



# THE TOURIST TRAIL

A NOVEL

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The Tourist Trail: A Novel

By John Yunker

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This is a work of fiction. All characters and scenarios appearing in this work are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Cover design by Rolf Busch.

*To Midge.*

*When the land has nothing left for men who  
ravage everything, they scour the sea.*

— Tacitus

# PART I

# ANGELA

IN DARKNESS, Angela ascended the winding gravel road. She carried a flashlight, but she kept it off. She knew the path well.

The Clouds of Magellan illuminated the white bellies of penguins crossing up ahead. Most stood at the side of the road and watched her pass, their heads waving from side to side. When one brayed, the high-pitched hee-hawing of a donkey, the others responded in kind, forming a gantlet of noise. It was mating season at Punta Tombo, and the males were rowdy.

At the crest of the hill, the road veered right and continued for half a mile to the vast empty parking lot where tourist buses and taxicabs disbursed their cargo during the day. Angela continued straight, onto soft dirt and dry patches of grass, sidestepping the prickly *quilembai* bushes and the cavelike penguin burrows. She stopped at the top of the hill and scanned the wide, arching horizon of the South Atlantic Ocean. A gust of wind nudged her from behind, and she leaned back into it, her eyes tracking slowly from left to right. The moon, about to rise, gave the sky an expectant glow. She looked for the telltale lights of passing ships but saw nothing but the stars.

He should be back by now.

The last she heard from him was a week ago. He was off the coast of Brazil and headed south, only eighty miles north of here. She had reviewed the weather charts, but there were no Atlantic surges, no last-second squalls that may have

pushed him off course, delaying his return. Perhaps he wanted to stay close to the others. Perhaps he was simply taking his time. Each day, she invented another scenario for why he was not on her shore, carefully ignoring the more rational, more depressing scenarios.

She was only supposed to trek up here once a week, a routine she'd once welcomed, a break from the camp. But when she lost contact, she began visiting nightly. Not that she would see him. But perhaps she would see something to explain his absence.

A star crested the horizon. She watched patiently as the light strengthened and inched from right to left, south to north. It was probably a fishing trawler headed for Puerto Madryn, returning from the Southern Ocean, its cavities stuffed with writhing fish and krill and the inevitable, under-reported bycatch. She felt her stomach tighten.

The moon began to bleed out over the water, erasing the ship from view. Angela sat down in the cold dirt and waited. A penguin brushed past her sleeve on his way to an empty nest, where he stood sentry. He, too, was waiting, demonstrating his fealty for a female not yet returned, as well as guarding his home. Every year, the males were the first to arrive at Punta Tombo to claim their old nests, under bushes or on the pockmarked hills, in burrows carved into earth. A hundred thousand of them, in a slow-motion land rush, scrambling over this nine-mile stretch of scrubland that hugged the ocean.

The females took their time at sea, gorging themselves on sardines and squid, gathering their strength for the six-month breeding season that awaited them, emerging from the water two weeks, give or take, after the males. Fashionably late. And if they were fortunate, if everything aligned, their mates were waiting at their burrows, their homes clean and dry, new twigs laid out to form a nest.

The males sang when their females returned, and the

females sang in response. They flapped their wings and dueled their beaks and circled one another, orbiting, an ancient bonding ritual, an anniversary.

But the penguin standing silently next to Angela would have no reason to sing this year. Of this she was certain. It was simply too late. The females that would arrive had long ago arrived. Chicks were already entering the world, some taking their first unsteady steps. In a few short months, it would be time for everyone to disappear back into the sea.

Perhaps this penguin was in denial, unwilling to accept his loss, or perhaps he was merely stubborn. Angela preferred to imagine the latter. He would stand by that empty nest until the end of the breeding season, and next year he would return and seek out a new mate. An empty nest rarely stayed empty for long. Angela often wondered if penguins mourn the missing, but universities don't award grants to answer those types of questions.

He should be back by now.

Angela waited another hour, until there were no more lights on the water. She looked one more time at the penguin at his nest, then stood and made her way, flashlight off, back down the hill.

## ROBERT

AFTER THE DRINKS and the dinner service, after the lights were dimmed and the curtains pulled, Robert extracted the television screen from the armrest of his business-class seat. He was not interested in the movies. He switched the channel to the flight tracker—a cartoonish map of the Gulf of Mexico with a little white plane suspended above, pointed south, creeping toward the tip of Colombia. Every few seconds, the screen refreshed itself, updating Robert on the air speed, altitude, distance traveled, time remaining. The dispassionate data comforted him, reminding him that he was making progress, that he was not lost.

He leaned his head back and closed his eyes, hoping to join the symphony of snoring bodies in the darkness around him. But he rarely slept in public. On those rare trips when his body did relent, he would often jerk awake wildly disoriented, spilling drinks and alarming neighbors—a side effect of a life spent constantly on guard. And then there were those rarer occasions when a flight attendant would awaken him to stop his shouting—a side effect of something worse.

Robert opened his eyes, sat up, and took a deep breath. He would not sleep tonight. Instead, he'd spend the next seven hours and forty-three minutes watching a little white plane inch its way to Buenos Aires. He didn't mind; at least it would be a quiet night, bathed in the blue glow of the flight tracker, his guardian compass, his night-light.

The light did not bother the woman passed out in the window seat next to him. If only she could have stayed awake a few hours longer. Dina. A cute but unnaturally tan woman in pink sweats. She was a model from Dallas on her way to Argentina for breast implants.

