
Chapter Three



THE ELITE

The reindeer of the North Pole are superior athletes—beasts of speed and ferocious strength unmatched by any and all creatures of their kind. Within the training complex, I could see them sprinting back and forth across the field, galloping up and down the stadium stairs, leaping, wrestling, lifting rocks, and treading air as long as they could without using their front hooves. In the center of all the action were Lars and Ivan, the Scandinavian and Russian reindeer coaches, wearing their baseball caps of red and green respectively. They were critiquing the reindeer performances.

“Insky! You need to be one hundred tenthz of a second fester or you vill never mek Christmas Eve time! You are a disgraze to zee name reindeer! One thouzend more spreentz! Ivan, make a note that Insky eez slecking.” Ivan wrote the comments on his clipboard by using the pen in his mouth.

I could even see Stardust and Moonbeam—the first female reindeer ever allowed to the tryout. They were standing next to the three champion reindeer—Ole, Boris, and Sven. These three reindeer were descendents of Dasher, Donner, and Comet—and they were terrifying. They were the biggest, most muscular reindeer I had ever seen.

All the reindeer were, collectively, a force to be reckoned with. Of course, the elite group donned “The Original Eight” had long since retired; their images immortalized on banners that hung around the stadium. It was the goal and purpose of any reindeer to make the Christmas Eve Sleigh Team and live up to the legends of Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donner, and Blitzen. Rudolph’s banner, however, was not hanging in the stadium.

It was felt, amongst certain reindeer circles, that Rudolph had not fairly earned his place on the team. He was dismissed as the “walk-on” of the team, forever benched all Christmases thereafter and later demoted to mascot.

Rudolph was rumored to haunt the training complex, singing his infamous song to taunt the generations of reindeer after him—a reminder to them that he was immortalized in a song and they were not. Thus, no banner was necessary.

The sight of such magnificent creatures was like a tractor beam pulling Snowflake in. As he hopped the fence, holding onto my feet as they dangled over both of his shoulders, I began to get nervous. “We shouldn’t be here,” I thought. But I was five, so I didn’t say

what I thought and, therefore, I said nothing. The whistles blew. All activity in the stadium stopped, and so did we.

"Snowflake," I whispered. "Let's go back." But it was too late. Lars and Ivan, with their hats branded "L" and "I" respectively, galloped angrily toward us.

"End vhat eez theez interruption to our eemportant dreelez?"

"Who are you?"

My mouth hung open, but I couldn't speak. Neither could Snowflake—he was an abominable snowdog. Snowflake's grip tightened around my legs to keep them from shaking.

"Vell?"

My mouth was still open, but nothing came out. Personally, I thought it was pretty obvious who I was since I was human. Luckily two other humans approached from behind and answered for me.

"It's Krissy, Ivan." It was my brother Nick.

"And his mutt, Snowflake." It was my other brother Nick.

"Vell, zay shouldn't be here! Zay are interrupting our tryoutz!"

"Ah, calm down, Lars. They aren't bothering anybody."

"Yeah, Lars."

Nick and Nick walked passed us toward the center of the field to watch the tryouts. It was one of the few times I was relieved and grateful to see my twin older brothers.

"Kreezy!"

My mouth closed.

"Beehind zee linez pleez! Santa vill be very angry if you get hurt!"

Snowflake and I retreated back behind the fence. Once again, the whistles blew and the drills began. Nick and Nick sat on a bench near Lars and Ivan in the center of the field, taking in all the action. They had the best seats in the stadium.

“It’s not fair, Snowflake!” Snowflake reared his head up at me. I wrapped my arms around his neck. “I wanna be in there.” He patted my head to comfort me. And then...it hit me.

“Let’s find a secret entrance!”

“Ruff!” Snowflake’s tail wagged furiously in excitement.

“Let’s go!”

He dropped down on all fours, taking off before I could move from his shoulders to his back.

