



SWIFT ENTERPRISES PRESENTS

## **Bud Barclay— It Wasn't Always a Good Night, Tom**

As told to T. Edward Fox

Bud has been best friends with Tom Swift for more than thirty-three years. He even married Tom's sister. In all those years he worked for Swift Enterprises and then for the civilian space agency.

Now, a sad occasion has brought him home early from a year-long mission to an outpost circling Jupiter.

Faced with a family tragedy, he makes a bold decision. Leave space behind him and finally settle down. But, is it too late to rekindle his relationship with Sandy Swift? Has his wanderlust built a gulf between them?

And, what the heck is he going to do now that he is out of work?

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This book is dedicated to men and women who come up to the big five-oh with grace and dignity. And for those who face the loss of their parents with a sense of sadness, but who manage to get through it. Sometimes it is quite hard to lose your parental supervision, no matter how old or young you are.

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## **Bud Barclay— It Wasn't Always a Good Night, Tom**

### FOREWORD

Tom Swift has been friends with Bud Barclay for—let me see—I guess it's about 34 years. During that time they have shared adventures too numerous to try to recount, dangers that almost cost each of them their lives more than they can count on their combined fingers plus two little toes, and the love of the two women who have been right next to them—in spirit as well as in person—throughout practically everything.

Time, situations and opportunities have kept them apart for many of the recent dozen years, but they have always stayed in touch.

Now, sad circumstances have brought them back together.

And, happy circumstances.

I invite you to tag along memory lane—both memories you do have and those you will have in the future—as they reunite and reminisce about their pasts, their present, and their futures.

*Thackery E. Fox*

## **CHAPTER 1/**

### **The Sadness**

“WELL, hey there, stranger,” Tom Swift called out to the handsome, dark-haired man approaching his front porch. “I thought you were stuck up at the Jupiter Outpost for another six months.”

“Ah, shucks, Tom. When I heard the news I had to take leave. Besides, I need to do a little catching up with the missus and the kid, you know?”

Bud Barclay, long time best friend of Tom Swift was currently a member of the twenty-person team that lived and worked in the newest Swift outpost. This one, orbiting about one million miles from Jupiter and following an intricate course that allowed them to weave through the orbits of five of its moons, was a huge improvement over the very first outpost in space.

But then, nearly forty years of progress had been made since then.

Still primarily a wheel, it was three times the size, sported twice the “spokes” in a dual-layer configuration, and featured a zero-G, non-rotating central hub.

“Sandy know you're here yet?” Tom asked.

Looking slightly embarrassed, Bud replied, “I started out to let her know before taking the shuttle back, then I thought it would be a nice surprise to just show up, but the more I've thought about it, the more I think I blew it!”

“I wouldn't worry, spaceboy. San will be absolutely thrilled and little Sam will jump for joy.”

“I really want to thank you and Bash for watching out for them this year. I hated to take the assignment, but next year I turn fifty and that puts me out of the civilian space business. Except,” he eyed his friend, “perhaps a few *Swift* trips, huh?”

Tom grinned, an expression that melted the years away from his matured face and almost made him look in his early twenties and not three months from his mid-century birthday.

“How are Bash and the girls?” Bud asked.

“Gee. Mary is almost twenty-five and has her own little bundle fermenting right now. She’s due in September, about five months from now. Annie is graduating from Cornell next month with a dual degree in Bio-Medicine and Physiology, and Sandra just graduated from high school—a half year early.”

“And, still no little Tommy to take over the inventing business?”

Tom looked at his best friend with a tilted head. “Want to know a secret?”

Bud nodded, his shaggy salt-and-pepper hair bobbing up and down.

“Bash is about four months along right now. We haven’t wanted to bring it up, not with dad—” His voice choked off with the emotion.

Tom’s father, Damon Swift, had been very ill for more than a year, but had become much worse in the previous two weeks. Three days ago, he had passed away in his sleep, leaving his wife of almost fifty-one years along with his famous son and daughter and their combined four children.

It was the occasion of his funeral service that brought his son-in-law home.

“Hoping for one boy before the factory closes?” Bud joshed.

Another grin from Tom told him all he needed to know. “When did you sprout that cookie duster?” Bud asked eyeing Tom’s almost snow-white mustache.

“Had it about three months, now. Dad was joking one day that he had never seen a Swift man with facial hair, so he and I both started. He went for the whole thing, but Bash only let me get away with the ‘tache. Guess I’ll shave it off once we have the funeral.”

They both looked at the ground for a moment, each lost in their own thoughts of Tom’s father.

“Well, I’m off to home to see Sandy and Sammy.” Bud said a few moments later. “Dinner tonight? Our place?”

“We are all going out to get Mom away from the house. Your side of the family and all. I’d imagine that the restaurant might find one more chair for you. That is, if you are free...”

Bud pointed a mock pistol finger at Tom and ‘pulled the trigger,’ making a popping sound with his tongue. With a wave he headed back down the front cobbles and climbed into his bright red tommycar, an antique he had now owned for twenty-seven years.

The door behind Tom opened and a beautiful, dark-haired woman came out, wiping her hands on a flash towel—a modern marvel invented by her husband and capable of being used to dry almost anything, and then simply flashed away. A hidden capsule in one corner was snapped between the user’s fingers, and the towel basically disintegrated into a small puff of water vapor, oxygen, nitrogen and hydrogen along with a small amount of a corn-based fiber that would dissolve within a day.

“Who was that?” she asked, putting her arms around his neck and giving him a kiss on one cheek.

“Bud made it back in time for the service.”

Bashalli let out a big sigh. “Oh, I am so happy he got here.”

Sandy is just about beside herself over the loss of your dad. "Bud is just the thing she needs."

Tom reached a hand up and gently rubbed one of her arms.

He well remembered how hard it had been when Bashalli lost her father and then mother within less than a year. Mr. and Mrs. Prandit had been in a terrible accident several years earlier. He died instantly and his wife lingered on in a coma for about ten months before slipping away.

Bash hadn't had the opportunity to say goodbye to either of them and had berated herself for a year or more. But, as it is with almost all grief, it passed. Her supportive husband and their three daughters had sustained her.

Anne arrived at the dinner along with Tom and his family. She still looked amazing, even in her mid-seventies. Streaks of silver ran through her reddish blonde hair, hair that had never seen a bottle of colorant in her life.

Bud, Sandy and their son arrived five minutes later. Sandy looked slightly flushed and her mother looked at her with one raised eyebrow.

Sandy smiled back at her and blushed slightly.

Although a somber occasion, everyone enjoyed the conversations that went on across and even from opposite ends of the long table set up for them.

Several of the patrons in the restaurant came over to offer their condolences. The Swifts were the most famous family in Shopton, and everyone knew them on sight. News of Damon Swift's passing had been top story on all three of the small television stations three evenings before.

Anne kept up a brave face, but Tom noticed it slipping when dessert arrived. He made a series of quiet nods at the others and they ate quickly, allowing them to leave the restaurant minutes later.

Tom and Bashalli and their two youngest daughters took Anne home while Bud and Sandy and their three-year-old headed for their house. Bud was tired from his trip back to Earth, and Sandy was exhausted, physically and emotionally.

