

NIKOLAS & COMPANY

Audiobook Adventures



Episode One

THE MERMAN AND THE MOON FORGOTTEN

NIKOLAS & COMPANY



BY KEVIN MCGILL
Illustrations by Carlyle McCullough

CHAPTER FIVE



Lyons? Did you hear me Nick Lyons?” Tim said, trying to keep pace with his brother up the canyon steps. “You went crazy back there. Certifiable. How hard did Rocky hit you? You were babbling on about Huron and Rones. They’re evil or something.”

Swish. The shed door automatically opened.

Nick stopped and sighed, “OK, fine. I keep hearing this, I don’t know, voice in my head. Something about a city—I don’t know.”

Tim stopped. “I totally called it. You *are* crazy. Just took a while to go full blown.”

Nick stepped through the shed door.

Beep, beep.

"Welcome Nick Lyons," Hospitality 3000 fired up. Just above the shed door was a cylinder-shaped sensor programmed to recognize and introduce every person that stepped through the doorway. Except this particular one added its own flair.

"Nick," Hospitality 3000 announced. "The believer of all things. Once, when Nick was five years old, he believed with all of his heart that people could fly. More specifically, he believed Tim could fly. So there Nick was, twelve stories high, holding a very scared Tim out of the window. That's when his mother, Sonya Lyons, let out a maternal shriek and lunged for the two brothers. 'In-the-Nick-of-time' became a popular catch phrase around the Lyons' home."

"Giving me flashbacks," Tim groaned. "I hate that thing, Nick. Turn it off."

"Can't," Nick said. "Daniel hid the shut off switch."

Nick's uber intelligent friend, Daniel, had taken the standard Hospitality 3000, found in most suburban houses, and demonized it. Somehow he figured out how to tap into everyone's social utility sites, email accounts, the Homeland Security system, and give what he called a full and honest representation of the individual.

"Bet you can turn it down." Tim leapt to the worktable and swept his hand around the edges.

Swish . . . swish. The door slid open.

"Entering Caroline Wendell," continued Hospitality 3000. "One of the three Wendell sisters hailing from the refugee camp."

"He-llo," Caroline greeted them in a breathy tone. She wore her usual print flower dress and horn-rimmed glasses, which was steamed up by a ceramic bowl teetering in her clutches. "I made food for the after party. Mashed potatoes."

"People only like Caroline because she can cook from scratch," announced Hospitality 3000.

"I wish we could shut that off, Nikolas," Caroline said.

"A rare commodity in this century. And for only a fourteen-year-old, she is a fantastic cook. Chocolate chip cookies after school, pie on Sundays, and a turkey for Thanksgiving. If boys won't fancy her for her looks, they'll fancy her for her key lime pie."

"The English accent just makes it more insulting," Caroline said.

Swish . . . swish.

"Entering Brandy Wendell."

"It's so making my hair limp." Brandy held a large, metal platter covered in aluminum foil. "Caroline? Where do you want your murdered cow?"

"Brandy couldn't be more different," Hospitality 3000 continued. "Being the youngest sister, she hates to cook. Brandy claims that it keeps her from her number one love: looking cute. In defense, Brandy also explains that cooking keeps her from talking with her friends, all 2,372 of them to be exact. Some people collect stamps, Brandy collects people."

"Caroline," Brandy said. "Your roast?"

"You made a roast?" Tim said to Caroline.

"Yes I did, Tim. It's a recipe I've wanted to try out for a while." Caroline shoved a non-functioning radio aside and set down the mashed potatoes.

"For an after-party?" Tim said.

Brandy called out, "Caroline? The murdered cow?"

"Next to the other thingamajig," Caroline said.

"Microwave," Nick offered.

"Oh. Is *that* a microwave? Neat," Caroline said, taking off her glasses to wipe off the steam.

"Oh. My. Gawsh. The smell of animal death—it's so in my sweater." Brandy plopped the roast down next to the microwave and quickly unbuttoned her cardigan. "OK. Angora. Six thousand dollars off the rack. Not that, you know, I actually paid for it."

"Where you get your clothes is a mystery," Caroline said. "We live in a refugee camp, you know."

"Daniel," Brandy said.

"Where does *he* get your clothes?"

"He has his sources," Brandy said. "It's all I can get out of that boy. Anyway, it's not like I ask where you get all your roast beef and pies."

"Pies!" Caroline put her hand to forehead. "Oh, dear. I forgot the pies."

"OK. Nick," Brandy said. "I expect a full on promotion to your little inner-sanctum here. Spent all morning getting the word out for your show. Most of them said 'no' to the show 'cause of the last incident with the burning down of the greenhouse and all, but 'yes' to the after party."

"Demonstration," Nick said.

"What?" Brandy said.

"It's not a show," Nick corrected Brandy, pointing to the machine. "This is a scientific demonstration."

"Yeah," Brandy said. "Whatever. When towers of flame and smoke are involved, it's a show."

"What will I do?" Caroline said. "I need those pies."

Brandy rolled her eyes. "Call Haley and tell her to bring them already."

Clop, clop, clop, came the sounds of wood hitting concrete from the outside.

Swish . . . swish.

"And now, all the way from the refugee camp, half-brothers Daniel and Xanthus Kobayashi," Hospitality 3000 continued its exposé.

Two boys stood in the doorway. One had Japanese features and leaned on a cane; the other was chubby and looked to be half-African, half-Japanese, and wore a pair of holobox virtual reality glasses.

