

“Oh they’re so beautiful...so tiny...I love them already...”

“You get really mushy about this stuff don’t you?”

“Oh hush and come look at your sons...”

“Alright alright! I’m comin’ quit pinching...huh...not bad...not as gross as I thought they’d be...”

“Mmm...what should we name them?”

“Lady’s first, only fair considering you did sort of push em’ out of you”

“Oh stop being crass...hmm...how about...we name this one...Minh?”

“Never heard of such name...heh...I assume it’s from your culture?”

“Yeah...Vietnamese...how about you name the second one, dear?”

“Oh alright...if I must...hmm...how about...”

MAX

Chapter 1: Snow

“C’mon already, I ain’t getting any younger!” The monochrome striped kitty beckoned at his brother, floating precariously in the air.

“S-shut up...”

A small kitty of ebon fur nervously paced towards his older twin, with a white scarf flowing from his neck, and grabbed his brother’s tail – a habit that helped him calm his nerves.

CLICK

The two children were slightly fazed by the flash of light, as their mother finally lowered the camera.

“Aww, Max, darling, why aren’t you smiling?” The mother said, reviewing the picture on the camera screen.

The boys were born to a feline lady of pure white fur, shining even more with the compliment of her steely silver eyes.

“S-sorry mommy...” His frosty breath can be seen as the boy spoke, the cold snowy surrounding attributed to that.

His mother smile kindly, and rubbed her son’s cheek to warm him up a bit, “It’s alright sweetie, you still look very handsome”

She then planted a kiss on his cheek, making him blush even more.

“Yeuuck! Gross! You got cooties from Mom!” The older brother yanked his own tail away and playfully hid behind it from his sibling.

Max furrowed his brow a bit, “I did not!”

“Ew, don’t speak at me – you’re gonna give me airborne cooties!”

“Now now, boys, stop yelling, and Minh – it’s not like you’ve never been kissed by me before~...C’mere mister” She inched closer to him with grabby hands.

“GYAHHH, STAND BACK, FOUL WOMAN” Minh started flying around in circles as he attempted to evade his mother.

Max giggled as he gazed upon the scene, his mom always knew how to make him smile.

“Gotcha!” She said as she grabbed her son in his arms, and started giving him pecks on his cheek

“NooOOOooooooo! Just kill meeeeeeeee!” Minh writhed and struggled in vain

After a few more pecks, she finally let go of him. “Ahhh, now that that’s done – lets go home, it’s not good to keep you boys out in the cold like this – how’s the scarf, honey?” She looked over to Max
Max twiddled the ends of the white scarf with his small fingers, “I-it’s good, mommy, I feel warm just having it...”

She patted her son’s head, “That’s a good sport.”

Minh then popped up from behind Max’s head, “Let’s go show dad our pictures!”

“Yeah, lets!” She said in return

Max’s expression soured, “Ok...”

Their mother held both of their hands as they walked back to their home together...

After a short trek, they returned to their home – a small wooden lodge in the snowy mountains...their humble, yet warm home.

“Honey~ We’re homeeeee!” She exclaimed as she opened the door, with her sons in tow, closing the door behind them as to not let the snow in.

Yet they were met with silence – not a single reply from anyone.

She sighed and rolled her eyes, “Oh we’re playing this game, are we?”

A sinister grin formed behind her, slowly approaching her...before she lifted up a fist and hit it in the face behind her, “Hi honey”

A male cat of black fur and green stripes appeared, “OWW! Is that any way to treat your loving spouse, Mai?” He rubbed his damaged nose.

The boys' father was a particularly regal looking man. His age wore below his yellow eyes, but did nothing to hide the wisdom beyond his years.

She raised a brow, "Uh huh...worried huh?"

"Oh I was absolutely sweating bullets! How could I not when such-" He moved his hand over her hips, only to have them slapped away.

"Sid..." She pointed towards the kids behind him, "...not in front of them"

He moved his field of vision over to his children, "Oh! There you are!"

"DAD!" Minh flew up and latched onto Sid's head

"SON! How was your little outing?"

"Boring, as usual – Max got Mom cooties"

"I did not! And so did you!" Max yelled

Sid grinned, "Sounds fun, you know kids, I happen to be familiar with that specific kind of cootie myself..."

"Hun..."

Sid looked over to his wife, seeing her make a fist with a smile.

"Err...perhaps a story for another time, kids~" The father turned to meet the reluctant eyes of his second son, "oh...did your brother cry again?"

Minh giggled, "No, but he looked like he was about toooooo~"

"It wouldn't surprise me, really" Sid shrugged

Mai slapped his shoulder.

"Oww!"

"Hun...just...go play with Minh..."

Sid shrugged again, “If you say so, come on little pilot!”

Minh stretched his arms out and made flying sounds as he traveled on his father’s head.

Max had a sullen expression on his face, gripping his fingers into his fist...

“Oh sweetie, you know he’s just kidding around...” She bent down and rubbed his head

He sniffled, “It’s because I’m not like M-Minh...”

“No, that’s not...”

“Then why’s he so nice to Minh all the t-time...a-and not...” The boy began cracking up into tears

The mother quickly wrapped him in her arms and petted his head, “Honey...it’s ok...we’ve talked about this...your daddy just has a weird sense of humor...”

“B-B-But...” More sniffles and small beads of tears trailed down his face.

“Max, honey – look at me, just look at me for a second.”

The boy wiped away his tears, as endless as they were becoming, to look at Mai’s assured eyes.

“Never think that Minh’s more special than you – you’re unique in your own way.”

“B-But I don’t...I don’t even have,” Max paused in between the tears, “s-stripes”

“Nonsense – you have them right now, don’t you?” She pointed to the scarf she made him.

He sniffled, “Y-Yeah...b-but...”

She smiled and kissed him on the forehead, “Max, you don’t need special powers for me to love you...now wipe away those tears – you can’t help Mommy in the kitchen while crying can you?” He wiped away his tears, taking deep breaths in-between to calm himself down, before nodding in response – face still reddened from crying.

She held him by the hand, “Good, now let’s go hun, we’re gonna make something special today”

His ears perked up slightly in curiosity

She laughed a bit, “Oh you’ll see – let’s just say it’s a very special drink that my family always loved to have.”

Max’s sullen face crumbled, giving way to a smile, following his mother hand-in-hand into the kitchen.

Just those simple words were enough for me, her kind smile – her loving heart – a foundation standing tall for a frail child.

Those days seemed so much brighter.

How I wished it could’ve stayed like that forever.

END OF CHAPTER 1