Mary and her husband, Peter, had come separately and left in their own vehicle.

Tom knew his mother wanted to be alone, but he insisted that they all come in for a few minutes. Minutes that stretched into almost an hour before hugs and kisses were exchanged, and the promise made to pick her up the following morning for the funeral and memorial service.

"Sleep tight, Momsy," Tom whispered in her ear as they embraced. "We're all here for you, you know?"

She hugged him back even more tightly and replied, "I know, Tommy. You can't imagine how grateful I am right now to have you and everyone else here. I love you."

"I love you too, Mom."

Tom joined the other ladies in his life out in the car and they headed for their home, just a mile away.

**CHAPTER 2/****The Joy**

TOM AND BUD sat in silence for a few minutes, lost in their own universe of memories.

The funeral had been very subdued. Damon had chosen to be cremated. Tom would take his ashes up to the Moon at a later date and inter them in a special crypt that had been built a decade earlier inside a cavern that had once been refuge for Sandy and Bud when they were stranded there.

The two friends were on Tom's front porch sharing some old memories and a few beers. Sandy, Bashalli and the girls were inside finishing making the food that would be part of a late afternoon picnic by the shores of Lake Carlopa on a private beach near the site of the home of the original Tom Swift and his father, Barton. Although no family still lived there, and the buildings had long ago been demolished or moved to the Smithsonian Museum, the property had remained in the family.

"What's next, skipper?"

"Gosh, Bud. I'm not sure. The company has been family-owned since the beginning, so Enterprises and the Manufacturing Company will go on. I'm not sure if I want to continue running everything. It takes away too much time from inventing and tinkering."

"Yeah. I ran out of fingers, toes and eyes and ears trying to count the number of things you've come up with this year alone."

"Twenty-seven."

"Just? Jetz, Tom. That brain of yours is gong to run dry some day if you keep this up." Bud's smile suddenly sobered. "Really,

Tom. What is next?"

Tom sat and thought for more than two minutes before answering, "I've got to find someone to run Enterprises. It's as simple as that." He looked at Bud who looked right back at him before shaking his head.

"Sorry. I've still got athlete's brain and pilot's muscles. Or, the other way around. Something. The point is, I'm just not desk material. Even if I was, running Enterprises is way out of my league."

"Okay," Tom said, dropping the subject for the time being. "I never got the chance to ask her last night. How did Sandy take to you coming home unannounced?"

Bud blushed. "One minute of shocked silence followed by ten minutes of thrashing around. I really missed her. In fact, right now I feel like submitting my resignation and not going back up to Jupiter base."

All Tom could do was nod. He knew how hard it had been between his sister and Bud when he brought up the subject of the year-long assignment. Things had become downright cool between them for weeks.

As his departure date approached, Sandy began to feel a sense that she might lose Bud forever, so she warmed back up. Their final week had been full of love and passion, but their relationship had been put to the stress test by his absence.

"Sandy would love that," Tom told his friend.

"Yeah," Bud nodded. "I know. And, Sammy needs to get to know his daddy."

They sat in silence for a few moments.

"We've had some pretty good years together and apart. You know?" Tom said.

Bud nodded at him.

“And,” Tom said slowly, “you and San have been together almost as long as we’ve known each other. Been pretty good there, too. Right?”

“Uh... well... I mean, sure. Pretty good. Not all great,” Bud admitted, then added almost under his breath, “not all good.”

Tom chose to ignore the last comment. He knew that there was one small bone of contention between Bud and Sandy. Although they had tried for years and years, they had been unable to conceive a baby.

Their son, Sammy, had been adopted the day after the baby had been born. Sammy had been the child of a young Enterprises secretary who had lost her husband in the Second Korean War. She felt emotionally unable to keep the baby, and when Sandy heard her story, she asked Bud if they might adopt.

There had been no question. Sandy and Bud had an empty spot in their lives and the baby filled it. And, Sammy was an almost perfect baby except for suffering from two potentially deadly allergies: bee stings and peanuts.

In his three years, he had only had one sting and quick action by Sandy had saved him. Now, both she and Bud carried special injection pens with them whenever they went out with Sammy, and Sammy always wore a special bracelet that could dispense life-saving medications if needed.

“Tom? You ever have any regrets about any of the things we got ourselves into?”

“Whoa, flyboy. That opens up a huge list of possibilities. I guess that anything that went wrong and almost killed us would go on the list.”

Bud chuckled. “So. Everything, then?”

Tom joined Bud in a good laugh. “Okay. Let’s see. Loved practically everything we did those first couple years. Even the bone-headed stuff like going into the nuclear fire caves in Africa. There were just so many things that might have gone wrong. Boy,” he shook his head. “When I think about how we risked our lives there I absolutely shudder!”

Bud agreed.

“So, Buddy boy, how about you? What’s your first regret?”

“Man. Let me see. I guess every time you or I or both of us got conked on the head or gassed or whatever and ended up tied in some remote shack somewhere. Although—” Bud’s grin got wider, “—we generally had some goon with the IQ of cheese watching us. I’m amazed at how easy it generally ended up that let us escape.”

It was Tom’s turn to nod and grin.

“I just wish that I had been a little more pessimistic when it came to some of the people I trusted back then. Dad was always —”

Tom stopped as his wife and sister came out onto the porch.

“Daddy was what, Tom?”

“I was just telling Bud that I wished I had been less trusting of some of the bad guys we ran into way back when, and that dad was always taking me aside and telling me to watch out more.”

“Didn’t do any good, did it?” Sandy teased him.

“And, I seem to recall that there were may times you practically defied your good father when he gave you advice,” Bashalli said in mock seriousness, looking first at Sandy and then at Tom.

Tom raised his hands. “Okay. I give up.”

Bashalli asked, "What were you actually discussing?"

"Just some of the good times and some of the not so good ones," Bud told her. Sandy sat down on the arm of the chair Bud sat in and put one arm around his neck. He leaned his head into her forearm and kissed it.

She smiled.

Tom said, "Yeah. We were recounting a few of the truly idiotic things we got into way back when. Before we both got a good dose of the smarts."

"And by that, you mean—?" Bashalli asked.

"I mean, before we both got smart enough to marry you two!"

They all laughed.

Bud was the first to stop. He reached up and squeezed his wife's arm. "Sandy? I've made a decision. I'm not going back up to the Jupiter outpost. I'm gonna stay home with you and Sammy. What do you think?"

Sandy stood up and came around to face Bud. She looked him straight in the eyes for more than a minute, trying to detect how serious he was. Finally, she had her answer and backed away from him. She walked across the porch and down the stair into the front lawn.

"Well, I'll be," Bud declared. "Forty-eight and she can still do cartwheels!"

## CHAPTER 3/

### The Memories

THE PICNIC had been like an invigorating tonic to Anne Swift. She regaled them all with tales of some of her exploits while secretly working for the FBI back when her children were in their teens and twenties.

Her granddaughters were flabbergasted. They had no idea that 'Gramma Anne' was once one of the best microbiologists in the country. Neither had they any idea of the many times she had placed her life in jeopardy in order to solve her cases.

