

Chapter One

“Look,” Niel told Olavo. “I’m not asking for you to get me the entire encyclopedia on them, I’d just like one book, you know, the overall history.”

The capybara pulled the raccoon into his bedroom. “And I would like to help you.” He closed the door and took his clothes off. “But what you want doesn’t exist. The Cuevas refused to put anything in writing.”

“So is that going to be for every family?” Niel asked undressing. “Or is it because of the tension I could feel in the room? Before they found out who my father was.”

“It predates this Patriarch.” Olavo pushed Niel onto the bed. “And I don’t know about the other families.”

“Can you put me in touch with someone who—”

“Yes, yes, but after.”

Niel grinned and spread his legs.

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The guy Olavo put Niel in contact with turned out to be Dario. The same Dario who had sought Niel out while he was staying with the Medeiros. The capybara had heard many stories about how the Survivors had started, and they didn’t all agree with each other, even the people within his family didn’t all believe the same ones to be true.

The one thing Niel did get confirmation on was that the expedition to Antarctica took place around World War Two. It could be a little before or after, that Dario wasn’t sure of, but Nazis were involved, all the stories he’d heard agreed on that. Dario agreed to contact someone he knew with the Suzuki family and try to get them to talk with him, but made no promises.

With a starting point, Niel threw himself into research in his free time. World War two was now so far back that just about everything had been declassified, which meant he had a lot to go through.

He found four antarctic expeditions linked to World War Two, one in Thirty-eight, one in Thirty-

nine, in Nineteen-forty, and forty-three. There were two more by Argentina, but they only coincided date-wise and weren't as a result of the war. Niel felt that if either of them was where the Survivors came from, Dario would have mentioned it. Also, the insistence on the Nazi left him feeling it was an Allies versus Axis push behind the expedition.

That meant the Third German Expedition, the United States Service Expedition, or the German Pacific Commerce one were the most likely. He quickly encountered a problem, each of them had survivors.

He knew five men had survived, but only because he knew about the Survivors. As far as the public would know, this was a lost expedition. Those proved difficult to find. By the time the second war came about, how dangerous the Antarctic was had been documented, so it didn't take much for any expedition to turn around as soon as things went wrong.

At least documented expedition. But if they hadn't been documented, it was out of luck.

Then he had a thought. How much earlier would an expedition have to take place to be considered part of the world war by historians? The Survivors considered it so, but could that be because they saw what happened after? Or before? There was nothing after the war but close enough Niel counted it, but before? Between thirty-three and thirty-eight, eight expeditions had been launched for the Antarctic. Three of which were never heard of again. None of them were by the US but one was by the Germans, in thirty-seven, followed within a month, by a British one.

No one ever said the US was involved in it. Niel made an assumption because he was American, but he didn't even know if Jarod had been at the time of the expedition. How hard would it have been for someone to pass themselves off as American before the advent of widespread computers?

There wasn't much information on the expeditions themselves. Both were noted as exploratory, with the captain's name and for the German one a list of the researcher. The British one only listed the captain, but Niel was able to use that to find a listing of all the ships he'd captain and for whom. The thirty-seven expedition was funded by the British Museum and the Cambridge University. From there, he found out the expedition was in response to a report from a passing plane claiming to have seen a structure in the ice where none were documented. There was a note mentioning a German name Niel had seen in the list from the German expedition. It was handwritten and the scan hadn't been great, but it read like who had written it didn't want to let the other have the prestige of finding proof of a civilization on the Antarctic.

It also mentioned the names of the people he wanted as part of the expedition, Jarod Spencer caught Niel's attention, and looking him up, he found a picture of a raccoon in his fifties, or maybe sixties in Cambridge's public file, an archeology teacher and researcher. Maybe he was younger. The picture was old and the file hadn't been in good condition before being digitized.

He found an obituary for Jarod Spencer in forty-eight that indicated he'd been missing as part of an expedition to the Antarctic for years and was now officially being declared dead.

Other than the man being too old, what Niel had found lined up. So if this was the same Jarod how did he explain the one he'd met looked like his older brother while this one could be his grandfather?