“Snoooowwwflaaaake!!!!” I was holding onto his fur for dear life. My body fell to his right side as we ran around the stadium. I didn’t even know why we were running. I couldn’t see a secret entrance zipping around the complex. We needed to be creeping, crawling, sneaking. But that was Snowflake for you. At the speed we were going, I couldn’t hold onto his fur much longer. I was going to fall. “Snowflake....sstttoppp!!!!” He did and I didn’t.

I flew off of him and onto the ground. I thought I was going to stop the moment I hit, but I ended up skidding and spinning on my stomach across the cold, slick ground. How could I be skidding so fast on the *ground*? How was this possible? I stopped in the middle of the slick surface, about thirty feet away from Snowflake.

“Woof! Woof! Woof!” I immediately recognized his worried barks. I waved my hand at him.

"I'm okay, Snowflake!"

"Woof!"

He sat back on his hind legs, anxiously waiting for me to stand up and walk back toward him. I tried to push myself up, but it was too slippery. I fell back on my stomach. Again I tried and again I slipped. It was then that I realized I was on the ice pond where the reindeer sometimes played hockey. I had never been on ice before, and I was stranded in the middle of it.

By this time, Snowflake had decided to come and get me himself. I could see him testing the ice. His enormous paw shook nervously as he stepped forward. Looking back on it now, acting cautiously was pointless. The ice was too slippery.

Snowflake immediately slipped onto the ice and began spinning and sliding on his rear end towards the center of the pond. "Roof! Roof!" He spun and skidded right passed me, all the way to the other side. As he reached the end, his tail bounced off of the snow, knocking him back towards me. "Roof!" He was coming toward me at remarkable speed, his size barreling down on me.

"Save me, Snowflake!" I reached my hands out to him as he approached, hoping against hope I could grab onto his fur as he skidded by. As soon as he was close enough, Snowflake reached down with his mouth and lifted me up onto his back. "You did it!" However, we still couldn't stop.

Like a pinball machine, we bounced all over the ice, spinning and skidding every which way. I screamed every time we were about to hit the shoreline. I was having so much fun, I had forgotten all

about finding a secret entrance. I didn't want it to end. And it probably wouldn't have ended had it not been for a tiny, strange-looking device peeking out from the middle of the ice.

"Snowflake, look out!"

And just as the words escaped my mouth, the device turned its glass eye toward us and dove back under the ice before we crashed right into it.

"What was that?"

It looked like my telescope. We looked back only to see the faint remains of a hole cut into the ice. As we approached the shoreline once again, Snowflake wisely jumped off of the ice and onto the snow. I jumped off his back and was about to comment on the object we had seen in the ice, when Snowflake put his paw into the air, motioning for me to keep quiet. He began sniffing rapidly, smelling something only he alone could detect. He searched the sky. Why, I don't know; the device was in the ground.

And then I heard it—the cracking sound of the ice. I looked down and saw the ice cracking right in front of us! We leaped backwards. Snowflake broke into threatening barks as the device rose from the ice pond once again.

"Snowflake, look!"

It looked like some sort of pipe.

"Roof! Roof! Roof!"

The glass eye peered at us once again, studying us. But we were not afraid. Snowflake continued to growl and bark. The more he barked, the higher the pipe rose until a medium-sized object broke

through the ice and floated just above the water. It looked like...*no*. Could it be? *An underwater space shuttle* was my only thought.

"They're underwater space aliens, Snowflake!" I leapt onto his back. Where was my sword when I needed it? I must have dropped it near the training complex.

The pipe retracted into the space shuttle and a hatch flew open, followed by two tiny hands.

"We're being invaded!"

"Ruff! Ruff!"

Snowflake backed away from the floating shuttle just as a head popped up between its hands.

"It's a Martian! We're under attack!" But it wasn't a Martian, and this wasn't its underwater space shuttle. The creature that emerged had too pointy of ears and too long a beard to be from another planet.

"Identify yourselves," said the creature. It was a submarine and inside was an elf.