“They’re cheaper there,” Dina told him after the drinks were served. “And the surgeons are world-class.”

She flirted with him, drunk on pisco sours. He told her he was in sales, a safe cover. Up here, in business class, almost everyone was in sales. Up here, he could have been anyone, which was why he lived for these brief moments of recess, acting out the role of someone else high above the Earth, moments when he could imagine life as a civilian, unburdened by the nasty ways of the world, drinking pisco sours with Dina from Dallas.

She told him he should be a model, another cover he once used. She ran a hand through his dark hair. He ordered more drinks. He said her *before* breasts looked perfect as is. She gave him her business card and invited him to Dallas to test-drive the *after*.

For effect, Robert had opened his laptop, pretending to read sales reports. As if to taunt him, the computer too had fallen asleep. He checked to make sure Dina was still out, then poked the laptop awake. He studied up on the agent he was to meet in Buenos Aires, Lynda Madigan. She would be his partner for the duration of the assignment. Robert didn’t want a partner, let alone an agent he didn’t know, but he needed an interpreter, and she spoke fluent Spanish.

He imagined Lynda looking through a similar file, one on him, and he wondered what else Gordon, their boss, might have told her. Though they were all in the business of keeping secrets, Robert didn’t want to share any of his. But even Gordon didn’t know everything that had happened five years ago. Robert kept those other memories to himself, hoping

that he could somehow suffocate them. Instead, he ended up preserving them, perhaps all too well.

Now, as he leaned his head back in his seat, he felt the memories returning. He could see the slowly undulating horizon of ice as he hovered low behind the controls of a helicopter, looking for a Zodiac, a break in the ice, a bright red parka.

As the clouds had descended, so had he, landing on a low, tabular iceberg. He left the engine running and stepped onto the ice. The fog surrounded him, leaving his eyes with little to do but dilate. He started off into the white emptiness, arms out in front, chasing every change in hue, hopeful that he was headed in the right direction, though in reality he was lost in any direction. When the engine noise faded, he called her name, hearing only wind in response.

The ice had begun to shift, growing pliable. He looked down to see the tops of his boots bathed in blue water. The iceberg was descending. He hopped onto a neighboring berg and called her name again, louder. This ice, too, became unsteady, so he hurried to the next iceberg, then the next. The icebergs, once joined together like a completed puzzle, had begun to separate, revealing expanding rivers of indigo, until Robert found himself stranded on a lone sheet of ice, his feet now immersed in the subzero water. He could no longer hear the helicopter. He screamed her name, his ankles now underwater, its icy grip working its way up his calves, then his thighs, and he whispered her name, prepared for the end, to be with her again, then his chest, then his arms—

Robert opened his eyes to see Dina, leaning over him, her hands gripping his shoulders.

“What?” he asked.

“You were shouting,” she said.

Robert looked at the flight tracker—two hours and thirteen minutes remained until landing, the little white plane

hovering over the southern half of Brazil. Dina took her seat again, and Robert reached for a water bottle. He wiped the perspiration from his face. He sat up and noticed the blinking eyes in the darkness around him. He picked up his laptop from the floor and turned to Dina. "I'm sorry."

"That's okay," she said. "Who's Noa?"

Robert didn't answer. He had already opened his laptop, pretending to read sales reports.

## ANGELA

ANGELA WATCHED HER ASSISTANT extend the *gancho*, a long piece of rebar that was hooked at the end, into the burrow. Doug was on his knees, face to the ground, squinting into the tiny entrance, nudging the male so he could get a better view of the five-digit number on the stainless steel band wrapped around the penguin's left flipper.

"Three four six two seven," Doug shouted over the wind.

Doug was in his mid-twenties and, like most naturalists his age, looked more the part than old-timers like Angela, his senior by a decade. While she stomped around in worn tennis shoes and faded, thrift-shop khakis, he was a walking REI catalog: waterproof boots, camouflage pants with more pockets than objects to fill them, an Indiana Jones hat shoving his messy blond hair down over his ears, a blue bandanna around his neck. He was the type of assistant—*You say assistant, I say wingman*, Doug liked to say—that kept Angela's program running year after year, fresh from the classroom and eager for an unpaid adventure. Too young still to find the trip down here tedious—the ten-hour flight to Buenos Aires, the two-hour flight to Trelew, the four-hour bus ride on a gravel road to the research station. And it wasn't much of a research station at that: two cinder-block huts, one shower, and a public restroom they shared with the tourists who stopped to pay their admission fees and to shop for postcards and key chains.

Angela studied Magellanic penguins, named by Ferdinand Magellan in the sixteenth century when the Europeans were busy naming the planet after themselves. At last count, Punta Verde was populated by 200,000 breeding pairs—a count Angela was in the process of updating. The Magellanic species was the largest of the warm-weather penguins, its beak reaching the height of an adult human’s knee, its dominant features the black upside-down horseshoe mark on its white belly and a circular white stripe that curved up either side of its neck to its eyes. Each penguin had a different pattern of black spots on its belly that tourists often mistook for dirt. This was not the penguin to inspire movies or stuffed animals—it was not as majestic as an emperor, nor as colorful as a macaroni. It lived in the dirt and the muck of wet spring days, snapped at hands that got too close, and often honked incessantly, emitting the sounds of a donkey, earning it the nickname *jackass penguin*. But even jackasses needed people to look after them.

“You get that?” Doug asked.

