

Chapter 14: The collective

Julmargo: The Truth of the Three

Mateusz Palczewski – www.julmargo.com

With every passing second, the entrance grew wider and the light brighter.

"I can't see anything!" Gogo shouted, shielding his eyes with his hand.

"Me neither. Step back, we don't know what's in there," Julka added.

But I could see everything—I was mapping out the streams of light coming from two massive lamps. Right past the entrance, stairs led downward, and at their base, to the left and right, were the massive light sources. In the middle stood two people pointing in our direction.

"It's them, they finally reached us, the whole Julmargo, the triad, we're saved," I lip-read the words from the woman on the right. The man standing next to her smiled widely and turned off the lamps.

"Julmargo, finally! Come in quickly, we're on your side!" we heard a loud call from below.

"Don't be afraid, sorry about the light, we had to make sure it was you. Come on in, you're in the Safe House," the woman added.

Julka and Ignacy could still barely see, but for me, the situation was becoming clear. The people standing below were genuinely thrilled by our arrival, waving and smiling warmly at us. It really looked like it was safe here, and that this was exactly where we were supposed to end up!

"We can go in, this is where Dad sent us. They've been waiting for us!" I told my siblings, taking my first steps forward.

"Wait, who's been waiting for us? Do you see Mom and Dad?" Gogo asked impatiently.

"I don't know if our parents are here, but for now, I see two harmless-looking people inviting us in and looking happy to see us. Come on, let's go!"

I grabbed Julka's hand, she grabbed Ignacy's, and we headed down together. Once we reached the bottom, we stood face-to-face with a couple older than us. She was wearing a green jumpsuit and a headband; he was in black cargo pants and a tight tank top. They

stood there, staring at us with smiles, as if we were some kind of... salvation.

"We've been waiting for you for so long, you have no idea how glad we are that you're here," she began, standing with her arms wide open as if she wanted to hug us right then and there. "I'm Ola, and this is Filip. Come on, come meet the rest."

"Hello, you were waiting for us? How did you know we would get here? Who are you?"

At that moment, we heard the sound of a hatch slamming shut behind us, and the place we were in lit up with the glow of dozens of lamps hung symmetrically along the walls. It looked like we were in some kind of mine—irregular walls, almost black in some spots and whitish in others. The place instantly reminded me of our famous Wieliczka Salt Mine near Kraków. Filip pointed down the corridor, and Ola briefly replied that they would tell us more soon, giving an inviting smile.

"Alright, let's go," Julka looked at her brothers, making it clear they didn't really have any choice but to trust their hosts.

We started down the corridor. It was quite chilly, but compared to the heat outside, it felt downright pleasant. You could catch the scent of moisture and... salt in the air. Maybe the comparison to

Wieliczka wasn't so far off after all.

We walked in silence, and after a short distance, the corridor opened up into a wide space where more people were waiting. They were all slightly older than us, but still quite young. Standing in a circle, they smiled at us warmly and gestured for us to stand in the middle. We glanced at one another with a hint of dread but also wonder, because you could feel we were truly welcome here.

As soon as we approached the center, everyone began clapping energetically, shouting over one another:

"We've been waiting for you!"

"Great job, Julka! Way to go, Marcel! Awesome, Ignacy!"

"Now everything will work out!"

"Welcome home!"

"The Collective is complete!"

And as if that wasn't enough, after a moment, they all synchronized, chanting:

"JUL-MAR-GO! JUL-MAR-GO! JUL-MAR-GO!"

We stood there speechless. It lasted for at least another minute until everyone quieted down a bit, and a tall brunette stepped toward us.

"Welcome, you are in the Collective's Safe House! I'm Kira, and I founded this place following your parents' instructions. I imagine you have a lot of questions, and there will be time for them. But first, please, meet the rest," she said, gesturing to the still-smiling people in the circle.

We approached each person individually, and right from the very first one, I realized this might not be an ordinary introduction. Filip, whom we had met by the stairs, started first.

"Hey, you already know my name, but most people call me Fifi. Sometimes I complain that it sounds a bit too childish for a thirty-year-old, but it sounds friendly and I've heard it my whole life, so so be it! I can lift three hundred kilos!"

"And I guess you're modest, too," Gogo laughed. "But I could probably lift that much as well!"

"I bet you could lift way more, Ignacy," Filip replied, bowing his head slightly.

From the very start, I wondered why they were showing us so

much respect here. That, however, was about to be explained soon enough.

"Hi, and I'm Natalia, and most people call me... Natalia." The next person didn't lack a sense of humor either, and this time we all started laughing. "My power is the touch of peace. Whenever someone is having a crisis, I help by holding their hand—after five minutes, all the fear and nervousness just melt away!"

"Wait, so every single one of you has some kind of incredible ability?" Julka asked impatiently.

"Wait until you meet everyone," Kira replied quickly, pointing to the next person. This time, it was someone almost Julka's age. The youngest right after us.

"This is Bartek. He's the only one who reached out to your parents entirely on his own," Kira added.

"Hi," the boy greeted us briefly with a gentle smile.

"Bartek isn't much of a talker, but his hearing is incredible. He's the one who heard you coming," Kira explained further.

After a short while, we had met all seventeen people. Everyone had some unique ability... not to say power. The number of questions

we wanted to ask kept growing, but what happened moments later complicated matters even further. Everyone, including Kira, began to step back. Once again, we were left alone in the center, while they formed a circle around us.

At the exact same moment, they shouted loudly:

"JULMARGO, we are at your service!" A piercing echo rang through the mine. Our new acquaintances bowed their heads simultaneously and stood completely motionless from that moment on, as if waiting for our orders!

- End of Volume 1 -

Information regarding Volume 2 coming soon!