

The Call of a friend

by

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After several days had passed, Hallowed spent most of his time watching his son doze in the afternoon sun. The bay stallion's ears twitched as he was deeply in thought. The sun was warm on their backs. Spring had been kind and the weather was warm and the grass was lush. However, the sadness of Evangeline's death only several days before, still lingered in the crisp afternoon air. Just as Hallow was beginning to doze off into sleep himself, the flutter of wings caught his immediate attention. He looked up, narrowing his eyes at the bird until he recognized the black raven. "Hjalmar!"

The raven perched itself on the branch of nearby oak, tucking its sleek feathered wings to its sides. "Greeting's Hallow." The raven crooned in a friendly greeting. "I trust all has been well." He tilted his head to the side.

Hallowed heaved a heavy sigh and he lowered his gaze to the ground, his ears flicking behind his head. "I-I've lost Evangeline to a black bear."

"Ah, yes." Hjalmar, the raven, replied, nodding his head as if remembering. "Yes, I've come to learn of the news." He ruffled his feathers, absorbing some of the sun's warmth. "Hence why I'm here." The black bird turned his head to the peaceful sleeping form of Henry in the soft grass. "It's a sad shame, to lose his mother at such a young time in his life."

The bay stallion lifted his head to look at young Henry as Hjalmar spoke of him. The little colt continued to sleep, undisturbed by his father and the ravens conversing. "I think he's dealing

with her death better than I'm." His orange-red tinted eyes were full of sorrow and guilt. "He's still too young to understand, and too young to be alone. He needs a mother."

Hjalmar's small night-black eyes blinked in surprise. "And what of you?"

Hallowed's ears flicked towards the raven, a bit stunned at the bird's question.

"I can see clearly that you have been doing an excellent job of caring for the young lad as it is."

Hallow's eyes widened in sudden surprise at Hjalmar's claim and he turned his head to look at the large black bird again. "Me?" He scoffed. "Certainly not, Hjalmar."

The raven shifted from each foot, seeming unconvinced. "He needs his father."

"It is a mare's responsibility to care for a foal." The big bay nodded his head curtly in a 'matter-of-fact' manner. "What he needs, is a mother."

Hjalmar rolled his eyes at his younger companion. "I thought you might argue me with that."

After that the raven pushed himself up from his perch and took flight into the nearby forest trees. Surprised, and a little puzzled, Hallow squinted his eyes to try to see through the dense shade of the thick, towering pines. But instead of finding his feathered friend, he saw a stunningly beautiful white mare standing just on the edge of the trees. Her coat was the color of newly fallen snow, and her eyes were the color of a graying winter-blue sky. She gave him a respectful yet friendly smile and a curt nod of her head before she looked to the branch where Hjalmar flew to and perched once again.

"Hallow." The raven addressed the bay stallion. "Meet the lovely Skadii." Hjalmar lifted one wing and pointed a sleek, glistening feather to the white mare.

The young mare tucked her head to the side at the raven's flattering introduction, touching the tip of her nose to her snowy white shoulder. "Oh Hjalmar." She giggled. "Aren't you charming."

A kind, fatherly smile appeared on the black bird's face.

Hallow forced a friendly smile to the beautiful mare, he didn't know what to think, he was completely confused. But then he saw Hjalmar giving him a look and nodding his head towards Skadii, who he now noticed was staring at him expectantly. "Oh! Oh, how rude of me. It's a pleasure to meet you Skadii, I'm-

"Hallow." The white mare finished his sentence for him, her gray-blue eyes glowing.

"How did, how did you know my name?" Hallow asked, bewildered.

Skadii looked up at Hjalmar who watched them with amusement in his eyes. "Hjalmar has told me about your, situation, may I say. I request for my lead stallion to let me come," she pointed her muzzle towards the small clearing through the trees behind her, and Hallow now saw the buckskin stallion standing there grazing. ", of course he insisted that he come along just in case there was trouble. I hope he doesn't appear as a threat." Her ears flicked forward.

Hallow shook his head. "Of course not, that's alright." He looked over at the buckskin once more. He could've sworn he recognized him before, but there were many buckskin horses around the mountain top now. "If...if I may ask you Skadii."

The white mare's eyes widened in curiosity. "Yes, Hallow?"

"Who, who is he?"

"Who?"

The big bay pointed with his muzzle to the buckskin stallion only a yard behind her, partially hidden by the shade of the pines.

"Oh!" Skadii rolled her eyes at her brief moment of stupidity. "Yes, my leader, that's Spirit." Then she looked at him again. "Why? Do you recognize him?"

Hallow shook his head, maybe that wasn't the right horse. He had never heard that name before. He cleared his throat. "Uh no, nevermind."

"Papa? Who's she?" A sudden little voice piped up.

All three looked to the sound of the young voice, and Hallow's eyes widened when he realized that Henry had woken from his sleep and was now standing several feet away from them with curiosity in his pale blue eyes. "Oh." Hallow looked to Skadii who stepped forward and lowered her head to meet eye level with the foal.