"You mean that the old Merchants and Company bank was just a front?" Tom's oldest, Mary, asked her.

"No, dear. The front really was a bank. For more than twenty years. It's just that the back half, the part that mysteriously fell down one dark night and had to be hauled away, was the laboratory area. My lab and another two used by some other talented people."

"Good golly, Gramma," Mary replied. "You were some sort of hero, then."

Her sisters both nodded in agreement.

"Well, hero is a pretty strong word. I'm just happy to have been able to do something. It would have been a pretty miserable life if I had just been a housewife and only did the vacuuming and cooking. I mean, really. Can you imagine how boring that would have been?"

"How did you and Grampa D meet?" her namesake, Annie, asked.

Anne's face was crossed by a quick pained look that she quickly dismissed. She took a deep breath and answered, "Well,

it was back in our college days. I was a Junior at Harvard and he was a Senior. Some of my friends suggested that I give him a call. They kept after me for weeks, playing him up as some super genius, more handsome than anyone ever and just about the best catch a girl could hope for. When I asked them why none of them were dating him, one girl told me that he was too smart for any of them. That I was the only one with enough brains to understand him.”

“Were you?”

“Well, Sandra, I like to think that I was. Your grandfather was a brilliant man and certainly smarter than any of his professors. He had already been accepted at MIT for his Masters and Doctorate degrees. Did you know that he got them concurrently? The first person to do that.”

Everyone except Tom shook their heads. It was new information to the rest of them.

“Anyway, I picked up the phone and dialed his number—”

“Dialed, Gramma?”

“Yes. Dialed. Before your genius father invented the Universal Phone System we actually had to look up telephone numbers and punch in the proper sequence on a keypad. Now we all just say a name and the system connects us. As I was saying, I dialed his number and we spoke for a few minutes. He was very busy, but we arranged for a date that weekend.”

She looked at her granddaughters.

“Would you like to know something?”

They all nodded.

“The girls were right. He was the smartest and best looking man I had ever seen. And he was genuinely interested in what I had to say.” She sighed at the memory, and her audience gave her the moment to enjoy it.

“We dated through his graduation and his graduate studies as well as mine. Then, on the very day I got *my* Masters, we were married. Just us plus his father and mother and my mother and both of my brothers. My dad was serving over in Germany at that time and couldn't get home.”

“You should tell them what dad did the year between his doctorate dissertation and your Masters, Mom,” Tom suggested.

“Oh, they don't want to hear any more. Do you?”

“Yes, please.”

“Sure.”

“Absolutely, Gramma.”

“Oh. You do. Okay, your grandfather went to work for NASA and was part of the development team for the Space Shuttles. He was so proud of that job. I broke his heart when the first one exploded. He had been part of the team that told the supervisors about a possible problem, but they never listened. And, after the disaster, he just couldn't trust them, so he left and went to work for his father, great grandpa George, at Swift Enterprises.”

There was a moment of silence before Sandy piped up with, “And Mother and Daddy had sex and everything and made Tomonomo and me!”

“*Sandra Swift Barclay!* Language. You have shocked your daughters.”

“Not really, Gramma,” Mary told her, patting her three-month-pregnant belly. “At least one of us knows about sex and all that.”

Both of her sisters nodded their heads until young Sandra realized what she might be admitting to and began shaking her head, mouthing “No, no, no.”



They all shared a good laugh. Anne was the first to stop, but she watched her family continue and she enjoyed it.

“Besides,” Mary continued, “Mom and I are going to pop within a month of each other. So that makes two of us who know about what can happen to girls who don’t say ‘no’.”

“Well,” Anne said. “Not to put a stop to this... erm... stimulating conversation, but I’m getting a little hungry.”

Sandy and Bashalli had set up the picnic table with all the food and drinks in self-refrigerating containers, so they headed over to open all the containers. “Come on, guys. Food’s on!” Sandy called.

As they sat, eating, Bud spoke up. “You know. I kinda wish that we had some of old Chow’s barbecued tri-tip right now. This is all good, but I miss him. I’d even settle for some of his rattlesnake stew.”

He and Tom shared a smile. Both remembered when the old ranch cook had surprised them by serving what Tom thought was a large chicken sausage in a stew. Chow wanted to get even with one of Bud’s jests and enlisted Tom to try to put one over on the boy telling him that it was rattlesnake sausage, but it turned out to be made with real rattlesnake. And, it had tasted pretty good.

“How’s he doing these days,” Bud asked.

“Surprisingly well for a man in his upper eighties,” Anne replied. “I received a sympathy message from him yesterday. He’s had both hips replaced, one knee and gall bladder surgery in the past three years. Trying to keep up with his young French widow, I suppose.”

“Is he still in France, Mother?” Sandy asked.

“Yes. Still there and loving every minute of it. That little school he started up when he retired is now almost fifteen years old, and going strong. The last I heard, he had five

teaching chefs working for him teaching ‘Honest Yoo-nited States Texas Cookin’!’ to twenty students at a time.”

“And, I’ll bet, setting French cuisine on its ear,” Bud quipped.

They sat in silence, each one savoring memories of the roly-poly chef. Only young Sandra hadn’t know him. She had heard plenty of stories, but Chow had retired and left for Europe before she turned three.

“Do you remember when Tom and Daddy had that contest to see who could get their spaceship into orbit first?” Sandy asked.

“Now wait,” Tom said. “We were trying for two different things. Dad wanted a heavy lifting rocket and I wanted to get Bud and me into orbit in a small, nimble ship.”

“Yeah, and that almost did us in, to boot,” Bud said. “I guess your dad won in principle, even if his rocket *was* hijacked by that rich idiot’s idiot son.”

“And, Tom got two people into orbit where Daddy’s only had the one—”

“It doesn’t matter. My two mad scientists had so many, ‘I can do it before you can’ episodes that I lost track. The main thing is that you both worked together better than most fathers and sons. It made me very proud of you both.”

“I only came into things when Thomas was eighteen, but as an outsider I saw such a high level of respect between them. It almost makes me tear up thinking how wonderful it was,” Bashalli said as she wiped away the beginnings of a tear.

**CHAPTER 4/****At Home With The Barclays**

SANDY, BUD and Sammy got home just after nine that evening. After putting Sammy to bed, Sandy came into the living room and climbed into Bud's lap.

He wrapped his arms around her and pulled her close. "Pretty nice ceremony and an even nicer time at the lake later."

She rested her head on his chest. "Mother held up really well, didn't she?"

"Yeah," Bud replied. "She did. I almost lost it a couple times, but she was a rock."

They stayed snuggling in the chair for more than twenty minutes, saying almost nothing. When Bud finally realized that his legs were falling asleep, and that Sandy was on the verge of doing the same, he stood up, lifting her in his arms, and headed for their bedroom.

He set her gently on the bed but she stood back up, kissed him on the tip of the nose, and headed for the bathroom. Soon, he heard the sound of running water, filling their bathtub. He gave her a few minutes to climb in and then went into the bathroom.

