

Chapter One

Niel was held by, of all people, the doberman who'd kidnapped him before the pedestal with the image of the raccoon carved on it. This close, he could make out that the man depicted was older and with an air of refinement. He wouldn't be surprised to see on any academic who spent more time in research than teaching. Possibly because the few pictures Niel had found of Jarod had been in black and white, but he could see the resemblance with the face carved into the stone.

Did this mean it wasn't the meeting with a god that had made him younger, but something had happened over the following years? Did it mean Niel wouldn't be stuck looking like an eighteen-year-old for all of eternity?

He looked at the Neo-Nazis assembled in the large chamber. If things went wrong, it was possible he'd be eighteen for whatever was left of his life.

Like him, the others were held before their corresponding pedestals, although Wieland was draped on it as he still couldn't stand unaided and his guard didn't seem interested in doing that. He could make out the capybara on his left and the kishu on his right. The ground they stood on had also been worked, a carved circle with lines that connected each pedestal, as well as going to the edges and criss-cross each other. There was a sense of purposeful geometry to them, but he couldn't make them mean anything.

The volume of conversation shifted among the crowd, growing excited. Even his personal guard was looking back at the cavern's entrance. A powerfully built man advanced with an entourage of a dozen other men. When they were close enough, Niel recognized the husky who'd taken him down on that man's left, the others were all unknown to him.

The man in the center, the leader, if Niel was willing to bet on it, was a wolf with a brown and gray coloring. Whistles and hooting welcomed him, fists pumps. The husky looked annoyed at the display, while the wolf took it in stride.

The group stopped a dozen feet from the pedestal. The wolf looked over the five of them, a

satisfied expression on his face Niel wanted to punch off. He was younger than Niel expected. Younger than his dad. Early forties at most.

He turned his back to the pedestal and addressed the crowd. In German.

Niel's guard cursed, in English, and the raccoon fought his amusement, before focusing on trying to understand what was being said.

The man's voice was loud and the words clear. A professional orator. He spoke of pride in the fatherland. Of a quest decades in the accomplishing. Of a relic brought back from a far land. Of the rebuilding of their people. Of perfecting who they are in the image of the original Wolf-Dogs—and here is motioned to the door. Of glories of old, and glories to come. Of raising Canidae above all others, where they belong.

No mention of Hitler, so that was good, right? His guard looked bored, and Niel wondered if he could body check him out of the way and run. His chains had enough look so he could walk, and so long as he was careful he shouldn't trip. Unfortunately, there were a few hundred people between him and the exit, and for as many guns as he saw, he doubt any of them would kill him and ruin this oh-so-wonderful moment.

The man brought a rousing speech to an end and cheers erupted. He moved aside and the husky stepped forward. When he spoke his words were direct, clipped. Instructions not to be disobeyed.

The seal would be broken, then Alpha Group went it. Beta, Gamma, and Delta would follow. The rest of the units would stand at the ready, but only enter if one of the principal groups called them in.

He looked over his shoulder and locked eyes with Niel before looking at the crowd again and instructing them not to dispose of the keys until the relic was in their leader's hand, but that if one of them became unruly, they were authorized to hurt them as required.

"Oh great," Niel grumbled. Not only was he relegated to the status of an object, but one that could be bent and scratched, so long as he still fit the lock.

"If he's hitting on you," The doberman growled. "I swear I'm going to kill you."

Niel look at the dog and smiled. "Wow, so that's who you're a bitch for?"

The doberman's fist was raised and wound back.

"Stop!" the dalmatian ordered, holding Fedor. "If you aren't going to do what you're told, you should have stayed in your country."

"I don't know what I'm supposed to do because I don't understand German." The dumb-ass was damned loud for being unsaid.

Niel snorted at the names the dalmatian called the doberman in German. "It is time to get them to break the seal." He pushed Fedor toward the pedestal. "You do know what needs to be done, correct?"

