

## Chapter 5

### Ruffled Feathers

Rebecca and Silver Sky looked into the obsidian eyes of the large black raven. The two voles that had guided them into the trees near the homes talked rapidly with the stately bird. Unfortunately, Rebecca and Silver Sky had been told to stay in the bushes, too far away to be able to hear what they were saying.

“That bird looks scary,” muttered Silver Sky. He was having second, and third, thoughts on this entire venture.

“He sure does,” replied Rebecca, gazing uneasily at the raven’s sharp talons. She became increasingly aware that she was made of cloth.

“Wonder what’s taking so long?” questioned the model horse; not that he was in any big hurry to meet this mysterious stranger.

“Don’t know,” admitted Rebecca as she pulled a leaf from the bush out of boredom and nervousness.

They continued to watch as Dr. Falltree and Miss Springfield talked animatedly with the raven. At one point, he cocked his head awkwardly to one side, staring into their hiding spot. Rebecca would swear that he winked, but birds can’t do that, can they?

After what felt like hours, the two small rodents returned to the bush. They looked very pleased with themselves. Miss Springfield shuffled through her notebook, now filled with more scribbles, handing a few sheets of paper to Dr. Falltree.

“Ah yes,” he said, selecting the page that seemed most important to him. “Tula Ulari thinks he can help you two on your journey.”

“Oh, very good!” beamed Rebecca, momentarily forgetting her nervousness.

Silver Sky clapped his front hooves together. He stood up and started towards the raven.

“Wait!” gasped Dr. Falltree, grabbing the impatient model horse by the tail. Miss Springfield nearly dropped her notebook.

“What is it?” grumped Silver Sky.

“Well, he’s a raven. He expects something in return. I gift for his kindness,” explained Dr. Falltree.

“But, we haven’t got anything. The only things we brought are things we need to get where we are going,” Rebecca stated.

Dr. Falltree scratched at his chin, thinking. “You’ve got to have something,” he said. “Something shiny,” he added.

Silver Sky looked around, but he didn’t even have real horse shoes. Rebecca’s buttons weren’t even shiny. “Doomed,” he said simply, his face falling.

Rebecca rummaged through the pack on Silver Sky’s back. All they had was the compass, map, matches and pen knife that Germaine had set them out with. The only thing shiny was the knife.

“Do you think he’d like this?” she asked Dr. Falltree, holding out the small knife.

“Only one way to find out, I suppose,” he answered, skeptically.

Dr. Falltree picked up the knife, unfolding the tiny blade. “It is shiny,” he replied, looking at his reflection in the metal. “Rather dangerous, though, don’t you think?”

“Germaine said it might come in handy,” Silver Sky pointed out.

“We used it to get out of our box,” Rebecca mentioned.

Dr. Falltree rummaged through the notes Miss Springfield had given him until he found the right one. “Yes, yes, so you did.” He closed the knife. “Well, this will have to do. Now remember, you are about to talk to one of the most important animals in these woods, so behave yourselves and don’t be rude. He’s got friends all around, and you don’t want to get on their bad side.”

With that, he started walking back towards the raven, ushering the two toys and Miss Springfield along with him.

Tula Ulari stood on an old stump, his head craned to one side, watching the procession with his right eye. His head moved in jerky motions as they came closer, watching first with one eye, then the other, only rarely staring straight at them.

As they came near, he stretched his wings out and bounded from the stump to the ground in front of them.

“And what have we here?” he asked, examining each one in turn. “Aren’t you a little lost? The forest is a strange place for children’s toys.” His voice was uneven, rising and falling in pitch.

“We’re not the ones who are lost. Our children are lost,” said Silver Sky, moving forward.

“You have children?” asked the raven, incredulously.

“Well, no. Not like that,” blushed Silver Sky. “The children that played with us are lost.”

“And why should I help?” asked Tula Ulari.

Dr. Falltree came forward with the pen knife. “I’m afraid this is all they have to offer, sir. I hope it will be enough.” He laid the knife in front of the imposing bird.

“Careful,” cautioned Rebecca. “It’s sharp.”

The raven chuckled a guttural laugh and approached Rebecca, who stepped back. “Dear, I’m very aware of sharp things, living with them every day. You try eating with a beak and claws.”

He rolled his eyes and returned to the knife. Using his beak, he pulled the blade out and glanced at his reflection. “Ah yes,” he crowed. “I look perfect. This will do nicely.” He gave a sharp whistle and several other ravens appeared from the trees.

The new arrivals lined up in formation, chattering amongst themselves, and eyeing the four strangers with suspicion. With another whistle from Tula Ulari, they quieted down and stood still.

Starting at the first, he began introducing them. “This is Tula Sanni,” he said pointing to a very proud looking raven that bowed deeply. “He will be carrying you,” he added pointing to Silver Sky, who wondered what he meant by carry.

Next, he pointed at a very fat raven. “This is Tula Quinn, who apparently has been at the dumpsters again,” he said in aggravation. “I don’t think he’ll be carrying anyone, perhaps not even himself.”

The third raven was of average size and seemed quite eager. “Tula Puck will be determining our path.”

Finally, he paused at the fourth and smallest raven. “This is Tula Miki, my son, and he will be going home to tell his mother that we are going to be out for a while,” he said patting the little black bird on the head.

“Ah, dad, can’t I come this once?” pouted Tula Miki.

Tula Ulari sighed heavily. “No, boy. Go tell your mother what we are doing.” He gave the little raven a nudge, and he grudgingly took flight.

“I will be carrying you,” he said, pointing towards Rebecca.

Silver Sky nervously stepped forward. “Why, exactly, are you going to be carrying us?” he asked, not sure he truly wanted the answer.

“That’s simple, toy. We’re going to be flying today,” answered the big raven.

“Flying?” gasped Silver Sky, his face becoming green.