



THEY KNEW THEY WERE FREAKS, EVERY ONE OF THEM, AND THAT THIS COMING TOGETHER WOULD SURELY REMIND THEM OF COMMON TRAITS AND EVOLUTIONARY CONNECTIONS THEY'D RATHER IGNORE. AND YET EACH YEAR THEY FELT DRAWN BACK TO THIS ORIGINAL SOURCE, BOUND BY MURKY FORCES AND IMPROBABLE HOPES.

THE MEAL OF COURSE, WAS ALWAYS DEPENDABLY EXCESSIVE, THOUGH AS THEY'D AGED THEIR TASTES HAD GROWN APART. NOW IT WAS POLAR SUN FOR THE EVERGREEN, ROAST HIKER FOR THE YETI, A DISH OF CUTTING REMARKS FOR THE ELF, AND SPIKED EGGNOG FOR THE SNOWMAN WHO LIKED TO DRINK.

WHO THE HELL WERE THEY TO EACH OTHER ANYWAY?

AFTER ALL THESE YEARS, IT WAS HARD TO SAY.

EXCEPT FOR DURING THOSE INEVITABLE MOMENTS WHEN THE RIDICULOUS BOUNTY HEAPED BEFORE THEM MADE THEM CRACK UP. FOR IT WAS THEN THAT ANYONE COULD SEE IT, THE SHARED LINES IN THOSE MOUTHS, THOSE UNMISTAKABLE CHICLET TEETH.

THIS WASN'T JUST A GATHERING OF SEASONAL TROPES.

THIS WAS A KIND OF FAMILY.