"Yeah, yeah," the doberman replied dismissively. "Hand around the heart so it will be pumping again." He shoved Niel toward the pedestal. "Ain't a hand in a heart I want to be pumping."

"Feel free to bend me over and fuck me," Niel offered.

"And strengthen you? I don't think so."

Closer, Niel searched the pedestal. He'd initially expected whatever their role to be to involve something on it, but the hand to the heart thing led him to think it would be lower. Then he saw the heart-shaped cavity in the top of the pedestal and he stopped.

It wasn't a cute heart like he'd find on a valentine's card. It was in the shape of a real heart, with arteries and veins branching out from it. Fedor was protesting too, while the kishu batted his guard's hand away with something that sounded insulted and shoved his hand in it almost in defiance. Wieland hardly reacted to having his hand pushed in, and Dario simply did as instructed, looking resigned.

Niel glared at the doberman. "Just try forcing me to do this."

The doberman grinned and reached for Niel's shoulder, but the raccoon took a step forward and slammed his shoulder into the man's chest as hard as he could. Hard enough he knocked him off his feet. Before Niel could take advantage of the situation, he had a revolver in his face.

"You enjoy causing trouble," the husky said.

Niel smiled and forced himself to ignore the cry of pain from Fedor. "Why don't you go ahead and make me pay for my insolence?"

The husky seemed surprised at the comment, then shrugged and pulled the hammer on the revolver. Niel was stunned his improvisation worked, before realizing the gun holding hand dropped before the gun fired.

In the silence caused by his ringing ears, Niel's nose was tickled by the scent he guessed was gunpowder. Then he sneezed and pain erupted from his leg. Then he was on the floor calling the husky all sorts of names.

"Get up," the husky told the stunned doberman, with enough disgust in his voice it pierced through Niel's pain. "Get him to the pedestal, if he does anything more, kick his leg." Then he left.

The doberman grabbed Niel by the shoulder and pulled him up roughly enough he screamed at the pain it caused his leg. "When this is over, I am going to fucking make you pay for making me look bad," he growled in his ear, shoving him against the pedestal. Niel forced himself to look at the others, Fedor was a crying mess, the kishu looked stunned at how Niel was treated, Wieland might be unconscious, and Dario didn't look up from the pedestal.

Niel help on to it for support, he wanted to glare at the doberman, but the hand was way too close to his leg. He gritted his teeth and put his hand in the hole at the top of the pedestal. There was an instant of relief that the inside was dry and rocky, then something clamped down on his hand, locking it in place. He tried to pull it out before the next part happened because he figured that wasn't going to be—he hissed at the pain that added to his leg.

"Fuck," he hissed. He hoped this wasn't going to take too long, because it was starting to—the room shook, the doberman jostled Niel's leg and after glaring at him, Niel followed his and the other's gaze toward the door. If he was suffering like this to get the think open, he was going to see what it revealed.

And then the floor dropped out from under his feet.

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He screamed in pain. It wasn't in terror of the fall, or the idea of what hitting bottom would be like. It was only the pain of his leg and the needles in his wrists. He fucking had the hole in his leg to prove he was in pain too.

The light above them went away as the whole dais left behind closed. Someone screamed, above them, that was definitely pain.

The fall slowed, and the doberman let go of the pedestal.

Niel punched him in the face as hard as he could, then was screaming and cursing at the added

pain to his hand, and the shift in position that pressed his injured leg against the stone.

The doberman sat up and glared at him. "I am going to fuck you—" something fell on him, splashing blood.

No someone, half of someone, Niel realized, his pain numbed brain oddly detached. The doberman made the same realization and freaked out, shoving it away and backing until he was against the side the Dias was dropping into.

Then it came to a slow stop.