He sat on the side of the tub and looked at her. "*She is incredibly more beautiful now than she was as a teen,*" he said to himself. "Hardly a wrinkle."

"What does *that* mean?" Sandy demanded, Bud realizing he had said the last part out loud.

"I was just looking at you and thinking how beautiful you are. And how much I love you. And—" he faltered.

"And?"

Bud looked sadly at his wife. He tried to say something a couple times before he finally got the words out.

"And, in our twenty-seven years together I have been a total jerk more times than you should have ever put up with. I've run —"

Sandy reached up and put a finger on Bud's lips. "You don't need to say this."

He shook his head slowly. "No. I do. I knew from the get go that having kids was important to you. Really important. And, when we found out that nothing was going to work to give us a baby, I took the chicken way out and escaped into my work. I couldn't face you and not be able to give you what you wanted."

A tear began to glide down Sandy's right cheek.

"I loved you the moment we met, way back when you were fifteen. I never had a serious date with anyone but you. You were all I wanted and I'm pretty sure that you felt that way about me."

Sandy nodded and reached a bubble bath-covered hand up and placed it on Bud's forearm.

"When I figured out that I was failing you, I went off on that first expedition to do the Pluto core sampling."

"That was pretty important, though. You proved that Pluto had a solid core and that it had once been molten and that Pluto deserved to be re-established as a true planet—"

"I proved nothing. I just proved that when things got tense here at Casa Barclay, I ran away like a scared little girl!"

"I never was able to convince you that I was more in love with you than with the idea of having a baby. We said we'd never resort to drugs or anything that wasn't one-hundred

percent natural. I still stand by that. Besides, we waited and got Sammy. Everything worked out.”

“Yeah, but I kept running. Pluto, then the deep space probe, and the visit to that exoplanet and—”

“And, and, and. Budworth Barclay,” Sandy whispered as tears began flowing from both eyes. “It all worked out. I never stopped loving you. I got over the... uh... disappointment of not having a baby inside me. From the first day I met you, right after Tom’s hyperplane crashed killing his girlfriend, I only had eyes and a heart for you.”

They sat in silence for a couple minutes, Bud still perched on the side of the tub and Sandy kneeling inside the tub.

Finally, Sandy wiped the tears from her cheeks along with the perspiration that had accumulated there, then she reached up and yanked Bud down and into the tub.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Good morning, sweetie,” Sandy said to Bud as he trudged into the kitchen the following morning.

He walked over to his wife and wrapped his arm around her waist, giving her a soft hug. “Morning.”

They sat simply enjoying each other and ate the waffles and bacon Sandy had fixed.

“Is it Monday?” he asked.

“It is. And, it’s suppose to be a beautiful summer day. Just right for staying at home or for heading over to Enterprises.” She raised an eyebrow at him and smiled prettily.

“Better try batting the eyelashes as well,” he told her with a smile.

They talked about what Bud might want to do with his life now that he was hanging up his spacesuit. Sandy was nervous

that talking about the future so soon after Bud had made, what Sandy felt might be a bit rash, his decision to quit the international space program.

“Well,” he told her with a sigh, “I have had a few offers this past year of two for taking over the Flight Operations Programs Director position.”

“I know. But, you have always said that you couldn’t see yourself having to do the political stuff that goes with the Space Agency jobs.”

Bud smiled ruefully. “I’ve just never been all that good with the hand shaking and the begging for funding stuff. I’d rather take Tom up on his suggestion that I take over day-to-day ops at Enterprises.”

Sandy looked at her husband thoughtfully. He glanced up from spearing the last piece of waffle in time to see her looking at him.

“What?” he asked, forkful hovering in mid air.

Sandy took a deep breath, then said, “Mother and I have talked about it, too. See thinks that you would be exactly the right person to take charge. Of course, Tom would maintain final say on the riskier things, but—”

“I don’t know. Jetz, San. Tom and I have been best friends—better than most people ever get to be—since we were both sixteen. I’m not sure it’s even a matter of whether or not I could take over managing things and even tell Tom ‘no’ once in a while. I’m not sure that Tom could take too many no votes from me before our friendship wore thin.”

“Tom thinks of you like a brother, Bud. Almost a twin. You’re more than a friend to him. Even though you two have worked apart for the past ten years, every chance he gets to see you and every chance you get to see him... you two get together. I’m not jealous, but I know that you went to see him first when you got back the other day.”

Bud looked sheepishly at his wife. "I just thought, given the circumstances—"

"And, you did it just the right way. You really did. Your brother-in-law needed to see you. His father just died. As much as I loved Daddy, and even though I was his little girl, he and Tom worked side-by-side day in and day out for years. Daddy's death hit him even harder than it hit Mother or me."

They stood up and hugged. Finally, Sandy said, "There are two people who desperately need you right now. I've already got you. Tom needs you. He needs you to be a friend and to come back to Enterprises. Geez. Even if you only go back as a test pilot, he needs to have you around."

"Who else?"

Sandy pulled back from Bud's embrace and pointed over his shoulder. "Sammy!"

Bud spun around and saw his smiling son standing there. "Come here, sport!" he commanded and knelt down.

Sammy flew into his father's arms. "Love you, Papa," he said giving Bud a healthy hug around the neck.

"Love you, too, Samster!" Bud looked up as Sandy and mouthed, "And I really love you!"

## CHAPTER 5/

### Back to Enterprises

"SO, WHERE do I sign?"

"Hey, Bud," Tom exclaimed, looking up from his three-dimensional holographic design system. Bud took a quick glance and immediately realized that he still had no idea what Tom designed until it was a tangible piece of hardware.

"Just thought I'd drop by to see if you've got anything for an ex-space pilot to do."

Tom looked at his friend thoughtfully. After a few seconds he asked, "Are you really giving it all up?"

"Like I told you, I'll be ready, willing and mostly able for anything you cook up, and I've just submitted my official resignation notification. As of midnight tonight, I'm no longer Admiral Barclay, ISO. I'll be old Budworth Barclay, ex-high school athlete, highly-rated test pilot, and... and your friend," he finished.

Tom stood up and came around to shake Bud's hand. Looking him in the eye, Tom said, "I want to welcome you back to civilian life. Plus, if you'll hear me out and not raise too much fuss, I would like to propose that you officially come back to work for Enterprises. At a substantially higher position than when you last left us."

They sat down and Tom outlined what he had in mind. It would include Bud spending about six months working as an 'Enterprise Fellow,' basically an employee-at-large who could sit in on any department and involve themselves in any project they wished.

Following that period, and assuming that Bud wanted to look upward, Tom outlined the position he had in mind for his

friend.

“Your title would be President and Chief Operations Officer. You would be stepping into Dad’s shoes a little. There would be some politics involved; a few trips to Washington and to the European Union and Asian Federation along with the occasional hosting duties for foreign and domestic dignitaries. Might mean that you would need to invest in a tuxedo and Sandy would need a few evening gowns—”

“What about how *we* would work? I mean, will there be a distinct line of demarcation between what I can and should control versus what you have say over?”