Daniel walked in slowly.

"Twenty-year-old Daniel Kobayashi is not much taller than a hobbit and intelligent beyond his years. By the early age of ten he had made the front cover of Japan's holopaper, 'I'. They named him "Child Genius of The Year" for discovering the

very first non-metal magnet. That was until the genetic plague killed his mother, crippled him, and left him utterly hairless, which makes him more goblin than hobbit, I suppose.

Xanthus saluted Nikolas and flipped up his holobox glasses.

"Xanthus, Daniel's half-brother, is thirteen years old. Xanthus explains to everyone that he received his name from a visit in the night by an African tribal leader indigenous to the Sub-Saharan. The leader is known for his powerful magic and warrior-like skills. This would be true if by "African tribal leader" he means 'I live in my own fantasy world because I can't cope with life at the refugee camp.' Xanthus's pitiful faux hawk, his earring of a silver woman, and mismatched black outfit make for an awkward compilation and a lack of girlfriends."

Xanthus found a lone barstool, flipped down the holobox glasses again and announced, "Gotta beat this level, Nick. Let me know when you're about to make ecological history." With that, he was lost to the virtual reality world of *Magicgeddon*.

"Nick," Daniel nodded, his bald cranium reflecting the soft UV light.

"Daniel," Nick nodded back.

Daniel turned an inspecting eye to the room and began making his way around. Nerves crept up Nick's back as he watched the boy genius limp to the machine and inspect the Prometheus 10,000 like some five star general of science, if those even existed.

"Hmm," Daniel said to himself, then moved to the edges of the room where three fishbowls were placed on wooden chairs. Each bowl had a piece of charred cardboard taped to it, with the scribbled numbers #17, #18, and #19. The bowls were filled with sooty water.

Daniel traced a figure eight in bowl #17, and then tasted the black water.

A fish eye rose to the surface.

"So, yeah," Nick said. "We couldn't experiment on ourselves. I, uh, I've been testing the reprojected sunlight on the fish. Trying to get the levels right."

Daniel said nothing. He swished the water with his pinky finger. Another eye rose to the top, but this one was attached to a fish paddling desperately.

"Mom and Dad have like a hundred of those fish. They won't miss a few."

Daniel still said nothing.

"Well," Daniel finally spoke, "experimentation is essential to the scientific method."

Nick's shoulders dropped. The boy genius approved.

Swish . . . swish.

"Entering the oldest of the Wendell sisters, Haley Wendell —"

"I've got pies," Haley said. She stood in full karategi while holding two pies like a waitress at a small town diner.

"Thank goodness, Haley," Caroline clapped.

"My match went a little long. Sorry, Nick," Haley said. "Then Caroline went all manic about her pies."

"Haley!?" Tim yelled and did a 180°, the motherboard sailing from his hand.

"Tim!" Nick lunged for the motherboard.

"Hi, Haley," Tim's said. "How are you? How's life? Win any state championships? I bet you beat up all those girls. You're like a queen . . . of kung fu. A—a kung fu queen. Queen fu. Ha. Ha. Ha. Ha. Ha. Ha. Ha." Tim's smile could swallow the Mississippi river.

"Hey, Tim," Haley said.

"Great. Thanks for asking, Haley. Um, yeah . . ." Tim's eyes danced around the room, desperate to hold onto the anemic conversation.

"Sixteen years old," Hospitality 3000 continued, "with enchanting blond hair and deep, green eyes. Haley's name is on the lips of every boy at the refugee camp, without any aid

on her part. In fact, it takes a brave boy to ask her on a date, knowing that Haley responds with more than a 'no'."

Haley inhaled deeply and turned around. She spotted two old-fashioned milk crates underneath the workbench.

"She verbally assaults would-be suitors," Hospitality 3000 said, "leaving only a scarred psyche behind. Over Christmas break Weaver High School's basketball team, who had won four state championships in a row and were well on their way to winning for the fifth year straight, made a bet as to whom she would say 'yes' to first on the team. Every team member stepped up and took their turn.

"She told them exactly what she thought."

Haley stacked the crates.

"Not only did the basketball team not win state championship that year, the point guard asked to be transferred to another school because, and I quote from his Friendbank account, 'I have serious questions about my own ability to dribble a ball, defend the basket, or lift a fork and put it in my mouth.'"

Haley climbed the crates and faced Hospitality 3000. She looked around the room and locked onto Daniel with her steely blue eyes.

"Now only nerds and misfits dare to ask her on a date, as they are already accustomed to verbal assaults in a public environment. But, do not be fooled by her aloof countenance. She is madly in love with—"

"Haa!" Without moving her gaze on Daniel, Haley executed a perfect half crescent kick.

The now smoking computer system swung over the doorframe by a red wire.

CREZAKKK!

The box fell, shooting out a bed of sparks.

Haley jumped down and said to Daniel, "Put it back up and you'll be trading that cane in for a breath-operated wheelchair."

“So, guess what Haley,” Tim said, leaning against a small bookshelf. “I hit a girl.”

“You hit a girl?” Haley spun around.



NIKOLAS & COMPANY'S BOOK CLUB

Book Club Questions

- Name all of Nick's friends.
- Which friend did you like the best?
- Who have you met that reminded you of one of his friends?
- Nick wants to leave Earth. What's his plan?
- If you were in his situation, what would you do?