Magic, of course. He didn't know what had happened. Maybe they'd all been turned into young men as part of meeting a god. Maybe it was part of the deal they'd struck. Only one person

really knew, and Jarod had made it clear he wanted nothing to do with him. Niel didn't think he'd appreciate being questioned about his past. If he had been interested in reconnecting with whoever Jarod Spencer had been, he would have gone back to that life and not become whoever he'd been until he took the Irvine name.

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(so I pieced all of this together feel free to change things as needed. I gave Jarod a different name than Irvine because it wasn't clear if that had been his name back then, or he changed it when he returned from Antarctica. Also, his original nationality of birth was never established as far as I remember and could find, so I made him British. Again, feel free to change things as needed)

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Bleary-eyed he looked up from the desk's display when the door closed.

"Man, what have you been into these last weeks?" Brendan asked. "Have you even gotten laid?"

"Every day," Niel replied. "What's with the bag?" the cougar was packing.

"I'm getting my stuff ready, my dad's picking me up right after practice tomorrow to take me home."

"But tomorrow's Wednesday."

"Yeah, the Wednesday before thanksgiving. We don't all live a stone's throw from here. I'm looking at a four-hour drive with my dad tomorrow, after having had the coach scream at me for two hours."

It couldn't be.

Thanksgiving wasn't for another two weeks. He brought up the date and was horrified at what he saw. "Oh shit."

"You've got time, relax."

"It's just me and my dad again this year." This couldn't be happening. The two of them at the dinner table with all this tension. The previous two years had been okay, they'd miss celebrating with the Hertz, but he and his dad hadn't been someone who'd withheld the biggest secret possible then.

Maybe he should just not go home. Send his dad a message and claim he was busy with... something. Fuck what would his father think? Niel preferring staying at the dorm rather than having thanksgiving with him. He wasn't *that* angry at him, but with just the two of them, there would be questions, evasion, then he'd get angry and the day would be ruined.

Wait. Why did it have to be just the two of them?

He was out of his chair, jacket in hand, and out of the room before Brendan could ask what had happened.

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"Niel!" Limbani exclaimed on opening the door. "Hungry again?"

"Actually, no. I need your help."

"What's up?" Kuno called from the kitchen doorway, a pint of ice cream in hand.

The monkey put his hand in Niel's pants. "Give me a second."

Niel moaned as Limbani stoked him. "Lim, please, Not now."

"Limbani, stop," Kuno ordered. He was next to them, studying the raccoon. "What's wrong?"

Reluctantly, the monkey removed his hand.

Niel caught his breath. "This should be with the rest of the guys, or at least those who aren't going home for Thanksgiving." A minute later he had eight other guys in the living room with him.

"Alright. Things are a bit tense between me and my did."

"Have you two considered fucking it out?" Erwin asked and Niel glared at the rabbit. "What? It's a great way to work out the anger and then you can talk the problem through."

"Niel isn't Society," Peng said. "Respect that he won't be comfortable with some of the things we do."

"Whatever it is, I'll help," Limbani offered eagerly.

"I..." Niel looked for the right words. "No, Lim, thanks, but no."

"I can be subdued."

The explosion of laughter made the monkey cross his arms over his chest. "Now I know who's going without sex for a while."

"I do appreciate it, and if you want to, you can help me with another problem I'm going to have with the away game this weekend."

"Oh, do I get to do the whole team?"

Niel sighed. Maybe someone else would be best. "We'll revisit this. Basically, I need a wingman to come with me to my dad's for thanksgiving."

"Are things that bad?" Kuno asked.

"Is it because you went with Olavo?" Gagan asked.

"Not really, but also kinda. I just don't want to have thanksgiving alone with him this year, and I thought that since some of you aren't going home, maybe one of you would be interested in having dinner with us."

"Unless it'll be vegetarian, I have to decline," Gagan said.

"Wait," Kuno said. "If what you're looking to do is throw interference between you and your dad, one person isn't going to be enough."

"We're not set up to feed a large group, Kuno."

"I wasn't thinking of us going to your dad's place," the margay replied, smiling. "I was thinking of you and him coming to my family's place."

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