

The Virus

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The wind was howling, and the scientists were freezing to death in a blizzard on the coldest place on earth. "It's freezing out here" Alan complains. "No kidding, Sherlock," Renae snapped. Loris pointed at a figure in the distance, "Look! A cave. Shelter!". The trio of zoologists were looking for an ingredient to cure a rare disease to save their colleague and close friend Garret. He had contracted the disease from performing an autopsy on a dead seal. He has two weeks before the disease takes his life. The trio left Dr. Edward Hale in charge of taking care of Garret, for he was the group's most responsible. They just hoped Edward wouldn't get it either.

Let's go inside the cave and wait out the blizzard," Alan says. They all agree and head inside. The roof of the cave has a spectacular bluish hue, and icy stalactites hang from above. A few stalagmites poke up from the floor of volcanic rock. From where the scientists were standing, the outside of the cave looked like a vast, empty, white void. The ice felt like it was freezing their fingers off. "If only Antarctica was still the tropical continent it used to be. Then, this expedition would have been much easier," Loris groans. "I hope we get back in time," Renae worries. "Don't worry, we should be able to get back on schedule," Alan stated. *I have worries myself though*, he thinks to himself. "Cheer up guys," Loris says. "We can do this." They set a few old newspapers they carried with them on fire, and they went to sleep thinking about the long day ahead.

The next day, the team left the cave and continued their journey. They left nothing behind, taking everything necessary with them in their packs. As the team walks on, they come upon a fork in their path, splitting into three directions. "Okay guys, Renae goes on the right path. Alan, you go on the one to the left, and I go on the one in the middle," Loris declares. The other two nod. Loris continues, "If you find a dead end, immediately turn back around to where we started. If you found the right path, come back and wait for the rest of us." "How will everyone get back at the same time?" Alan asked. "Just wait for the others, pea brain" Renae snapped, "It's not that hard to figure out." Alan took their separate ways. Alan goes down his path but comes upon a dead end. He turns around and waits for the others, just like Renae told him to do. After a few minutes, Renae comes along. "I think my path might lead us in the right direction." Renae stated. They waited longer for Loris, but she didn't come. After a while, they grew worried and impatient. "What about we go down her path to see if she is there." Alan suggested "Why would we do that," Renae said. "It would waste time for finding the ingredient. Our friend is DYING. I know Loris can find a way back to the lab." On that note, they continued down Renae's path, hoping Loris would make it out safely.

Over the course of the next few days, they made several stops for resting and eating food. Even though they didn't find Loris, they were determined to finish their journey. Though they hoped they would find Loris later, or she would find them. On day seven, they reached their destination. A cave with normal concentration of zinc, an important ingredient in the antidote. Garret- the infected scientist-mentioned seeing a cave with zinc, which helped the others get a place to start looking for the ingredient. They

went into the cave and set up so they could get some. They didn't know how much time they would spend getting zinc, but they knew they had to do it as quickly as possible.

They wandered around aimlessly inside the cave for a while, looking for the ingredient. After a few minutes, Renae saw it. "Look, some zinc!" exclaims Renae. Alan brings out a small plastic bag to hold the zinc. "If we leave now, we'll probably get back early," Alan claimed joyously. Renae agreed, "We'll be able to save Garret for sure." They left the cave with a bag of zinc and hearts full of hope.

The duo got back to base two days early. They walked into the lab, only to be greeted with empty tables and experiments halfway finished. The air was silent with nothing to be heard, not a single sound from anyone. It was so quiet you could hear a pin drop. They assumed Edward was staying near Garret's quarantine chamber. He wasn't there. The pair squinted through a window, but instead of seeing Garret, they saw a long object covered in a white cloth. Garret? They gasped. No, no, this could not be! How could their friend have died? They calculated that he should only die by the fourteenth day, yet it was only the twelfth! The two were frozen in shock. Their whole expedition was for nothing. They had lost Loris for nothing. The two wept in silence, knowing that they had made a grave mistake, and that their dear friend had passed only because of a small miscalculation. Dr. Edward Hale walks up to the sobbing scientists. He says gravely, "He died two days ago. I rung up for a plane to get him."

For the years that followed, the scientists despaired over their first and last trip to Antarctica, where they inadvertently caused the death of one of their colleagues and dear friends. As for Dr. Loris Garcia, she was never found again, despite multiple search efforts. The three remaining scientists blame themselves for all that occurred on that trip, scolding themselves for miscalculating such an important thing. The scientists vowed that they would never make any mistake of that degree ever again. Renae Schmidt kept the small chunk of zinc as a sorrowful souvenir from their trek across the Icy Continent. If they had been granted the power to go back in time, they all would have gone back and saved Garret.