“Three four six two seven,” Angela repeated back without looking up. She leafed through her notebook, her little *black-and-white book*, as she called it, looking for the five-digit number. She’d tagged thousands of birds over her fifteen years at Punta Tombo; every penguin fitted with a tag was listed here, with a number, place, and date. Yet despite such a wealth of data, most numbers were entered once and never again revisited. Tagging a penguin was akin to putting a note in a bottle, tossing it out to sea, and waiting for it to return. At night. It wasn’t enough for the penguins to come home; Angela also had to find each one, among thousands and thousands of nests.

“Did you hear that?” Doug asked.

“Hear what?”

“Sounded like an engine. A boat engine.”

Angela looked up and tilted her head back and forth.

“Must be the wind,” she said. She returned to her book.

“Red dot?” Doug asked, hopefully.

Angela didn’t answer right away. While finding a tagged bird was not as statistically significant as winning the lottery, it certainly felt that way at times—and the greatest jackpot of all was when they discovered a red-dot bird.

A red-dot bird was a known-age bird, one that had been tagged the year it was born and hadn’t been seen since. Young penguins typically spent four to seven years at sea before they reached breeding age and returned to their colonies. Yet not all penguins returned, and the reasons had been haunting researchers for years. Because red-dot birds had been tracked since birth, Angela and the other naturalists knew more about them than about any other tagged bird—and they still wished they knew more. But they took what they could get, recorded what they could measure. Whether five years or twenty had passed, finding a red-dot bird always felt like a family reunion.

But she was beginning to hope that this bird was not a red dot. She was reluctant to let Doug handle the bird, even though she knew he was due. It was the natural order of things, for researchers to pass on their knowledge and skills. Once they found a red dot, they had to weigh it, then measure its feet and the density of feathers around its eyes.

Doug hadn’t yet weighed a penguin, and once he did, it would be one less thing he needed to learn from her. One less reason to join her on these trips. One day closer to not needing her at all. Not that he’d ever needed her to begin with. The life of a naturalist was a lonely one, spent more with animals than with people. This was what Angela had wanted, and at thirty-six, she did not harbor any illusions about having children—the birds were children enough—but she did have her illusions about Doug.

Over the past few weeks, Angela had adopted him as she

had the birds. Every morning, she was first out of the dining hall to select her assistant and set out for the day's assignment. Doug was always out there waiting for her, a smile on his tanned face, while the other assistants were still cocooned in their sleeping bags or brushing their teeth in the public restroom. She knew by now not to anthropomorphize the penguins, but she could not help projecting her attraction onto Doug. That he was simply an early riser did not dampen her belief that he had developed a crush on her, and that perhaps when he no longer needed her, he would still accompany her. A comforting thought, particularly since they had indeed discovered a red-dot bird.

She looked at Doug and nodded.

"Kick ass!" Doug leapt to his feet and emptied his brown backpack of a caliper, handheld scale, and nylon strap.

This one had been tagged five years ago. Finally ready to breed, this penguin was probably in his second season at Tombo—returning to his natal colony to make a nest, find a mate, and begin a ritual that would last another two decades, if he was fortunate.

During Doug's first week at Tombo, against her better judgment, Angela had let him extract a penguin from its burrow. He had only just figured out how to handle the *gancho* correctly, and she had been giving him free rein with the birds. He was so passionate that she could not have refused him the opportunity. The scrubby hills were like a playground to him, and she enjoyed looking at the world through his sharp blue eyes, eyes that would wink at her on occasion across the dining room, a wink that took a few years off her life. Sometimes she imagined herself his age again, not yet jaded by the drudgery of Ph.D. politics.

She'd always kept her hair short, but its deep red color invited attention. She never doubted her ability to attract men, only her ability to keep them around. Her life was a

migratory one—six months here, six months in Boston, the cycle repeating over and over again. While most women her age were now cuddling their newborns, she was crouched over burrows in the relentless southern sun. Her face had begun showing signs of the mileage, wrinkles to the sides of her eyes, ridges that caught the dust like snowdrifts.

She remembered the first time she held a penguin in her hands, a fierce little lapdog, all muscle and motion; felt the tightly woven feathers; gripped that firm, fibrous neck as his beak thrashed dangerously about. She remembered the joy of holding this creature who spent most of his life in the water, that only for the sake of raising his young bothered to set food on land, that this gorgeous awkward creation was now between her two straining hands. She never forgot it. Her teacher was Shelly, who later recruited her for the job Angela had now: teaching Doug.

Shelly had waited four weeks before letting Angela handle a bird, but Angela was not as patient, not as thick-skinned, and when she first began working with Doug, she was quietly thrilled to have a handsome young man spending the day with her. She wanted to be the person that Doug would remember for the rest of his life. The woman who taught him everything. The woman who said yes.

*Hold the bird, she'd told him that first time. Firmly. Mind the beak. Grab the neck.*

Doug had been bitten so badly he had to be driven to Trelew for stitches. His natural instinct had been to pull away, but the penguin's serrated beak had hooked his flesh tightly and held fast as Doug tore what was left of his hand away. *It was like a Chinese finger prison*, he joked as the doctor sewed together the sinew of his left hand.

But Angela got what she wanted. He never forgot that day.

Now Doug used the *gancho* to pull the bird out of the hole by his feet, then clutched him swiftly by the back of his neck.

He clasped the neck with unflinching confidence, ensuring that the bird could not swing around and bite his arm. Angela slid the strap around the bird's waist, cinched it, and attached it to the scale. Then Doug let go.

