

Chapter 1: The family

Julmargo: The Truth of the Three

Mateusz Palczewski – www.julmargo.com

Wrocław in March tastes like cold tea with lemon—it's supposed to be refreshing, but it leaves a tart, bitter residue in your mouth. I stood on the balcony of our apartment in Nadodrze, watching the streetlights bleed into the puddles below. The air was damp, heavy with the scent of approaching rain, and I felt as if I were about to burst right out of my own clothes.

It wasn't just the usual feeling of being a "big kid." I was twelve, and theoretically, I should have been the smallest, the weakest—the one the older siblings kicked out of the room. But for a few months now, my body had become... a stranger. Every step felt too heavy; every doorknob felt too fragile. When I walked to school, I had the sensation that the sidewalk was made of play-dough.

"Ignacy! If I see your dirty sneakers in the middle of the hallway one more time, I swear I'll teach them how to fly right out the window!"

Julia's voice sliced through the evening silence like a sharpened

blade.

I sighed, pulling my hands away from the railing. When I looked down at them, I noticed something strange. For a split second, the skin on my knuckles looked dull, almost grey, as if it had momentarily turned into armor. I blinked hard. It was gone. But that feeling of "mass" remained.

I headed inside. Our kitchen was the heart of the daily chaos. Julia was sitting at the table—seventeen years old, blonde hair pulled into a messy bun, and a gaze that could make the toughest bully in my class suddenly want to bring her flowers. Julia was the oldest and a master at managing our domestic microcosm. She had something magnetic about her; when she spoke, you simply had to listen. Even when she was screaming at you about your shoes.

Beside her, Marmar, my fifteen-year-old brother, was hunched over a gutted toaster. Marcel was at that age where most guys only think about games, but he preferred to know why the games worked. He wore glasses that were constantly sliding down his nose, and he held a pair of tweezers like a surgeon.

"They aren't sneakers, Julka. It's an art installation titled: The Return from Training," I muttered, brushing past her and trying to keep my distance. I was afraid that if I accidentally bumped into her, she'd fly across the kitchen.

"Gogo, don't get philosophical, just move them," Julia shot back, though the anger had vanished from her voice. She smiled at me, and I suddenly felt... safer. That was her power, though back then we just thought it was "natural charm." People simply softened when she was around.

"Marmar, what are you staring at now?" I asked, leaning over my brother.

Marcel didn't answer right away. His eyes, usually calm, were darting rapidly from one copper wire to another.

"Something's wrong here," Marmar whispered, as if talking to himself. "It's not just a short circuit. This copper contact has the wrong... density. It shouldn't look like this, Gogo. It looks as if someone deliberately programmed this metal to snap after exactly a thousand uses. Maybe that's how manufacturers drive business these days?"

"Program metal? Give it a rest, it's a fifty-zloty toaster," I grunted, but Marmar shook his head. He always saw more. He claimed the world wasn't a collection of objects, but a web of connections—a code that could be read if you only focused hard enough.

The front door opened with a heavy click. Our parents walked in. Both worked in a biotech lab and usually returned home full of

energy, debating new research. But today was different. Mom was pale, and Dad was nervously adjusting his bag strap, casting quick glances back at the stairwell before locking every bolt on the door.

"Kids, are you home?" Mom asked. Her voice trembled in a way that sent goosebumps racing down my arms. Or were they goosebumps? I felt the air around me begin to pulse.

"We're here, Mom. Is something wrong?" Julia stood up, immediately sensing the shift in the atmosphere. As a seventeen-year-old, she was our first line of defense against "grown-up" problems.

"We need to talk," Dad began, sitting at the table. "But first... let's have dinner. Just a normal, family dinner. Please."

That "please" sounded like a goodbye.

The Calm Before the Storm

We ate in a strange, suffocating silence. I felt worse by the minute. Every bite of my pierogi felt as heavy as a stone, and my chair began to creak under my weight, even though I weighed the same as any other twelve-year-old.

"Gogo? Are you alright?" Dad asked, looking at my hands gripping

the fork. The fork was now bent into a perfect 'U' shape. I hadn't even realized I'd done it.

"I... I don't know, Dad. I feel... denser? Like the earth is pulling on me harder than usual."

My parents exchanged a look. In Mom's eyes, I saw pure terror, but also a strange hint of pride.

"Julia, what about you?" Mom asked. "Still those dreams about sounds?"

"They aren't dreams, Mom," Julia replied, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear. "Today in music club, I was singing and... every mirror in the room shattered. The teacher thought it was a draft, but I felt it. It felt like my voice was a physical wave. Like I could hit someone with it."

The silence in the kitchen became so thick I could barely breathe.

"It's starting," Dad whispered to Mom. "The Triad is activating. We didn't have enough time to hide them."

"Who is activating? Dad, what are you talking about?" Marmar put down his tweezers. His perception was working at full throttle now; he was staring at Dad as if he could see his heart racing beneath

the skin of his neck. "You're lying. Your pulse is 110 beats per minute, and your facial muscles are twitching in a way that means you're afraid of..."

Suddenly, the lights went out. All of Nadodrze plunged into darkness.

Down on the street, tires screeched. Then came the thud of car doors slamming. One, two, three.

"Marek?" Mom whispered, turning deathly pale.

"They're here," Dad replied, lunging for the window. "Eterna Corp. They found us. Elena, take the children to the bedroom. Now!"

"I'm not going anywhere!" Julia shouted, and her voice echoed off the walls with such force that the glasses on the table jumped.

"Who are those people?!"

"Julia, watch your brothers!" Dad grabbed me by the shoulders.

"Gogo, listen to me. You are the youngest, but you are our shield. Whatever comes through that door, do not let it touch your siblings. Do you understand?"

I felt liquid lead begin to flow through my veins instead of blood. The fear that had paralyzed me moments ago suddenly

transformed into something else. Into strength. I stood in the hallway, blocking the passage. Julia stood behind me, her hand resting on Marmar's shoulder.

A massive boom shook the front door. The steel frame buckled inward.

In the darkness, I saw the red dots of tactical visors. Men in black armor burst inside with the grace of predators.

"Leave them alone!" I roared.

I didn't know what I was doing. I simply shoved the air in front of me with both hands. The shockwave was so powerful that the lead intruder flew backward into the stairwell, ramming into his teammates. For a fraction of a second, my skin turned as hard as diamond.

"Don't touch my family," I growled. My voice no longer sounded like a twelve-year-old's.

The fight for our lives had just begun. And we had just stopped being an ordinary set of siblings from Wrocław.