Tom nodded. “But, we can discuss that during your Fellowship period. I don’t want to heap more on you than you are willing to take, and I know that there are some changes that have happened since you were working here that you need to get a real understanding of. Some of that will affect your ‘line’.”

“What’s my first stop, then? Personnel?”

“Yep. Then we get you to Human Resources where I get you to sign your life away, then we get you to the Dispensary for your physical—”

“Ph—phy—physical?” But sputtered. “I’ll have you know that I scored in the top half percentile during my last one for the space agency.” Bud harrumphed for good measure and crossed his arms over his chest.

Tom smiled. He knew Bud. This would just be a formality, but one that the corporate insurance carrier insisted on. He told Bud as much. In the end, the dark-haired pilot and space jockey relented and agreed that it “couldn’t hurt him.”

“I heard that Doc Simpson left Enterprises last year. What for? He’s still on the good side of sixty,” Bud wanted to know.

Tom stopped. So did Bud. “Didn’t you hear? Doc Simpson was asked to join the staff of the Surgeon General of the U.S.

They desperately needed a man who knew as much as possible about space medicines—”

“—and Doc has more experience with that than any ten other doctors combined. Right?” Bud finished Tom’s statement.

“Right, spaceboy. Doc just couldn’t refuse the assignment, so he asked for up to eight years of leave. Of course, he’s welcome back any time, but until then we have a new, young doctor. Doc Rosenbloom.”

“Rosenbloom? Rosenbloom... Hmmm. Don’t think I’ve heard of him. From around here?” Bud asked.

Tom smiled and clapped a hand on Bud’s shoulder. “Let’s get you over there and the good doctor will tell you the whole story if you like.”

As they continued over to the building where the Dispensary was housed, Tom decided to fill Bud in on a little of the story of the new doctor.

“We put out feelers for someone who had some of the same experience that Doc had, but ran into a big brick wall. He is, truly, one in a million. So, given that we couldn’t really bring ourselves to shame him into staying here, we found someone who has more than a passing knowledge of Enterprises and space programs and such.”

“Okay—so who is our good doctor Rosenbloom. Or, where did he come from?”

“Would it help if I told you that the doctor’s name is Debra?”

Bud thought a moment then shook his head. “Give me another hint.”

“What if I told you her middle initial was ‘S’?”

“Ess? Debra S—” He stopped because they had reached the Dispensary door. “I’m having a brain fart, Tom. Some of the

memory gremlins are laughing their heads off in the back of my brain. I can feel them rolling around. Only thing is, I just can't pull the memory out."

Tom opened the door of the Medical Chief's office and gave a little knock on the doorframe. "Okay if I bring in a new hire, Doc?"

A woman—someone who easily could be the reference photo for the dictionary listing of 'statuesque'—swiveled her chair around and rose to greet them.

"Hey, Tom. And this is—Oh! My! God! It isn't. Is it?" She came around her desk and wrapped her arms around Bud. He looked helplessly at Tom who was stifling a laugh. "It's Mr. Barclay. Right?"

Bud eased himself from her grasp. Standing back and looking a little shaken, he stared at her. "I'm truly sorry, Doctor. I—"

Tom laughed out loud. "Would it help you to know that the 'S' stands for Simpson, Bud?"

Bud looked totally nonplussed. Finally, like a bolt of lightning, it hit him. "Debbie Simpson? Doc's kid?"

She nodded at him and smiled.

Bud looked back into her beautiful face and was stunned anew. "Bu—but. The last time I saw you, you were a gangly teenager, all red hair and skinny arms and legs and freckles. What happened?"

Then, realizing how he must have sounded, Bud opened his mouth to explain, but the doctor placed one finger on her lips. "It's okay, mister Barclay. I know what you meant." She gave a delicious little laugh.

Tom explained, "Debra grew up, Bud. And, she followed Greg into the medical business. She graduated top of her class

from Johns Hopkins and finished her internship out in San Francisco. I'm surprised that your mom never mentioned it. Debra tells me she and your mom use to have lunch at least once a month."

Bud looked from his friend to the redheaded doctor and then back again. "My god! And we've got you here to take over for your old man?"

She nodded and gave him another dazzling smile. "That's right. Tom and Damon were gracious enough to offer a fledgling doctor a job and I jumped at it."

"Don't let her fool you, Bud. We were one of about fifty offers she had to sort through. I'm not sure how we rated so highly, but Dad and I were absolutely over the moon when she agreed to come work here."

Between the two of them, they filled Bud in on her story. At the beginning of her internship, Debra had married a California Highway Patrol Trooper named Frank Rosenbloom. Frank, a hovercycle officer, was in a bad accident shortly after they returned from their honeymoon. Both of his legs were crushed. One so badly that most of his calf muscles had to be removed and the other so weakened that the muscles became inoperative due to non-use.

She had contacted her father to see if there was anything that Swift Enterprises might be able to do to allow him to walk again.

"It was a chance conversation with your wife that led Dad and me to the answer. When I told Sandy about Frank's problems, she simply asked, 'So why don't you take a bunch of your nanobots and put trailer hitches at both ends, then train them to connect up and then expand and contract?' It all seemed so simple after she asked that."

Debra picked up the narrative. "So, Dad and Tom and Damon and I all worked on creating a new type of nanobot that

could link up in long chains and be taught to replace missing or withered muscle fibers. Then, Tom designed the programming and all that. I was a surgical resident, so I took a month off and came here and we installed—what was it, Tom? Fifty thousand nano-muscle-bots in one leg and about twice that in the other?”

Tom agreed that those were close, round numbers.

“So, how is Frank these days?” Bud inquired. “And, how long ago was all this?”

“Well, Frank is fine. It was just a year ago next month. He can walk unaided on the flat as well as on stairs. He has been trying to do a little running, but Tom is going to have to replace some of the programming to accommodate that sort of rapid movement need.”

“Plus, I’m going to replace the micro-computers we installed. Kind of like pacemakers in the chest, except that these reside in the upper thighs.”

“I would love to meet this wonder-man,” Bud stated. To himself he was also adding, *“And give the lucky son-of-a-gun a good handshake. I love Sandy, but if I had known that little Debbie Simpson was gonna turn out like this—”*

“You *can* meet him. He’s Phil Radnor’s second-in-command these days,” Tom told him with a smile.

Bud’s physical went very well, and was almost as thorough as his most recent space physical only lacking the centrifuge testing and the dizziness tests.

By the end of the three hours, Doc Rosenbloom had proclaimed him to be one of the most fit men she had ever seen. As he departed her office, she thought, *“Wow. If I’d known Bud was going to be so handsome and fit back when I was thirteen, I—”* She blushed at her thoughts, straightened her white tunic, and went back to sit at her desk.

Ten minutes later Bud reported back to Tom. “Well, guess

I’m in good enough shape to do some light lifting work, skipper,” he said.

“Right, and I’m only fit to invent new colors of wall paint. My guess is that Doc found you to be more fit than anyone else working here.”

They sat and talked for another hour before Tom suggested that Bud head home for the day and to report the next morning. Bud agreed and was soon driving his vintage tommycar home.