The bird flapped his wings and snapped at the air as he twisted in circles. Angela read the weight aloud; Doug entered it into the notebook. Then Angela grabbed the bird and held him between her legs, to measure the feet.

The wind shifted. Angela heard an engine cough, coming up for air between the waves. She looked up, half expecting to see a boat cresting the hill, then heard a scream. Her own. The penguin had bitten the skin between her thumb and forefinger.

"Doug, take hold of the beak," she said, trying to remain calm.

Doug fumbled with the bird's wings, finally grabbing onto the head and prying the beak apart. Angela snatched her hand back. The bird squirted out beneath her knees and retreated to its nest.

Angela's fingerless ragg glove was shredded, and blood was beginning to bubble through the crevices and soak through the fabric.

She started up the hill, toward the sound. Doug followed.

"Where the hell are you going?" she said.

Doug froze.

"We're not done measuring," she told him. "Stay here. Don't let that bird go anywhere."

Angela stomped up the hill, angry with herself for making such an amateur mistake, for letting emotion get in the way of science.

The first thing she saw as she crested the hill were whitecaps blown backwards. She felt her body pushed forward by the stampeding wind, a breeze that had rolled off the Andes and gathered speed over hundreds of miles of nothing.

Then she saw him.

A man prostrate on a flat stretch of rocks that extended two hundred yards away from the beach. The remnants of an inflatable boat. It looked as if the boat had exploded, sending him and his belongings in all directions.

She hurried over sand and mussel-covered rocks, the sound of crunching shells in her ears as she neared him. He was facedown, a large man in a fluorescent yellow jacket and an early beard. The waves washed over his legs. She grabbed his arms and pulled him, as best she could, away from the water. And it was then that the body stirred and opened its eyes. He came to, as if from a deep sleep.

“What?” he asked.

“You were in the water.”

“Goddamn piece of shit,” he said, looking around. “The engine flooded. Wave tossed me.”

Another wave crashed, dragging him across the mussels into Angela’s shins, nearly taking her down. He spit out saltwater and looked up at her, confused. She helped him to his feet, and he leaned on her until they reached sand. She saw smears of blood on his jacket and arms and neck. She sat him down, pawing at his clothing, looking for the source.

“You’re hurt,” she said.

“I’m wet.”

“You’re bleeding. You need a doctor.”

“No doctors.”

“But you’re bleeding.”

“There are people looking for me. People who wish to hurt me. Do you understand?”

She drew away from him. He had the look of a merchant marine—a reddened face that rarely saw sunscreen and lines on his forehead and cheeks from a life spent squinting. He appeared to be in his early forties, and fit. His thick, dark hair could have used a haircut six weeks ago. He looked her up and

down in a deliberate way, as if he only just noticed her.

“You’re the one who’s bleeding,” he said.

She glanced down to discover the source of all that blood. Her ragg glove was saturated and dripping. She felt the sting of saltwater. She remembered Doug and glanced up the hill, relieved to see it empty.

“Let me look at it,” he said. She offered up her hand, and he gently peeled back the moist fabric. “How’d this happen?”

“Penguin.”

He looked up at her. “A penguin did this?”

She nodded. Though his face was sunburned and rough, his eyes were calm and steady, and for a moment Angela forgot the pain in her hand.

“And I thought I was having a bad day,” he said.

Now was the time to return to camp and notify the authorities. Report what she’d seen; stitch her wound; document items recovered; note coordinates, date, and time. Normally that was what Angela would have done. She detested all nationalities of tourists and trespassers.

Yet this man was neither. He was wet and shivering and needed her help. And she had a soft spot for strays.

## ROBERT

AT THE BUENOS AIRES AIRPORT, Robert held Lynda's picture, studying the faces of the people walking past, coming through the automatic glass doors that separated customs from the outside world. He himself had emerged from behind those doors only an hour before, weary from a sleepless night, wondering how he would make it through the long day ahead. With one more flight to go, and a partner yet to meet, he'd begun to entertain thoughts of turning around and heading home. He tried to remind himself why he'd agreed to this assignment in the first place.

He replayed the previous morning in his head, when Gordon had phoned him awake and told him that Aeneas had turned up again. *Like a bad penny*, Gordon said. He told Robert to pack his bags and get to the office.

But Robert had stayed in bed, staring at the bare walls of his "no personality" apartment, as an old girlfriend once called it. She'd been right. He used to blame the lack of decoration on living his life on the road. But the truth was, as an undercover agent, Robert had assumed so many personalities over the years that he had begun to question which personality was his.

Robert's one meager attempt at interior decorating was a laminated map of the world. He'd hung it in the kitchen, planning to use pushpins to mark every place he had visited—Amsterdam, Oslo, Osaka, Kuwait—but he abandoned the idea when he realized that most of those trips were classified.

And that morning, after he'd finally gotten out of bed and dressed, he wandered into the kitchen and stared at the northern reaches of the map, at the tiny islands of Svalbard, two hundred miles north of Norway, just below the polar ice cap. Places deserving of pushpins. Places Robert had nearly succeeded in erasing from memory, until Gordon had called and mentioned Aeneas.

When Robert had entered Gordon's perennially unlit office, Gordon was reclined in his chair, feet on the desk, keyboard on his lap. People often mistook the posture for laziness, but Robert knew it was intentional. Gordon once said the fastest way to get promoted at the Bureau was to pretend you didn't want to get promoted. Robert wondered whether Gordon's emerging paunch was part of the disguise, but he hesitated to ask. Gordon was only a few years older than Robert but looked twice that, heavysset, with a balding head framed by wisps of thin blond hair and wire-rimmed glasses.

