

Chapter One

Niel looked out the window as they entered Frat Row, ignoring the looks his father sent him. He parked in front of Sigma Theta Gamma, and Niel was out before the engine was turned off. He didn't run. He just wanted space the car hadn't provided. He buzzed the door, and Stewart joined him before it was answered.

The elephant looked at them. "Yes?"

"Hey, Gagan. Is Kuno around?" He fought the urge to just barge in. He should have texted, let the margay know he was coming, at least.

"I don't know." The elephant looked at Niel's father. "I think he's with someone. Come in, before one of the seniors accuses me of not being a good representation on the frat and decides to punish me."

"The cage?"

Gagan stared at him, first in confusion, then horror. Right. That hadn't been used since the bat, even in jest. "Can I tell him what this is about?" he asked once he closed the door.

Niel sighed. "Remember when I told your guys that if I somehow ended up with some strange magic-related condition, I'd come to see you instead of running off?"

Stewart coughed.

"Yeah," Gagan said hesitatingly, glancing at the older raccoon. "That was part of the joke."

"I wish," Niel muttered, then sighed again. "Turns out I've developed a case of needing sex to stay alive, and that I probably caught it during the party, so I'm really hoping you kept a list of all the guys who attended."

Glass shattering on the floor cut off Gagan's reply. Niel stepped around the elephant to look at the living room's doorway. Olavo was the only one there, holding a glass with a finger of amber liquid in one hand, the remnant of a decanter at his feet, with liquid splashed all the way top the foot of the couch. The look of horror on the capybara's face gave Niel pause.

“Are you okay?” he asked lamely.

Olavo shook his head. “I think my father’s going to kill me.”

* * * * *

Olavo closed the door to the study, cutting off Gagan’s complaining about cleaning up someone else’s mess, and leaned against it. He was muttering in Spanish under his breath. Then he was reaching into his pants, giving it a few strokes, which caused Stewart to gape, then he was tracing symbols on the door.

“Why didn’t you ever mention you were part of the Survivors? (I think that’s what you called the Antarctica group)”

“They have a name?” Niel asked. “Wait, you know about that? That made it safe to talk, right?” Niel paused. “Why are you keeping this conversation from the others?”

Olavo looked from one to the other. “Alright. I need to know a few things before I can get into anything else. One, why didn’t you tell us?”

“I didn’t know.”

The capybara looked at Stewart with incredulity. “You didn’t tell him?”

Stewart seemed unable to decide if he should be annoyed at the tone or embarrassed at something. “I don’t really know anything either,” he finally admitted.

“How can you not? You’re his father, you know how this works.”

“He isn’t,” Niel said flatly.

Olavo stared at him. He pulled a chair and dropped into it. “Okay, I need a lot more information then. Do you know who your biological father is?”

“My great grandfather,” Niel answered when Stewart didn’t.

“We wanted to make sure he was genetically part of my family,” the older raccoon said defensively. “Niel is my son.”

“And you haven’t been educated on how any of this works?”

Stewart shook his head. “The only thing Jarod told me was that if Niel had sex with his father, his condition would become active.”

“That’s why I need the list of who was at the party. I don’t remember a raccoon in his twenties, but there were a lot of guys, and the whole night kind of turned into a blur.”

“He told you it would only happen if Niel had sex with his father?”

Stewart nodded. “I’m not into that stuff, so it wasn’t like that was a problem. Oh, and Jarod basically vanished again after that. I do have a number where I can leave messages, and I have, but my understanding is that he needs to go there physically or call in to get them. Jarod isn’t big on technology.”

“That isn’t how it works,” Olavo said. “All it takes is a man from that bloodline who is initiated.”

“So it didn’t have to be a raccoon?”

The capybara shook his head.

“Do you know who it is?”

Olavo hesitated. “I think I do. But since you don’t know anything about them, I think it’s best if I give you a rundown. First thing, they don’t advertise. The compact they made with Him works differently, so they never felt the need to incorporate within the Society. Do you know about

Antarctica?”

“The stories I’ve been told mentioned Jarod going there,” Stewart said. “The why is nebulous, and the what happened there even more so.”

“It was an archaeological expedition. I don’t know those details because they’ve never been of interest. They were caught in a storm. Most of them died. Five survived and made it into a cavern.”

“Some sort of ancient site,” Stewart provided.

Olavo considered it, then shrugged. “A stone block and six pillars. To a certain Society, that would be a holy site, so yes. To the rest, to them. It was barely a place to get out of the elements. That’s where He appeared to them. They made a pact, gained abilities. With them, and a lot of luck made it off that continent and ended up in Argentina, where my family helped them. That’s why I know about them. That and because one of them was a capybara, he became really close to my family.”

“You guys had sex,” Niel provided. “Come on, I know how that part works.”

“And children. If it was on purpose or not, I don’t know, but our bloodlines mixed heavily. My mother’s a Cuevet.”

“Wait. How can your mother be related to them? Don’t you only have boys?”