"You must be Henry." Skadii offered a kind smile, and her voice was soft. "You know, I've heard so much about you. Your mother talked very fondly of you."

The young foal gasped and took a step towards the white mare. "You knew mother?" His eyes instantly lit up.

Skadii nodded, chuckling at the young foal's reaction. "We grew up together. I have many stories of our adventures together." Her blue eyes were warm.

"Really?" The white mare had clearly hooked Henry's interest.

"Henry, let me talk with Skadii for a bit." Hallowed stepped in, having not yet told his son about his plan to find him a new mother to raise him.

"But I wanna hear about mother." Henry looked up at his father, then to Skadii who also turned to look at Hallow.

But the white mare, not knowing that father and son hadn't discussed the situation, stepped forward and gently nudged Henry's shoulder. "There'll be plenty of time for that, once we get you settled in your new home."

Suddenly, Henry's excited smile turned to a frown. His eyes widened and he stepped away from them, then whipping his head to look up at Hallow. "You-you're giving me away?"

Hallow's eyes widened in despair. "No, Henry it's not like that."

"I'm sorry I didn't listen, I'm sorry I thought I could handle the bear on my own! Papa please! I won't ever do it again!" The bay foal rushed forward and buried his head in his father's chest.

Skadii's eyes widened in surprise, then her expression saddened when she realized that she had spoken too soon. But Hallowed looked at her and gave her a forgiving smile before looking down and nudging his son gently. "Henry, son. I'm not angry with you."

Henry looked up at him, his blue eyes full of guilt.

"I could never be angry with you." The big bay ruffled his son's short scruffy mane with his muzzle, a smile on his face. "None of that was your fault."

Henry looked at his hooves for a moment, then looked back up, his eyes still sad. "But, why are you sending me away?"

His father heaved a sigh. "I'm not giving you away Henry." Hallow nudged him gently towards Skadii, who was watching them with sadness in her eyes. "She's going to take care of you for now."

Despite him being a young foal still, Henry understood. He nodded but took a deep breath before forcing a smile to Skadii. But before he walked over to her he turned around and looked back up at his father. "What about you? Will I ever see you again?"

"Of course Henry." Hallowed smiled down at him, ruffling his short mane once more. Then he looked to Skadii who was beginning to turn away and head towards the trees where her lead stallion waited patiently for her. He lowered his head to meet eye level with his son. "Be good for Skadii."

Henry looked at the white mare before nodding, then looking back up at him. "Promise you won't forget to visit?"

Hallowed touched his nose to the colt's forehead. "I promise."

The colt narrowed his eyes and tried to stare his father down in a teasing manner. "Daad."

"I promise!" Hallow laughed, nudging his son towards the white mare in a gesture to get going. "No dangerous adventures Henry."

The bay colt skipped after Skadii, but before disappearing into the trees he turned around to reply to his father with playful swish of his short scruffy tail. "How would you know if I did?"

"Henryy." Hallow raised a brow in a false threatening expression.

"Okay, okay!" Henry laughed, and before he disappeared into the trees he rushed forward and pressed his forehead against his father's chest once more. Hallowed's head jerked up in sudden surprise, but then he lowered his head and wrapped his neck around his son, both of them breathing in the scent of one another, wanting to never forget. Hallow didn't want to let his little boy go, but Henry pulled away and smiled up at him before quickly bounding after Skadii.

The large bay watched as the white mare touched her muzzle to his son's cheek affectionately, and was surprised when he saw another foal, a lighter version of the buckskin stallion that walked beside them, skip up to Henry. She must have been Skadii's previous foal. Hallow watched them until his eyes could no longer see them. His heart ached within his chest to watch his son leave his side. But what choice did he have? Henry was barely a yearling, he needed the watchful eye and caring heart of a mother.

Meanwhile, Hjalmar had noticed his friend's sad mood. "Don't worry yourself too much Hallow. Skadii lives in a large herd, and Spirit is a very strong and fair stallion. Henry will be well protected."

Hallow nodded before turning his back to Hjalmar and began to walk down the sloping hill to the water hole that lay at the base of the valley. After several minutes of walking he felt the tight clamp of Hjalmar's talons as the raven perched on his back for the ride.

"Thank you, Hjalmar. For finding Skadii as Henry's mother." He flicked his ears towards the raven on his back.

"There is no need for a thank you." The raven replied warmly. "You have been a good friend of mine for a long time now. And you and Henry meant the world to Evangeline. It's the least I can do for her, and for you and your son."

Hallow smiled and then tossed his head, glancing quickly behind him. "Is there anything I can do for you in return, old friend?"

Hjalmar thought for a moment. "Well," he cawed, ruffling and then preening his feathers. "You could find me some lunch."

And with that the two old friends shared a good long laugh. Little had they known at the time that it would be their very last, and that something would stand in Hallow's way to prevent him from ever fulfilling his promise to his son.