Robert walked to the window and pulled open the vertical blinds to let in some light, revealing the top half of a naked tree. The night's ice storm had left a sheen on its branches, and they hung low under the weight. A dense layer of clouds threatened more of the same. Robert normally would have welcomed the change in scenery brought about by a new assignment, but not this time. He could feel Gordon watching him but resisted the urge to turn around.

*Don't you want to know what he did?* Gordon asked.

*Not particularly.*

*I'd have thought you would relish a second shot at him.*

*And I'd have thought I would've graduated to pursuing real terrorists by now.*

*Oh, he's real,* Gordon said. *Aeneas, too, has graduated. To negligent manslaughter.*

Robert turned to see if Gordon was joking. He wasn't. *Aeneas may be good at protecting animals,* Gordon said, *but he's*

*not so good at protecting people. He let one of his crew members, a woman, die up in the North Atlantic. Details are sketchy because nobody's talking. She was estranged from her parents, and they want it kept quiet as well. But they've got connections in the Bureau, which is all we need to know. And, frankly, it was just a matter of time before he gave us another reason to come after him.*

Robert had looked back out the window, at the tree, at one sadly sagging branch. He felt the urge to exit the building, climb the tree, shake the ice off. Give the branch a break from the weight. A little temporary insanity might give Robert a break as well, a week off from work, an excuse. He knew he didn't need an excuse; he could just say no. Gordon certainly owed him. Back when Gordon had been working undercover, with Robert just out of the Academy, an arms dealer in Long Beach discovered a microphone in Gordon's briefcase—and Robert put a bullet in the man's head just as he was about to put one in Gordon's.

But Robert couldn't say no. He'd been the one to open this case, and he knew he needed to be the one to close it.

Still, he wished he hadn't been assigned a partner, that he wasn't still waiting for her at the increasingly crowded airport terminal. He noticed a woman approaching rapidly, pulling a wheeled carry-on bag, and he stepped aside to get out of her way. But she stopped, right in front of him.

"You Robert?" she asked. She wore a Red Sox cap that covered her short blond hair.

Robert looked again at the picture, expecting a brunette. The woman smiled. "That photo's from when I was working out of Boston. I'm in the Miami office now. Gotta blend in with the locals. I'm Lynda." She gave his hand a quick shake then started off. She was shorter than Robert expected, but she carried herself with a swagger that made up for it. "We've got to motor," she called back to him. "Next flight leaves in ten minutes."

Robert followed a step behind. She was still talking, but

he couldn't hear her over the public address system, and he got the sense that she didn't care if he heard her anyway.

On the plane, Robert took the window seat and, as Lynda continued her friendly chatter, watched Buenos Aires disappear beneath the clouds. Then she switched gears, brought up the case, and he started to listen.

Lynda told him that Brazilian trawlers off the coast of Fortaleza had first sighted the *Arctic Tern*. Fishermen were, by nature, a suspicious lot, and they took the boat for a competitor. She said they'd reported that the *Tern* was headed south. And she had a warrant for Aeneas's arrest.

"So what's your story with this guy?" she asked.

"I don't have a story."

"Then why are you here?"

"Ask Gordon."

"I did. All he told me was that you could I.D. him. Can you?"

Robert nodded.

"Well, that's a start. If all goes well, you'll be pointing him out by nightfall. Gordon pulled some strings with the Argentines. There's a naval cutter waiting for us in Puerto Madryn loaded with enough men and arms to invade Panama."

Everything was suddenly moving quickly, too quickly. The *Tern's* coordinates, the Argentine cutter. Success seemed inevitable, which would have been a good thing if they were chasing anyone else. But Aeneas in handcuffs seemed more dangerous to Robert than Aeneas on the run. The stories Aeneas could tell, once captured, to anyone within earshot. How Lynda would react if she learned the real reason Aeneas escaped under his watch five years ago. The new cases Gordon could open just as this one was being closed.

Robert began to imagine scenarios that would result in the use of lethal force. The images weren't hard to conjure—Aeneas raising a shotgun, Aeneas playing Kamikaze with

his ship—giving Robert an excuse to react with a well-placed round, extinguishing, finally, the man and his stories. Extinguishing the memories, once and for all.

“You’re not all that chatty, are you, Bobby?”

Robert turned away from the window. Lynda wore a sly grin, which pulled his mind back to the present. He forced a smile and shook his head.

“Like my husband,” she said with a shrug. “We’ll get along just fine.”

AS PROMISED, THE ARA *ROCA*, a four-story gunmetal warship, was waiting for them when their taxi arrived at Puerto Madryn harbor.

“If only the Bureau moved this fast in getting me a raise,” Lynda said as she and Robert hurried up the boarding ramp.

Robert looked up at the guns, at the men in uniform, and felt a twinge of embarrassment. He imagined what Aeneas would say at such a display of might—*All this, for little old me?*—and didn’t know what bothered him more, the veritable army before him or the fact that he’d begun imagining what Aeneas would say.

Lynda stopped in the bridge, and Robert heard her talking to the captain in Spanish while he took up position outside on the wing deck, off the starboard side of the bridge, which gave him a panoramic view of the water below. He could still see Lynda inside, laughing at something the captain said. She was flirting with him—a short man in his forties, trim, with dark hair and the matching requisite mustache—and Robert felt his body begin to relax, knowing that she was taking care of things. It was nice, for the time being, to feel as though he were nothing but a passenger.