## CHAPTER 6/

### Settling In

IT TOOK all of two days for Bud to get back into the swing of things at Enterprises. Of course, there had been a lot of personnel changes and people who had been in junior positions were now often heads of their departments.

On day two, Bud wandered into a building that was totally new to him, having only been built and opened in the past year. A plaque on the door belied the importance of the building's contents. It merely stated **BUILDING 22 — STORAGE**.

Inside, however, as an almost complete museum of Swift Enterprises inventions and products dating back to the 1930's.

Bud wandered around each of the three huge rooms in the building fondly patting such things as the original Sky Queen—decommissioned more than twenty years earlier—along with everything, large and small, that Tom and his father had devised over the years.

The Flying Lab was in the same condition it had been in when it landed after a suicide attack had crippled her and killed eight Enterprises personnel. A mysterious black MIG fighter, one of many that had attacked Tom over a period of years, had dived into the right side, ripping away more than 40% of the plane and sucking the eight victims out into the icy cold of 50,000 feet. It had only been through Tom's superior handling that she had been able to land back at Enterprises and not crash into the ocean off of Maine.

Bud felt a tear come to his eyes as he saw her. He had been close to all of the lost men. After more than fifteen minutes he turned and walked to the next exhibits.

One room contained a pair of work sheds with a backdrop of

trees and Lake Carlopa. Without even looking at the information sign, he knew that these were a couple of the sheds shared by Barton Swift and his son, the original Tom Swift. Around the sheds, hanging from wires or on plinths, were such items as Barton's revolutionary torpedo turbine engine, Tom's electric rifle, his first airplane and glider and the first model of his giant searchlight—something that was a wonder of its time but put out as much light as one of Damon Swift's Light Emitting Tritanium Diode pocket lights.

Before walking on he stopped in front of the control panel and servomotor set that comprised old Tom's remote air bomber controls. "Helped win that war, didn't you, old fella?" he muttered.

Many of Damon and the most recent Tom's inventions, aircraft and spaceships were on display. Several, Bud knew to be replicas as the originals had met various fates. This included the beautiful Challenger. Although gleaming and impressive, the Challenger that hung from the ceiling was only a hollow, 4/5ths scale model.

Bud had to laugh when he looked at things like the flying kite he and Tom had flown. It now looked so small and flimsy. And the Dynasphere was just plain weird.

Tom's Aquadisk hung directly above models one through five of the deepsea diving suits that had been used over the years. He looked at the three original Fatman suits arranged around a model of the helium well valve Tom built. He was about to turn away when something hit him. "I thought Tom only kept two of them. Hmmm?" He glanced around and found the information sign. "Ah-ha!" he said. Tom had returned five years ago to the site where the Fatman suits had been scuttled and had been able to locate and retrieve one of them.

For more than three hours he looked around. Finally, as he was standing in front of two very odd looking items—one, an inflated ring criss-crossed with metal vanes below and solar panels on top, and the other a stainless steel cylinder on a



plain, gray box and featuring a cross-piece on top which also held solar panels—when he heard a door close in the first room.

Presently, Tom walked into the room and strode over to stand next to his friend.

“Any nostalgia?” he asked.

Silently, Bud nodded. He was surprised to find that he had a lump in his throat and couldn't speak for a moment. He cleared his throat.

“Yes. I'm remembering all of the great times we had over the years. And, all the near disasters. These,” he said, pointing at the duo of inventions, “are so very, very important and yet they are just sitting here, like everything else. I was wondering why no special notations?”

Tom looked upward, taking in both the ERB—Endless Rain Barrel—that had been such a boon to countries where water was scarce, and the ozone cleaner/generator hanging above it. That invention had been mainly responsible for rebuilding the ozone layer over the South Pole area and had helped slow global warming to the point where simple steps taken by industry and individuals had been able to halt it, then begin its reversal.

“Well,” Tom said finally looking at his friend, “the OzoNuts did their work like anything else we've ever come up with. It just seemed right that they were part of the whole display and not made to be anything special.”

But placed a hand on Toms shoulder. “Skipper, you really need to have a better sense of perspective. Last I read, these two little guys are probably responsible for saving a billion lives and countless species that might have died if not for the water the ERBs provided.”

He told Tom that if he took over the reins at Enterprises, one of the things he wanted to do was to update all of the

information signs. “Besides,” he added. “Why signs when we could just let people wear a wireless TeleVoc receiver and be told everything they want to know?”

“I've always felt that good old reading made things more meaningful, Bud.”

The two friends had lunch in the Executive Dining Room. Both remembered Chow and his strange but usually delicious concoctions, but agreed that the new head chef, a graduate from Chow's French cooking school, was pretty darn good.

As they munched down on a fresh blueberry cobbler for dessert, Bud turned the conversation to a serious matter.

“Tell me, and I mean truthfully, okay?” Tom nodded but frowned as he was unsure where the conversation was about to go.

“Go ahead.”

“Right.” Bud took a deep breath. “Why has Sandy stayed married to me all these years?”

Tom stared blankly at Bud. He gave a shrug and turned his head slightly before saying, “Uh—”

“I mean, I've been a real chump. Class A, top of the list, chump. You know all about the problems we've had trying to make a baby, right?”

Tom looked as if he were running several scenarios through his head before replying. Bud knew the look, very well, and waited.

“Bud. My sister is totally in love with you. She has been since about ten minutes after you two first met. You were just about all she talked about for months back then. And, that was interspersed with talking about flying. She only has ever had two loves. One—emotional as well as physical—is you. The other—practical—is climbing behind the control yoke of

anything that moves above the ground.”

“Okay, but we’ve had issues. At least, I’ve had issues.” He told Tom of his great guilt about not being able to father a child, but Tom reminded him that both Sandy as well as Bud had been tested and had proven to be deficient in that arena.

“I do know that Sandy has felt hurt whenever you head out into space on some mission or another. She’s never told me, but she and Bash are like sisters, and she’s confided her feelings. But, I must add, she has never been out of love with you!”

Bud sat, looking miserable. “Am I making it worse by keeping it as an open subject?”

Tom thought and then nodded slightly. “Yeah. I think so. Bash told me that Sandy is so happy that you have decided to stay grounded. Oh, sure. She’s nervous that something will catch your fancy and off you’ll go, but she is over the moon right now. My advice to you is to keep your feet on the ground. If you get homesick for space, I’ll take you up on a few day trips, but I really think you should be sleeping at home each and every night possible. Get me?”

Bud said that he did.

The following three weeks were a whirlwind of visits to every department at Swift Enterprises and the recently built Swift Manufacturing Corporation—the replacement for the old Swift Construction Company—now sharing the Northern wall of Enterprises and filling an area almost as large. Together and including an increase in the Enterprises property twenty years prior, they spanned a rectangle of five miles along each end and more than seven miles on the sides.

When Bud had departed ten years earlier, the combined employee roster had been just under two thousand, five hundred. It was now topping four thousand with another two thousand at satellite manufacturing centers in California, New

Jersey and Idaho.

He had read the news but it hadn’t really sunk in that the Citadel out in the Southwest had been decommissioned, dismantled and bulldozed over eight years ago.

