

Chapter 1

Alex was a typical teenager who found himself in a peculiar situation. He remembered being in an automobile accident in the 21st century. When he woke up just inside the tall magnificent ornate gates on a dusty road his first reaction was of course, "Where am I, how did I get here, how long has it been and where will I go from here?" He started by checking his physical condition for injuries. First the fingers, hands and then the arms, nothing seemed to be wrong here. That was followed by a mental checklist for the legs, feet, and toes. Everything seemed to function well and he wasn't in any pain. That led to the greater question, almost an exact renewal of the first set with the new ones added.

He could remember his car slipping on the ice and going over the side of a cliff. He knew that he'd taken that corner too fast but he had done so a dozen times before so he considered it safe and had no doubt that he could do it again. Then he could remember thinking as he went over the side... "WRONG!"

Now of course he was completely lost. If he had survived the crash you'd think he'd be riddled with broken bones and the pain would be excruciating.

"Funny" he thought, "I should be in severe pain yet nothing! What's wrong with this picture? How can it be that I'm here on the side of the road that I've never seen before and how did I get here?"

"Alex; Alex; ALEX; ALEX! Where on earth can that boy be?" Albert the Elder had been assigned to oversee Alex and get him ready for work.

"Well, I'd say he isn't on earth, or at least he shouldn't be. The last time he went down there it took a hundred years to get things back on the track again."

"Yes, but I have a mission for him. In spite of his shenanigans the Boss said he needs to perform this one correctly, or else."

Albert hesitated. "Michael, you know as well as I do that he's not up to an assignment yet."

"Perhaps, but it's not our decision." Michael replied. Albert the Elder smiled a wily smile, shook his head and fluttered his wings.

"But, he's the boss." He cocked his head over his left shoulder to referring to Gabriel. "I don't know why but he has complete faith that Alex will gain his wings before the millennium is over."

Michael and Albert had been working together almost from the start of creation. They looked and acted so much alike that at times they would stand in for each other to complete the job.

They just stood for a moment looking at each other and recalling many times they had bailed each other out. After a moment, Michael simply shook his head and went to search for the wayward Alex.

"How am I expected to give direction and training to an entire legion of new recruits if I'm always chasing one lost sheep?" He mused to himself. "Wonder where he's off to this time. Last time I found him in an entire different galaxy sea. He could turn your hair grey if it wasn't already white as snow now."

Then as if a light bulb was turned on he conjured a thought process that he was sure would bring the young wayward out of hiding. "I'll send a vibration message out letting him know that whatever he is doing is secondary to an important mission and he must report immediately." He knew that by opening the all persons notification channel and putting out a message that the entire heavens could hear indicating that Alex had been selected for a most important mission and he needed to report immediately or it would be passed to Alicia.

He knew that would intrigue him, as he and Alicia were contestants in the pursuit of the next feather badge. Currently they both had seven feathers and needed only three more to

attain their bronze. In human terms, six hundred years would seem a long time, but that was only a blink of an eye up here. Still the competition was fierce and the bronze was, to put it mildly, a feather in his cap. It rather reminded him of himself and Albert when they first started. They had gone from bosom buddies to arch rivals that lasted for so long he couldn't remember.

It wasn't until they had been on several assignments that they finally figured out that cooperation was the key to excellence.

Since that time they have had each other's back. Michael was sure the same would be true of these two as they were extremely competitive and yet although they wouldn't admit it they really liked each other.

"Trickery?" a voice came over his private communications channel. He knew Gabriel didn't approve of sleight of hand maneuvers but Michael didn't have the time or the disposition to search all over heaven for a lad with attention deficit disorder. Besides, he knew Gabriel well enough that he could tell his official reprimand stand from his under the table manner of rebuke.

Sure enough, Alex came around the corner so quickly that he almost ran him over. As he had slipped into yet an uncomfortable human form he was still trying to straighten out his shirt tail and button the front when he came around the corner.

"You've got a mission for me?" He said with a sheepish grin.

"Good, you've got on some suitable clothing. That will do you well where you're going." Alex's eyes lit up.

"I'm going to be allowed to return to earth?" He didn't even try to suppress his joy at the thought. After the last fiasco, he was sure they wouldn't let him go back for a million years.

Earth was a prize sought after by all the freshmen as usually it meant at least two or even three feathers. He'd have to stay alert, keep his mind on what he was doing, and complete the job in the allotted time if he were to attain his goal. Alicia would be really hot under the collar if he was to get his bronze first.

"I know I really messed up the last one, but I promise I'll stick to the script and finish in record time whatever it is." It reminded him of **himself many eons ago. For the most part he was** known by the trainees as "Stiff Lip" behind his back of course. He never allowed his facial expression to allow them to know just what he was thinking but on this occasion he just had to allow the slightest crack of a smile.

He wasn't sure if it was frustration or relief.

"Don't ever speak of this." he spoke with a stern voice and glared with that special glare that would chill the devil himself.

"Oh, what?" came the reply. "I didn't notice anything, and if I did I wouldn't speak a word."

"Okay, report to Albert the elder, he has your assignment."

Alex was relieved that he had not been asked where he had been as he was frolicking in the forest area again with some of the animals. He always liked to go there during break times because they never were demanding, except to be petted of course. In this case though, he was supposed to be polishing the harps for the choir. That was usually his assignment as it was used to allow him to reflect on what he'd done last that didn't please the masters.

He, of course would start thinking about the animals and how they needed to be petted and would usually wind up in the forest area far before his break time. This time though he told himself that he was going to concentrate on the assignment and be sure not to be dissuaded.