Within a few minutes, the boat was in open water, under

a cloudless sky. When Lynda joined him at the railing, Robert hoped that the stiff headwind, which made talking difficult, might keep her silent. But Lynda had a loud voice and stood extra close.

“Captain Zamora says we’re not far,” she said. “A fisherman sighted the *Tern* just an hour ago, not far from here. We should call Gordon and give him an update.” She looked at Robert expectantly.

“What do you mean, *we*?” Robert asked.

“You’ve got the satellite phone. He’s *your* boss.”

“I’ll call him when we’ve got actual news. What’s the rush?”

“Look, Bobby, I don’t know about you, but I’ve got to start scoring some points with upper management. I wasn’t sent down here for my health, if you know what I mean. You do know what happened in Miami, don’t you?”

“I read the report.”

“That’s the official story,” she said. “Not the entire story.” Lynda began to tell Robert about her attempt to capture Aeneas in the Port of Miami, much of it a rehash of what he’d already read. So he raised his binoculars, focusing more on the horizon than on her story.

She’d had only three agents to do a five-agent job—round-the-clock surveillance of the *Arctic Tern*. It would have been simple, she told him, if only she’d had the manpower: The Canadians had pulled the boat’s registration. The FBI had obtained a warrant on the captain. The Coast Guard was on high alert. All they needed was a positive I.D. of Aeneas, and they would move in and make the arrest.

Then came the bomb threats, two of them, fifteen minutes apart. Two fully loaded passenger ships—one about to depart and one just arrived—had to be evacuated. More than seven thousand people spilled out onto piers, herded by SWAT teams, bomb-sniffing canines, and TV cameras. The next day, Lynda traced the calls to a cell phone on a ship that slipped

out of the harbor during all the commotion—the *Arctic Tern*.

“Now for the part I left out of the report,” she said. “You see, I was the only one on surveillance that afternoon. The only one. And I get this call on my cell. Franklin Bimler, he says his name is, out of Counterterrorist Operations. You know this guy?”

Robert shook his head.

“Of course not. Neither did I. Franklin tells me he’s got urgent information, but he can’t tell me because he thinks people are listening in via parabolic microphone—because I’m outside at the time. So I leave my post and get into my car, and that’s when all hell breaks loose with the cruise ships.”

“So?”

“So, there was no Franklin Bimler. Not on the phone. Not anywhere. I ran a search on the guy, and there’s nobody by that name in the Bureau.”

“Franklin could have been Aeneas.”

“I considered that. I did. But how’d Aeneas get my number?”

“He’s good.”

“I don’t know. How’d he even know I was working the case?”

“You think that someone in the Bureau set you up?”

“Crazier things have happened.”

“You’re getting paranoid, Lynda. Aeneas will do that to you.”

“I suppose.”

“Why didn’t you put that in your report?”

“Because I left my damn post, that’s why. I got duped. It was bad enough I let him get away. Would you have put it in *your* report?”

He wouldn’t have. There were a lot of things he’d left out of his own report on Aeneas. He looked at Lynda, who was still watching him, and wondered how much she knew.

“It was Aeneas,” Robert said, turning away and raising his binoculars again. “Trust me.”

“*iBallenas!*” shouted one of the uniformed men standing below on the main deck. Following the man’s pointed finger, Robert scanned the horizon, then broadened his viewing arc. He zoomed out, then back in, but he did not see any ships. He lowered the binoculars and turned to Lynda.

“Whales,” she explained. “I think.”

“You *think*? I thought you were fluent.”

“I am. They speak a different Spanish here,” Lynda said. “The double *el* has a *jha* sound. Always throws me.”

Robert returned his eyes to the water just as the nose of a whale emerged, missile-like, off the right side of the ship. The gray marbled monster rose ten feet, twenty feet, angled, then fell sideways into the water.

“I was right!” Lynda reached into her backpack, pulling out a camera. Looking down, Robert counted five men in uniform doing the same, aiming their cell phones and pocket cameras.

“Five summers dragging my nephews into Boston Harbor,” Lynda said, “and we never saw so much as a fin. They’re not gonna believe this.”

After getting her fill of photographs, she began to flip through a travel guide. “Must be a southern right whale,” she said. “This is where they give birth and raise their young. And did you know there are penguin colonies along the shoreline? Along with elephant seals and blue-eyed shags. Maybe we can swing by there on our way back, hey, Bobby?”

“This isn’t a vacation,” he said.

She shrugged. “Might as well get something out of it besides frequent flyer miles.”

Suddenly the ship turned sharply left and coughed up a thick blast of smoke. Robert grabbed the railing to avoid losing his balance. The two officers standing next to them began talking rapidly.

“What are they saying?” Robert asked.

“Looks like we’ve got a runner.” Lynda raised her binoculars, and Robert followed where she trained them. He could make out three small ships on the otherwise flat horizon. The one in the middle, a medium-sized fishing trawler, appeared a lighter shade, possibly painted white. It emitted clouds of smoke, evidence that it, too, was in a hurry.

As the *Roca* began to catch up, Robert watched the white ship expand in size until he could count the number of decks (three) and estimate the length (150 feet). Yet he did not recognize the ship itself.

“That’s it,” Lynda said. “That’s our ship.”

Robert looked again and realized that he had been searching for something much smaller, the boat he’d sailed on five years ago. The ship ahead was larger, probably a recycled commercial fishing trawler with ice-reinforced hulls. Robert thought of Aeneas using a former fishing vessel to attack fishermen, and how much Aeneas would relish the irony. He’d probably acquired the boat from the Russians or the Norwegians—the fishermen thrown out of work by declining cod stocks or some other overfished species. *It’s time someone put this boat to a noble use*, he would say.