Even some of the old standards like the outpost in space had been totally replaced and now housed a hospital for people for whom gravity could be deadly. The old spokes of the wheel had been moved to the Moon and now were used primarily for housing for the eighty-three scientists and miners who lived and worked there in six-month shifts.

Loonau Island in the South Pacific, the site of the original launch facility for outpost-bound rockets had been devastated by a typhoon three years earlier and all launchings now took place on a man-made island some eight miles wide and located off the coast of what had been Suriname. It was now the I.N. Protectorate of Arawak, named in honor of the area’s original inhabitants.

As an International Nations protectorate, it had welcomed Western and European industry to set up facilities, so long as they remained carbon neutral, or what had once been called ‘Green.’ It had become such a success that several other countries had begun pursuing I.N. status.

The new island, christened Goddard Island, was anchored in a shallow bay and built on a system of extendible pilings that could raise the island above heavy waves or even lower it underwater in case of an attack. Violent storms were a thing of the past thanks to Tom and his Cyclonic Eradicator satellite, but high winds still meant periods of no launchings several times each year.

Bud’s Jupiter outpost mission had launched in part from Florida and part from Goddard Island. He had hoped to leave from the island but had drawn a ‘short straw’ and found himself at the old Canaveral Center for Space Exploration.

As he heard more about Goddard Island, he wanted to pay it a visit. “*Maybe I can arrange to take Sandy and Sammy for a day or two. Better check to see if it’s okay to bring a toddler, though,*” he thought.

A quick check informed him that more than half of the employees working on Goddard also lived there with their families and there were plenty of kid-friendly places to visit.

By the time his first month was complete, Bud was totally convinced that his place—his *workplace*, that is—was at Enterprises. He discussed his feeling with Sandy at dinner that Saturday. Sammy was being watched by Anne Swift that evening.

She simply nodded and got up from the dinner table. She came around as if to pick up his plate but pulled him up from his chair, wrapped her arms around his neck and jumped into his arms. Once settled, she merely said, “I love you!”

## CHAPTER 7/

### Taking Charge

BUDWORTH BARCLAY — MANAGING DIRECTOR, stated the sign on the door of the large office once occupied by Tom and his father, Damon. Tom had decided that he felt more comfortable in his remodeled laboratory/office one floor below that he did in the huge space.

Bud had tried to talk Tom out of it. “I really don’t know what I’ll do with all that space, Tom,” he said.

“With as many meetings as you will need to have this next few months, you’ll be glad of it!” Tom exclaimed. “Besides, it’s always been the control center. Enjoy it!”

Bud turned to his secretary, and told her, “Miss Farthing? Can you please have them make a new sign? Just Bud Barclay. I only get called Budworth by my wife and only when I have forgotten to do something she has asked me to do.”

“I’ll get right on it, Sir. And please, call me Penny.”

Bud looked at her and she looked at him, then they both broke up in laughter. “Oh, god. My parents were absolutely dreadful, weren’t they?” she asked.

“Bud stopped long enough to answer, “I’m not sure which sets me off more. Penny Farthing or Penny dreadful,” and they both collapsed in gales of laughter.

He pulled himself up and got through the door and closed it behind him. “I love this place,” he said to nobody other than himself.

His first day in the new job was filled with back to back meetings beginning at ten and going until seven than night. When he got home, Sandy took one look at his face and

hurried into the kitchen. She returned a minute later with a large, icy mug filled with a Pacific Northwest Porter that Bud favored. He took it, kissed her gently on the nose, and sank into his favorite chair.

No sooner had he taken his first, big draught of it that he heard his son coming running down the hall shouting, "Daddy! Daddy!"

He managed to get the mug onto the table just in time to catch his son who practically flew through the air and into his lap. Sandy came back into the room and started, "Sammy, daddy needs—"

"—Daddy needs a great, big hug. Can you give it to me?"

Sammy looked from his mother to his father and then pushed himself up from a sitting position and wrapping his arms around Bud's head. Bud returned the hug, slightly moving his son to one side so he could wink at Sandy. She smiled, blew him a kiss, and then turned to finish their dinner.

"How was the first day of college," she asked him as they munched on the salad she brought out first.

"Well, you remember how you had three or four classes at about sixty minutes each? Today I feel like I had sixty meetings at three or four minutes each. My brain is all jumbled. I don't remember what I agreed to this morning or even if I countermanded anything in meetings later in the day. How did your dad do it?"

"Well, until five years ago he had old Munford Trent. Munnie was about as good as they come when it came to keeping things organized. Too bad he passed away. I'm sure he really would have liked to properly train Penny to replace him."

Bud smiled at the mention of the secretary's name.

"And, don't you give her a bad time about her name, Budworth Barclay. I'm warning you. She's a real peach. Treat

her well."

He crossed a finger over his heart and raised his right hand. "Promise," he told her, still grinning.

"Dinner's on," Sandy stated and they headed to the dining room. Bud turned on his heels halfway there and returned to get his beverage. Once seated he took a deep smell of the food in front of him and smiled at Sandy. "Yum!"

"Momma? Can I hab a fish stick, Momma?"

"Sammy. You know that it is 'have,' not 'hab.' Now, ask again, please."

Momma? Can I *have* a fish stick?" He emphasized the word while at the same time widening his eyes and leaning forward.

Sandy told him, "We're having chicken tonight, Sammy. If you eat all of your chicken then you can have fish sticks for lunch tomorrow. Will you do that for me?"

"Yes, Momma." He turned to face Bud. "Daddy?"

"Yes, Sammy?"

"Can I *have* a fish stick?" Although he had learned the basics of pitting 'Mommy' against 'Daddy,' he hadn't mastered *art* of doing it out of hearing of each parent.

Bud glanced at Sandy and then asked his son, "Do you know what day of the week this is?"

Sammy's face screwed up a little as he mentally went through his personal calendar. They could hear him mutter, "*Monday, Tудays, Wensday, Thirьsday*—" He looked up at Bud. "It's Thirьsday, Daddy. Right?"

"Well, that's the right day just the wrong way to say it. Thursday. Today is Thursday. Thursday is chicken and Friday is fish sticks. You may have a fish stick on Friday."

Sammy seemed ready to accept that his current day was not the correct 'fish stick day' so he dug into his chicken, fish soon forgotten.

About half way through their meal, their son finished his and was allowed to go into the living room to watch a movie chip. His favorite was a modern remake of the old classic, *101 Dalmatians*. He had shown no interest in the original 2D version but would sit, rapt, in front of the new 3D animation version and always giggled when the strand of spaghetti whipped through the air over his head and disappeared into the dog's mouth.

Sandy looked at Bud and then asked, "Are you going to be able to handle it? I mean, all the meetings instead of climbing into something and soaring off."

He thought about it. "Yeah. I guess I can. Penny is going to give me condensed notes about all the meetings from today so I can review them tomorrow morning before round two hits. Come to think of it, I've got only a couple things on Monday and Tuesday. Oh, and I have to go to Washington Wednesday for the day and then London on Friday."

"But, you'll be home for dinner those nights?"