“That’s one of the reasons why they never integrated within the Society. Very few of them are okay with how we live. You need to remember that the Society predates a lot of what you’d call societal structures. We made our pact with Him in ancient times. Back then, boys were considered men a whole lot sooner than we do now, so it was never questioned that they’d have sex with whom we consider a boy now, was part of it. It’s remained because it’s part of who we are, what our rituals are.”

“Are you saying you—”

“Yes, they do, Dad.” Niel was literally of two opinions about it, due to that bat. On one side, he thought it aberrant that grown men had sex with boys, even as part of a ritual, but on the other, he had a set of memories where that was acceptable since there was a god involved in it. It wasn’t about men taking advantage of kids. It was about bringing them into the fold, ensuring they had power. Fuck, that first time pretty much ensured they never got sick.

Niel could see why those rituals would remain as they’d always been.

“The Survivors were born in the mid to late nineteenth century. The idea of having sex with a child was repugnant to them, enough they would have rather died than agree to it, and for some reason, He was okay with it, and with them siring children like anyone else. Not just boys. But only the boys can be initiated, even if the bloodline will be passed along with the women.” Olavo rubbed his temple. “We have people trying to figure out why He’d agree to something like that when He wasn’t starving. He’s a god, so He has his reasons, but they are a mystery to us.”

“I guess it isn’t only God who works in mysterious ways,” Stewart said with a chuckle Olavo didn’t share and Niel didn’t feel like indulging.

“But that is why, if I’d known you were part of one of the Survivor’s lines, you and I wouldn’t have had sex after your eighteenth birthday.”

“So before that it was fine?” Niel asked,

“Clearly,” the capybara replied.

“And this is because we had sex at the party?” Niel remembered that, clearly, and he didn’t regret it.

Olavo nodded. “This frat has to be cursed.”

“Nothing you need to know,” Niel told his father.

The copybara took out his phone. He let out a breath. “I need to call my father.”

“Aren’t you worried he’s going to kill you?”

Olavo let out a mirthless laugh. “Oh, he will. But if he finds out what I did from someone in the frat talking to their father, he isn’t going to just kill me. He’s going to make sure I have a couple of years without sex before he does it. While I’m signing my death contract, you should talk with Kuno, Niel. It’s his family’s city. They need to make sure there’s nothing in the medical record that’s going to raise questions.”

“Like blood work showing my body isn’t absorbing any nutrients?”

The copybara sight. “Exactly. And don’t worry about what you tell him. He’s going to find out soon that you do or not.”

Niel nodded and opened the door to Olavo speaking Spanish. He wasn’t surprised to see the assembled men in front of the door and pushed his way through them, wishing Kuno was one of them.

“So,” Limbani said, all smiles, “are you feeling peckish? Maybe I can interest you in some South African sausage?” He started unbuttoning the tail strap and Stewart cleared his throat. The money looked him up and down, licked his lips. “Are you hungry too? It runs in the family, right?”

“No, he’s not hungry,” Niel sighed. “Neither am I. Keep your pants on, Lim. And no, I don’t care what you say. I have more important things to do than have sex right now.”

“I thought you needed it to live,” Limbani replied, pouting.

“What?” Gangan said at the glare Niel gave him. “You announced it in the hall. That isn’t the actions of someone who wants it kept secret.”

Niel sighed. He had a point. “Look. I have things to deal with. Once that’s done. You guys and form a line to fuck me.”

“Niel,” his father warned.

“My life, Dad. I’ll fucking sleep with who I want.” He pushed his way through the other and went up the stairs. He knocked on the door and entered. The margay looked up at him from the end of the bed, legs over a horse’s shoulders and a blisshed-out expression on his face. Which vanished the second their eyes met.

“Bert,” he said somberly. “We’re going to have to finish this later.”

“I’m almost...” Bert panted.

“Later. Don’t make me freeze it off.”

“If it helps,” Niel said. “There are half a dozen guys down the stairs who’ll be happy to let you finish with them. And I’m sorry for getting in the way.”

“You wouldn’t look like that if it wasn’t serious. I’ll make it up to you, Bert.”

The horse gathered his clothes and exited, nearly bowling Stewart over. Niel considered slamming the door in his father’s face. Instead, it motioned for him to enter, then closed it.

“What’s wrong?”

“I’m magical too, and I was in the hospital where they have my blood and have run tests that aren’t going to make a lick of sense to anyone. Olavo suggested having your family make sure nothing came of that.”

“You’re magical?” the margay asked in disbelief

“Yep.”

“As in one of us? Please tell me we didn’t cause this.”

“It’s not another Thomas,” Niel said. “And I didn’t catch everything Olavo said, but yeah, it’s relating to the Society.”

“How?”

“His grandfather, my actual father, is to blame.” Niel heard his father’s shuffling.

“Okay, I’ll see it’s done, but I’m going to have to explain why.”

Niel gave Kuno the quick rundown of what had happened to him, making sure to send a glare his father’s way anytime he mentioned Jarod. Once he was done, Kuno was on the phone, speaking quietly, and he opened the door to leave and Olavo was about to knock.

“I’m not going to die,” the capybara said, “so long as you’re willing to fly to Argentina with me tomorrow after class.”

* * *