The *Tern* ran for a few minutes more before slowing to a halt. Because Canada had pulled the *Tern’s* registration, it was now a ship with no country, meaning it could be boarded by any nation at any time. Not that Robert needed an excuse. They already had the warrant. Still, he realized, this was all too easy. Aeneas would not have stopped running.

The Argentine captain radioed the *Tern* but got no response, and he began speaking to his officers in rapid-fire Spanish. As Lynda listened in on the chatter, Robert stepped outside the bridge to call Gordon on the satellite phone.

Robert paced the deck until he got a clear signal, then wrestled with an unresponsive keypad before giving up and

tossing the phone back into his backpack. If they were chasing real terrorists, Robert would have the latest-generation satphone, plus a backup. But not here. Everything down here was old and used. Secondhand. Including him.

By now, they had pulled within a football field's distance of the *Tern*. The ship, painted white from mast to bow, looked like a U.S. Coast Guard cutter, with the exception of three large black letters painted on each side of the hull: CDA, for Cetacean Defense Alliance. The name RV *Arctic Tern* was visible in smaller letters, the "RV" indicating research. There was, of course, no research being done aboard the *Tern*, just as whaling ships claimed to be research vessels without ever publishing a single study. *If the Japanese are going to play the research card, Aeneas always said, so will we.* And on the side of the bridge were painted a dozen black checkmarks, one for each whaling vessel sunk over the years. Robert had been a witness to one of those checkmarks.

Lynda and Robert stepped into a lowered Zodiac, and a crew member ferried them over the chop, followed by a dozen men in uniform. Lynda was the first up the ladder on the side of the *Tern*. Robert held back, watching as the uniforms pulled themselves aboard, one by one, until he was alone with the driver.

He'd tried to brace himself for this voyage into his past, for the opening of old wounds, mostly his own. But now he could feel his body tensing, his heart accelerating. What if someone up there recognized him; what if some fragment from his past did emerge? More important, he didn't know how he would react once he came face-to-face with Aeneas after all this time, with all the history between them.

Robert heard a shout from above. Lynda, looking down at him, waved him up. He reached down and made sure his gun was holstered, safety off. Then he took a deep breath, slid on his sunglasses, and grabbed onto the ladder.

Assembled in front of him on the rear deck was what

looked like an Earth Fest crowd—about two dozen college dropouts, potheads, and tattoo addicts. A few wore white T-shirts with the CDA logo—a black silhouette of a whale fluke with the letters CDA superimposed in white. Most of the crew wore secondhand flannels and fleece, ripped jeans, flip-flops. As Robert reviewed the faces beneath the beards and piercings, he began to breathe more easily, thankful that the CDA did not pay a salary, ensuring a high rate of turnover. He did not recognize a single face, and he was growing optimistic that nobody recognized him—which was fortunate, as Lynda had apparently left the introductions to him.

“We’re with the FBI,” he said. “I’m Agent Porter, and this is Agent Madigan. We’re here to execute an arrest warrant for Neil Patrick Cameron.”

“Who?” asked a gangly, unshaven man standing in front.

“Aeneas,” Robert said.

“Are you in charge of this vessel?” Lynda asked.

“In a manner of speaking.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Robert said.

“I’m the chef.”

Muted laughter emanated from the crowd. For a ship that was on the run, these people appeared awfully relaxed. But perhaps they were bluffing; perhaps Aeneas was hiding somewhere below. But Robert had a feeling that he was long gone, that Aeneas again had managed to stay a few steps ahead. The only times he ever got captured were times he chose to be captured. Like in Iceland, during the CDA’s first year. Aeneas sank three whaling ships and eluded a fleet of naval and Coast Guard ships for six months. Then, one afternoon in October, he sailed into the Reykjavík harbor and turned himself in. He’d wanted a high-profile trial. Iceland, fearful of negative publicity, stuck him on a plane to London and barred him from ever returning.

Aeneas was an expert in the game of cat and mouse, a

trait Robert envied when he was on the side of the mouse. Now that he was the predator, he felt predictable and slow. Yet he had little choice but to continue along this preordained path, go through the motions, search the ship, ask pointed questions, ignore the laughter.

Robert looked at Lynda. "You want to do the honors?"

"My pleasure." She said something in Spanish as she led the way into the ship, a few of the Argentines following her, a few heading for the bridge.

"You all stay right here," Robert told the crew on the deck. He knew that the faces staring back at him knew where Aeneas was, and he knew just as well that they would not give up their leader. As Robert paced the deck, he envisioned the uniforms below, opening doors, lockers, anything that might contain a heavyset man of just over six feet. They would, he realized, come up empty handed.

The chef stepped forward. "About how long do you expect this open house to last?"

"Until we find him."

"I've got food on the cooker," he said.

"It can wait."

"I am quite serious," the chef said. "We could have a fire in the galley if I don't get down there."

"Tell me where Aeneas is, and I'll let you go."

"I don't know where he is."

"Then tell me where you dropped him off."

"I work all the way down there. I don't know what goes on up here."

"Then tell me who does."

"I do." A tall woman in a red fleece jacket and wraparound sunglasses emerged from behind the crowd.

"Who are you?" Robert asked.

"I'm the captain."

"Aeneas is the captain."

“Aeneas isn’t here.”

