

## **A Wing and a Prayer**

By John Morano

Excerpt from chapter 2

### "Weathering the Storm"

With nothing but a wing and a prayer Lupe burst into the dawn sky. A pink sunrise hailed the beginning of his migration to the Islands of Life. Although he was still many miles inland, Lupe could smell the sea. Instinctively, he pursued the vast waters.

As he looked down from his flight, Lupe saw many trees, hills and small streams. But more than anything else, the planet was covered with the immense nests of the man-flock. Trees were killed, hills were flattened and streams were drained; all to make room for the countless nests and the wide hard paths that scarred the planet's skin.

Some of the nests were so tall they reached up into the clouds higher than the trees, never noticing the Petrel chasing the sea. Lupe gazed at the massive structures created by the man-flock and a sad smile crossed his beak. He was reminded of something Kurah had told him as a chick.

Kurah was just putting the finishing touches on a fresh nest, a nest any Petrel would be proud to call his own. Although most of his flock chose to burrow into the dirt, Kurah felt a nest was safer. He liked to be able to see what approached without being cornered underground.

Lupe remembered the help he had given his father, how he gathered all the loose twigs and debris he could find and carried them to the site, a ridge not far from shore, covered with pines and shy oaks. When Kurah was done a small nest sat softly along the rocks. Kurah nodded approvingly and then flew off to feed.

The more Lupe looked at the nest, the more he became convinced he could improve it. So, while Kurah was away, Lupe began his alterations. By the time his father returned, the young Petrel had piled enough twigs around the original nest to house several families. The cozy creation of Kurah was now a massive sloppy pile of debris.

As usual Kurah said nothing. He looked over his son's work, and then he looked a little longer. While Lupe waited to be congratulated on his craftbirdship and sense of style, Kurah hopped over to the mount and began removing excess twigs. Somewhere under there, he hoped, his original nest survived.

This was too much for Lupe. He screeched, "Father, what are you doing? I helped you make the greatest nest on the island! None is bigger than ours!"

Kurah dropped the twigs from his strong beak and turned to his son. "I thank you for your help, Lupe, but what makes a nest great is not its size. The only thing that can glorify any home are the birds who live in it. Their nest will only be as special as they are."

The father leaned over and slowly ran his beak up and down the little one's neck. He whispered to Lupe, "Always fly the good flight. Only your spirit will bring honor to this spot, not a bunch of twigs."

As is often the case with small birds, Lupe only partially understood what his father was saying, but happy for the chance to help, he joined Kurah in removing the debris. When they were almost done, Lupe made one last appeal.

"But look how big, how soft I made it," the little one peeped.

"You are right son," Kurah replied. "It is big and soft, but does that make it better?"

Now Lupe was really confused. He looked at his father, smiled and shook his head...yes.

So Kurah asked, "On cold nights, what keeps you warm?"

Lupe thought..."You and mother covering me."

"In a nest this size, would you stay warm?"

Lupe began to understand.

"On dark nights, when the snake is hungry, what keeps him from my sleeping son?" Kurah continued.

Again Lupe thought..."The snake must pass you and mother before he can reach me!"

"When the hungry hawk flies overhead, who is he looking for to become his meal?"

"Little ones," then Lupe swallowed hard and added, "like me."

"So my son, what size nest keeps you warmer, safer, and hides you from the hawk in the clouds?"

"The little one!" Lupe laughed.

Kurah smiled, and together they removed the rest of the twigs.

Later that evening when Lupe, Kurah, and Raza were nesting down for the night, Lupe, never one to give up on a new thought or idea, popped his head up between his parents and asked, "OK, I know it's better to have a small nest, so if I can make one too big, can I also make one too small? How will I ever know what size is just right?"

Raza looked down and answered her son's question with another question. "From where you sleep, little one, what do you see?"

Lupe looked all around him, concentrated and screeched, "Two large rumps!"

"Good!" Raza cackled. She continued sincerely, but slightly ruffled by the realization that her rump could seem that large to someone, "Now you know how big your nest should be...Large enough for two adult rumps. The young will squeeze in between."

Although this was a very happy memory, Lupe was saddened by the thought that his next nest would probably be a lonely one, only one-third full. Whenever he was faced by a long flight, Lupe liked to look back at his younger days. It helped him feel as though his family was still with him, and in one sense maybe they were...