

Alone Chapter 2

The first thing I felt was a muzzelful of snow as I face planted right into a snowdrift, legs flailing about like miniature windmills as they desperately fought for purchase. A shockwave of pain shot up through my spine as I plowed to a not-so-gentle stop. A wave of urgency and panic washed over me as I pulled my head out of the snow, but it was already too late. I turned my head around only to watch my house fizzle away in a flash of light, trapping me in whatever fate the old man had designed for me.

The moment the portal disappeared, something broke inside of me. Panic was replaced by a wave of complete exhaustion, the day's events finally catching up. My legs felt like wet noodles, and my heart was swimming around somewhere near my feet. This all seemed like a bad dream, even as I felt the freezing winds nipping at my fur and the cold wet touch of snow underneath my paws. I kept replaying the day's events in my mind; the more times I did so the less they made sense. I was at home, minding my own business. Then my old fart neighbor Wizard McWhatsit decided to completely screw my life over, which I was doing perfectly well by myself. And now I'm stuck on some lonely crap mountain ledge left to slowly freeze to death thousands of miles from the things I loved. Like being able to hold the tv remote.

With a feline groan I resigned myself to turning into a frozen catsicle as a biting wind rippled through my fur. My mind flashed back to all the horror stories I had read about mountain climbers, even experienced ones, attempting to take on the Himalayas and suffering horrific fates. Bodies trapped forever in a tomb of ice and snow, never to be seen or heard from again. The only thing remotely related to rock climbing I'd ever done was at a birthday party at Pump-it-up when I was 8. Tackling Earth's tallest mountains seemed like an impossible step up.

I pushed those daunting thoughts to the back of my mind as I squeezed my eyes shut and tried to wake myself up from this nightmare. This was impossible. I couldn't be here. I'd done nothing to deserve this. The harshest battle against the elements I'd ever fought was mowing my lawn. And now I'm duking it out one on one with Mother Nature for my very survival in an environment that could kill a man in minutes without extensive protection. I couldn't possibly win.

And yet... as time went by I found myself surprisingly un-dead. I kept waiting for frostbite and hypothermia to claim me, but after thirty minutes I had yet to produce even a runny nose. To be honest I was quite comfortable, an insulating blanket of fur shielding me from Mother nature's frigid wrath. At some point I drifted off to sleep, and was embarrassed to wake up to find myself purring.

"You will NOT enjoy this," I told myself angrily, shaking my head to clear up my thoughts. I needed to be rational about this. One wrong move equals a dead cat. *"You will list the facts about your situation and make a rational plan for the future, then act on this plan."* This sounded like a good idea, so I plopped down on my haunches and sorted out a mental list in my head.

1. *You are trapped in one of Earth's most dangerous environments.*
2. *You are not a human, you've been turned into a snow leopard.*
3. *This environment is deadly for humans, but is the natural habitat of snow leopards.*
4. *Thus, you are at least somewhat equipped to survive in this hellhole.*
5. *You must survive in this hellhole so you can maul the crap out of Cedrick when you get back home.*

Comforted by the first rational thoughts to enter my brain since I got here, I let out a sigh of relief.

“Maybe this won’t be as bad as it seems”, I told myself. “ If I just have a little positivity maybe I can get through this thing”.

The positive thoughts quickly vanished as I surveyed the mountainside on which I found myself. Of course Cedrick didn’t do me any favors in this department, apparently landing on solid ground was too much to ask for. No, I was stuck on a craggy ledge with a vertical drop of at least two hundred feet below me. Around me the majesty of the Himalayas unfolded like a tapestry, providing a fairytale view that would have been delightful if I wasn’t about to face my imminent death. Looking up, my situation didn’t get much better. More solid rock walls, another impossible climb. How in the hell was I supposed to tackle this?

Fueled with rage at the hopelessness of my situation, I decided to passionately let the mountain know what I thought. I let out a barrage of feline expletives, then winced as the sound slammed into my ears like a freight train. Holy crap, that was LOUD. It was far louder than any noise a human could make. It shattered the silence like a knife against a pane of glass, it was like a firework went off. The sound bounced off the mountain walls, echoing far and wide as the wind carried it like a letter addressed to the entire continent.

Instinctively my head shot around the mountainside, fearful of any avalanches I might’ve absentmindedly provoked. Fortunately my voice went unanswered by mother nature and she decided to spare me for another day. Or at least for a couple more minutes. Because if I didn’t figure out how to get off this ledge, being buried alive might be my best case scenario.

Suddenly my eye caught the glint of a grayish-white object half-buried in the snow. I cocked my head curiously, instinctively sniffing the air as I trepidly padded towards it. Already my body had a mind of its own, my tail and ears twitching of their own accord. The movement was so natural, yet unnatural at the same time. The sensations of cold air brushing against sensitive whiskers and the movement of quadrupedal limbs sent feelings of wrongness to my brain that made me feel sick. But it couldn't prepare me for the heart-wrenching feeling of my stomach being ripped out of my chest as I approached the foreign object in front of me.

It was a stuffed animal, or at least half of one. Only its back legs and tail were visible, as if it had dove headfirst into the white stuff. The grey spotted pelt and tail lined with faux fur were unfortunately all too familiar. What wasn't familiar, however, was when it twitched to life.

I nearly catapulted myself off the mountain as I yowled in shock, stopping myself just in time to save me from a 200 foot plunge. The stuffed animal's back legs were impossibly moving, as if animated by some unseen puppeteer. Soon all four of its tiny plush legs were flailing about, sending snow flying everywhere as it appeared to be digging itself out. I recoiled on the edge farthest away from it, going back as far as I dared as my battered mind tried to process this latest development.

"What the hell?" I bawled as a tiny, fuzzy head finally poked up through the snow, shaking off the white stuff before tilting its head in my direction. It stared at me with beady black eyes, a stitched smile plastered on its face. It would have been adorable if not for the fact that it was alive and staring at me like a prop in a horror movie.

In retrospect, I was probably overreacting. I was literally cowering in front of a pile of fluff one tenth my size, and I was the one with a fully-functioning pair of death mittens. But I was

stressed as hell and not ready for more bullcrap in my day. So to an outside observer, I probably looked like the one with fluff for brains.

After an uncomfortable silence that seemed to last an eternity, the stuffed animal seemed to realize I wasn't coming to it and began padding towards me on its tiny legs. I wanted to run but I'd run out of ledge. So I could only sit there as it waltzed right up in front of me, plopping down right underneath my nose. From this angle I could see that a piece of paper was attached to the stuffed animal's back. When I leaned in I could see writing on it.

Thought you might have trouble out there, so I brought you a companion. Don't worry, Charley's only here to help. Just follow his lead and let your instincts guide you. You're more capable than you think. Just remember, everything happens for a reason.

Best of Luck,

-C

I let out a low growl as the letter vanished into dust and blew away, like something out of James Bond. I glanced between the space where the letter once was to the grinning face of "Charley" sitting right beside me. I growled.

"Cedrick, you bastard."