Something clicked, and his wrist was released as soft lights came on, illuminating seven Neo-Nazis regaining their balance, one pallas cat in the ground, cradling his arm and crying. Dario still looking at the pedestal as if he'd checked out. Wieland was checked out, unmoving on the floor and the kishu was—

The Neo-Nazis trying to grab the white dog screamed as the smaller man took his wrist and twisted it. He glanced to the side at another Nazi, kicked something off the floor, and after a ricochet, a chunk of stone hit the man in the face and dropped him. The kishu tripped his guard, helped him down hard and only the kishu stood. Talking the gun off his belt. Instead of using it, he lobbed it at Niel.

"Catch."

Niel tried, but the throw was wide and his leg buckled under him, and with another scream of pain he fell back, into a Nazi's way, tripping him, and cursing the entire time. He realized the gun was next to his hand, grabbed it, and hit the Nazi with it until he'd worked out his frustration with the situation.

"Feeling better?" the kishu said.

"I will once someone tells me they know a healing sigil and they can use it on me and Wieland. Fuck getting shot hurts."

"That was very brave of you." The kishu gave a small bow. "I am Isamu. Isamu Suzuki. You are of Irvine blood?" He knelt next to Niel.

"Not by choice." Niel looked around, from his vantage point on the floor, he could see three unconscious Nazi, which he was confident hadn't been handled by his companions. He looked at the kishu. "Precision, huh?"

Isamu looked at him quizzically.

"Fedor said your family's power is precision."

"That is not the right word." He took Niel's palm and traced a sigil. "The bullet went out of your leg, so this is safe to do."

"So what's the right word for being able to take out a bunch of guys without moving from your where stood?"

Isamu shrugged.

Niel sighed in relief and the pain went away. The kishu left him and went to see the others. He closed his eyes.

"Irvine." Isamu shook his shoulder.

"Five more minutes, Coach."

"We do not have more minutes. I need your help."

Niel sighed. "It's Niel, Niel Leslie. Irvine's just my biological father's last name." He stood and took a tentative step. His leg was sore, but no more than that. He followed Isamu to Wieland, who was

still on the ground, unconscious. The Nazis they passed were restrained, and Fedor was busy tying another one of them. Dario was seated, holding his knees.

“Why haven’t you healed him?” Niel asked.

“Broken leg. I do not know the greater healing *phrase*. Must set first or heal wrong.” The kishu took hold of the german shepherd's knee and indicated the ankle. “Take and pull.”

“I don’t want to hurt him more than he is.”

“Take more strength than you have to rip leg. It aligns bones, then I heal him, then we leave.”

“It’s going to be hard to do with chains on.” Niel took then ankle, and after a hesitation, he decided it was best to get it out of the way quickly and yanked on it. Wieland whimpered for didn’t otherwise react.

Isamu handed him a set of bloody keys. “They are for the chains. From him.” He indicated half a body, then he was tracing sigils on the german shepherd. Niel took off his chains, then undid those around Wieland’s ankles.

“You okay?” he asked Dario.

“I should not be here. I am not important.”

“Most of the time,” Niel said, “it’s the people who aren’t important that matter.” He found the right key and took off the chain. “We’re going to be okay. Isamu’s pretty bad-ass, and it isn’t like we have to worry about food. The five of us just need sex, and the Nazi...”

A white hand offered him a gun. “For Nazi,” Isamu said.

“What? No. We’re not killing them. I was just saying we don’t need to stress. The danger’s up there, and they can’t get to us.”

An explosion sounded above them.

“You need to survey what you say,” Dario said, chuckling.

“It’s watch, and yeah, I really should.” Niel looked up. “You think that with our blood unlocking things whatever other magic that kept them from just blowing up the door is gone too?”

The kishu shrugged.

“Maybe not the door,” Wieland said, Fedore helping him walk. But this,” he indicated above them, “will not be as strong. We cannot stay here.”

“Door there,” the pallas cat pointed to an opening on the wall.

“We’re inside some unknown german ruin,” Niel said with a sigh. “About to set out into the unknown. Yeah, that’s what I’ve always wanted to be,” he said, dejectedly. “Indiana, fucking, Jones.”

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