snowdrift.

*A spacecraft!*

It was oblong and silver in appearance; a wing was poking out of the large snow bank. It was dotted with dark blast marks along one side. The heat from the craft was melting the snow on it and he got a pretty good look at the ship.

*Sun of a gun!*

He moved forward unafraid; in fact he was extremely curious. An alien craft and the possibility of lizard-like creatures or worse never entered his mind. As he moved closer he began to feel the heat coming off the ship. The first cohesive thought to come into his mind was to wonder if anyone was hurt. As he moved closer there was a loud hissing sound and a panel on the side of the ship slid open. A great billow of dark smoke poured out and was immediately swept away by the wind. He froze in mid-step.

Covered in snow like some gigantic snowman, he blended in with the storm and surrounding area. Movement from inside the ship alerted him and he watched with held breath.

Suddenly a man came to the doorway and fell out onto the snowy ground. He was tall, at least 7 feet. He was muscular, chiseled facial features, long white hair, blowing wildly in the wind. His head and face were very bloody. He slowly rose and took a step and fell again and rolled over. Brandon could see he had a nasty cut on his forehead; it was deep and bleeding profusely.

*Mya...!* He screamed loudly without opening his mouth.

That's when Brent realized he was hearing him in his mind. So what he had heard before was real and not a nightmare. He took a step forward and the alien/man in the snow turned and looked at him with wild eyes. Summoning his courage he raised his hand as if patting the wind saying; *it's all right, I'm a friend; I'm here to help.*

The alien/man stared at him for a moment and then answered.  
*Mya... Mya is trapped inside; got to help her. Oh my head... I can't... I...*  
He fainted right there in the snow, the wind howling about him.

“Okay... now what do I do?”

Assessing the situation Brent decided to drag the man to the sled.

“You'll freeze if I leave you out here.”

He pulled the sled closer and threw the blankets on it and put the sleeping bag on top and unzipped it. Then he went to the man and dragged him over to the sled and after several tries managed to get him on it. He zipped him up in the sleeping bag and then wrapped the blankets around him and shielded his face from the storm. When he was satisfied that he was warm enough he turned his attention to the ship.

Cautiously Brent walked over and stepped up into it.

Great billows of smoke were swirling everywhere; it was impossible to see clearly. A red light was blinking on off and it gave everything an unnatural glow. He headed for the front of the ship first, thinking this 'Mya' person was a co-pilot. He found the cockpit and was startled to find an exact replica of what he had seen in his dream. The room was empty, and with only one seat in front of the dashboard, it appeared that the man outside was the only pilot. He turned around and headed down the darkened hallway. The smoke was slowly dissipating, and he was able to see his way a lot better. The hallway was short and ended in a juncture.

*Okay now, which way, left or right?*

*Ohhh...came a disembodied voice, Tam... where are you?*

Brent damn near jumped out of his skin at the sound; he also noted the voice sounded female and was coming from the right.

*"Ok, right it is."*

He made his way to the right and observed the hall curved back to the left.

*Tam? Answer me Tam!*

He picked up alarm in the voice now. He decided he didn't need a hysterical female on his hands and decided to chance an answer.

*Tam is not here Mya; he is outside in my sled. He was injured; a deep gash on his forehead rendered him unconscious. I'm a friend Mya; an Earth friend. My name is Brent, and I'm here to help, where are you?*

There was a long moment of silence. During this time Brent felt a tingling sensation all thru his body. His head felt like a swarm of bees were buzzing about inside. Then it all stopped as suddenly as it began. After a bit he guessed the woman was scared and deciding whether or not to trust him.

*Tam is injured?*

*Yes, but he's alive.*

*You are of this world?*

*Yes.*

*Your consciousness is vastly superior to most of your kind. You show no fear, only curiosity. I will allow this help due to the mitigating circumstances.*

*Gee thanks!* Answered Brent sarcastically, which was totally lost on Mya.

*I am about twenty feet further down the walkway. A beam has trapped me and I am unable to move.*

**Brent counted his steps down the walkway and stopped and looked around. There was no one on the ground in any direction. He looked carefully moving all sorts of crates and barrels.**

*I can't see you anywhere.*

*I am right above you. (replied an exasperated voice)*

**Brent looked up and saw nothing. He took two of the crates and positioned them and stepped up. On a ledge outcropping that ran the entire length of the ship he saw to his amazement, a small creature. It was dragon-like in appearance; it's wing was pinned, and it lay face down, beneath a large steel-like beam.**

*Oh my God, is that you?*

*Yes, and it is very uncomfortable, please hurry.*

**Brent looked over the area and judged quickly that if he removed the metal at the rear he would be able to raise the beam without causing anything else to fall down. He did so quickly and then came back to the creature and lifted the beam. The small dragon-like creature pulled itself free and stood. It tried out its wing several times before turning and facing him.**

*Thank you Brent of Earth, I am in your debt.*

*You are most welcome Mya. I think we should move quickly, I wouldn't want your friend to freeze outside.*

*First we must go to the pilot's chair. It was an order – not a request. We must retrieve something before we can leave the ship here.*

**The creature took off and flew straight to the cockpit with Brent running behind her. As he entered he saw it sitting in the middle of the large console.**

*Please sit down in the chair and turn it around.*

**Brent did and the chair moved by itself and slid forward centering him amid the vast array of dials and buttons.**

*Ship, this is Mya of the First Council, lower the retrieval remote.*

**ACKNOWLEDGED, MYA OF THE FIRST COUNCIL** replied a disembodied voice.



**A hidden door slid open and a small platform was lowered from above. On it was a strange looking ‘remote’ with several buttons on it. It was shaped like some weird space gun from a Science Fiction movie.**

*Please take the device Brent, and place it in your pocket. He did as instructed.*

*Now we may leave, she announced.*

**They left the cabin and went directly down the walkway to the door. Outside the wind howled loudly; snow and ice swirled about wildly; the storm had increased in ferocity. The sled bearing the man was completely covered in snow.**

*We are going to have to hurry if we hope to make it back to my cabin before we freeze. Can you tolerate the cold?*

*Not really.*

*If I may so bold, Brandon opened his coat, I can offer you the warmth of my body heat.*

*It is not permitted; my touch could have an effect on you, physically. We who are paired with a Peacekeeper do not touch other beings.*

**Brent turned and looked at the creature.**

*Look Mya, there is a raging storm about to hit us; if we are caught in it we will freeze in a matter of minutes. Your friend needs medical attention soon; and you are worried about touching me? Well don't, I'll take my chances. Now please attach yourself to my sweater or by God I will leave you here.*

*Very well Brent of Earth, your argument is a sound one.*

**The little creature leaped onto Brent thick sweater and he closed his coat over it and buttoned up. It stretched its head so it could see out over the top button. When they reached the sled Brent brushed off the snow and opened the blanket so the creature could see her friend.**

*Before we leave Brent of Earth, please take out the device from your pocket and point it at the ship. Brent did as instructed.*

*Now press the blue button twice.*

**He did as told and the ship disappeared.**

**“Son of a ...” he exclaimed.**

*I beg your pardon?*

*Sorry Mya, just an earth expression. Let's get moving.*

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