"What good is a Mach 3 business aircraft if you can't cross the Atlantic in an hour ten? Know what I mean?" He said the last as if he were a hick, sticking his upper teeth out and making a face

She smiled. "I love you, Bud. Know what I mean?" She made the same face back at him.

As the weeks and months went on, Bud grew more comfortable in his position, even proving his mettle when he was able to secure a sizable contract from the South African Alliance, one that everyone told him was certain to go to a consortium of three Asian companies.

When he told Sandy about it that evening, she beamed with

pride. "I knew you had it in you, Bud. I'm so proud. So, what was your secret?"

"Well, I just pointed out how Swift Enterprises had been instrumental in saving more than a dozen different old African nations from drought and starvation. I asked them what the Asian companies had ever done for Africa and all they could come up with was 'radios and televisions.' Guess that did it."

She gave her husband a congratulatory kiss and then headed for the kitchen.

"Oh, hey," he called after her. "When's Bash due? And Mary? I've lost track of dates."

"Don't worry. Bashi is due in two weeks and Mary three weeks after that. I've already made sure Penny has cleared both yours and Tom's calendars. She has made it clear to the folks in D.C. that neither of you can be counted on for meeting for that time."

Bud grinned. He knew who 'had his back!'

**EPILOG/****The Future**

TOM, SANDY AND BUD waited, along with Tom's daughters, until the nurse came to let them in to see Bashalli. He gave them a warning to keep the visit to under ten minutes and then left them to enter the room.

Somehow, Bashalli had managed to locate a brush and some basic makeup. Her hair was in place and she not only had color in her cheeks, she had her favorite light red lip gloss on as well.

"How's my girl?" Tom asked her, softly, kissing her forehead.

She smiled at him. "Pretty good for having gone through fifteen hours of labor."

Bud looked puzzled. "I thought that it was suppose to get quicker and easier after the first. What gives?"

Sandy planted an elbow in his left side, and he let out a little "oof" noise. "Budworth? You just hush. Bashi did things the old fashioned way. That's all."

"That's right," Tom added. "No timed drugs to induce the different birth stages. We both wanted this one to be the most natural thing possible."

Bashalli smiled at everyone. "Tom was so good to be with me through the whole thing. Quite the change from when Mary came into the world. You two were off on that rescue mission to Mars and couldn't get back in time. Sandy and I had to tough that one out."

"But, I made the other two—I mean the other three," Tom said.

"From beginning to end," his wife teased him. "Have you

seen him?"

Tom's face split in a huge grin. "You bet! Gee, Bash, he's beautiful. As beautiful as the girls were."

"I just wanted to break into the room and pick him up and give him a squeeze and tell him that Auntie Sandy will always be there for him."

"Don't forget his doting big sisters," Mary reminded them. Her sisters nodded in agreement.

They all laughed. Sandy had picked up each of the girls on their birth day and told them exactly the same thing.

Sandra said, "Just as long as you and Mom decide on who has to take care of who's baby. I'm not doing double duty once yours comes out next week!" She looked meaningfully at her sister's very distended belly.

When they went quiet, Bashalli looked at her best friend and sister-in-law. She could tell that something was going on in Sandy's mind, but couldn't put a finger on it. She decided to ask later, when they had some time alone.

All too soon it was time to leave. But, as they were about to head for the door, it flew open and there stood Anne Swift, a huge bouquet in her hands and an old-time Teddy bear tucked under her arm.

She breezed in, past the protesting nurse and turned back as if to acknowledge his presence, but instead pushed the door closed in his face.

"I'm here," she announced.

She moved past Tom and Sandy and practically knocked Bud down getting to the bedside. "These are for you," she told the new mother, setting the flowers across her legs, "and this is for little Tommy." The bear was placed right next to Bashalli.

“Uh, mother? Tom and I haven't officially come up with his name yet.”

“Well, that's just fine. Of course. You're the parents. You can name him anything you wish. I, however, will always call him Tommy, or Tom when he gets old enough!”

Anne nodded her head as if that settled matters. And, it did to her satisfaction.

Tom looked at Bashalli, his sister, his daughters, and his best friend before addressing his mother. “Momsy, Bash and I were thinking of naming him Damon.”

“I know. In memory of his grandfather. And, I'm positive that Damon would have been so amazingly honored that he would have been speechless. But, and as much as I truly loved your father, I had a real problem with his nickname back in college. His friends called him ‘Dame.’ No grandson of mine is going to go through life being called ‘Dame.’ Okay?”

“Mother. Why didn't we ever hear about that?” Sandy asked, smiling at the very thought of her father having that for a nickname.

“We *both* wanted to put that behind us as quickly as possible. This family has had some interesting names for the men. Before Damon there was George, preceded by Tom, and before him was Barton. Before that was James Wainwright Swift and before him there was Arbuthnot. Gawd! Can you imagine being called Arbuthnot Swift?”

Her audience laughed.

“So, here is the real reason why I want you to think of calling him Tom. The world is full of inventors, most of whom you never hear about, at least not by name. You *do* hear of the Edisons, and the Einsteins, and a few others. *And*, you also think of the name Tom Swift. It really means something. It is a proud name and known even above your father's.”

Sandy had tears streaming down her cheeks; Bashalli wiped away one of her own and Bud stood silently, his mouth silently repeating, “Tom Swift, Tom Swift.”

Tom reached out and took his wife's hand. She gave it a gentle squeeze, a sign they had agreed on years earlier where he asked for and needed her silent approval. He glanced at her in time to see her wipe away a second tear with her free hand.

Letting go of Bashalli's hand, Tom walked to his mother and took her in his arms. He kissed her on her cheek, and was surprised to feel her trembling a little. He whispered in her ear, “That's good enough for us, Momsy. Can we give him Dad's name as his middle name?”

She pulled away from him and smiled up into his face.

“Your father and I would be proud, Tom.” She turned to the rest of the people in the room and looked deeply at each one. “We are—I am so proud of each and every one of you.” In her mind, she was thinking, “*Bashi has never looked prettier. Motherhood becomes her better than anyone I've ever known.*”

She then looked at Bud. She smiled at him and he returned it as she thought, “*My Sandy has been through a lot in her adult life. How lucky she is to have Budworth beside her!*”

Lastly, she looked at her daughter. “*How pretty she is, even in her forties,*” she thought. Then, she saw something. A little something in Sandy's face. Anne's eyes widened as she looked right at her daughter.

She raised one eyebrow. Sandy raised the same eyebrow right back at her. And smiled a little smile.

“*Oh, my!*” Anne thought as she glanced at Sandy's midsection and then back at Sandy's face. “*Sandy and Bud will sure have something to talk about tonight!*”

She opened her mouth to speak.

Catching a minute shake of Sandy's head, Anne broke off her stare and turned back to Bashalli. It was, after all, Bashalli Prandit Swift's day. Sandy's would come later.

"You look radiant. Almost as if you had only been through fifteen minutes of labor, not fifteen hours." She reached out to pat Bashalli's hand before adding, "It's time for us—all of us, Tom—to leave you alone for a few hours."

As she turned to herd them all from the room, she looked back and added, "But we'll be back tonight at five *to see my grandson.*"