The woman—somewhere in her thirties—had the hardened look of a triathlete, with close-cropped blond hair and dark skin blushed red from the wind and sun. Robert considered telling her to remove her sunglasses. He wanted to see her eyes, to know if she was hiding anything. But doing so would have only made him look desperate, which he wasn’t, not yet.

“What’s your name?” he asked.

“Lauren Davis.”

“Very well, *Captain* Davis, tell me why you’re headed south via Argentina instead your usual route via New Zealand?”

“You should already know that.”

“Indulge me.”

“So you can pass it along to the Japanese?”

“I don’t work for the Japanese.”

“You might as well.”

“You haven’t answered my question.”

“If you want to catch a fish, go where the fish are; if you want to catch a whaler, go where the whalers are.”

Robert felt blood rush to his face, not just because he recognized the line—one of Aeneas’s many adages—but because of the way she delivered it. Knowingly. He lowered his sunglasses. He wanted her to see *his* eyes, to see that she was mistaken, that she did not in fact recognize him.

“Have the whalers moved to a different location?”

“Not yet. But they will,” she said. “The Aussies are sending two naval ships to protect their waters. This will force the Japanese into the Amundsen Sea.”

“Which is where you are headed.”

“If you’ll let us.”

“All I want is Aeneas. Show me where you dropped him, and you’ll be free to continue on, save all the whales. I’m not here for the ship. I’m here for him. But if I can’t get him, I’ll settle for the ship.”

She removed her sunglasses. Her eyes, bright green in the sunlight, stared defiantly at him.

“Unlike you,” she said, “we don’t leave people behind.”

She knew. Robert could see it in her eyes. She knew who he was, and she probably knew everything. Aeneas must have told her. Maybe he told everyone.

Robert turned and walked to the rear of the deck and leaned over the railing as if checking a possible hiding spot. He looked back at the Argentine ship, anxious to return to it, angry with Gordon for sending him here, angrier with himself for coming. He dug his fingernails into the railing, as if he could bore through layers of paint, peel away the history of the ship. He should have known better than to think he’d been forgotten just because a few years had gone by. A fresh set of faces didn’t save him from the same collective memory. Now Robert had their ship, but they had—and always would have—his past.

Lynda emerged from below, followed by her Argentine escorts. When she saw Robert, she stopped and shook her head before joining him at the railing.

“You don’t look surprised,” she said.

“They dropped him off somewhere, not far from here. That’s why they didn’t run far when we chased them.”

“They tell you that?”

“No,” he said, “I just know.”

“In case you’re wrong, Sherlock, we should take the ship back to port and do another sweep. Get the dogs on here.”

Robert knew she was right but was too weary to say anything, the jet lag catching up with him, the feeling that this short mission would not be so short.

“Hand me the phone,” she said. “I’ll call Gordon.”

# ANGELA

ZERO FOUR TWO TWO NINE.

Angela had tagged him during her tenth season at Tombo.

At the time, the penguin had taken a liking to the old Toyota pickup that the researchers used to travel to town. He would belly up to one of the worn Goodyears and paddle it with his wings—the flipper dance. It was a mating ritual, one normally reserved for females of the same species. Clearly, he was not the brightest of penguins, but he was young still.

They named him Diesel.

Sometimes Diesel would offer up a flipper dance to a seated human. That's how Angela got to know him. She used to read in the early mornings, seated outside the cinder-block *cueva* that she shared with six other researchers, sneaking in a few moments of peace before the day ahead.

Diesel mostly spent his days on his stomach under the rear of the truck, watching the humans pass. But one morning he cautiously approached Angela and began to poke at her shoes with his beak. She put her book down on a cinder block and he pecked at that as well; then he stepped forward and began to flap his wings against her right leg.

“It’s nice to get attention from a male once in a while,” she later told Shelly, her boss. “I won’t bicker over species.”

Over time, Diesel spent more time around humans than with his peers, loitering around the camp, trying to push his way into the *cueva* or the office. They soon discovered that he

wouldn't bite if touched, and he became more of a pet than a penguin, always nearby as researchers prepped for a day's census or as they walked among trailers and tents and the bathrooms. None of them thought Diesel was likely ever to find a mate.

He followed Angela into the public toilet one evening after the tourists were gone. She had to pick him up to get him out and was surprised that he didn't struggle at all and made no attempt to bite her. From then on, during her morning rituals, she would skip the book altogether and lift Diesel onto her lap, staring at him, eye to eye, his head turned so that he could see her more clearly.

What a sight they must have been to anyone who woke early—but Angela didn't care. Diesel was uninterested in his own species, and she was uninterested in hers. Two loners, sharing their mornings.

And just when the humans were sure Diesel was far too domesticated to take a mate, he found one. Or one found him, as was usually the case. One morning, Angela discovered Diesel under the Toyota with a partner on her belly next to him.

Angela felt somewhat abandoned when she first saw them together, but the naturalist within her quickly took over, and she spent the next two weeks deliberating with the others on how to remove the truck without disturbing this fragile relationship. They had to move quickly—once an egg was laid, any disruption could cause the penguins to retreat to the water, sacrificing the next generation. If Angela had had her way, the truck would never have been moved at all.

They spent a week constructing an artificial undercarriage out of leftover plywood, brass pipes, duct tape, two spare tires, and cinder blocks—such an odd contraption that the tourists actually began taking snapshots.

The switch occurred during the morning hours when the

birds were standing beside their nest, crowing to each other.

Stacy, a rookie researcher who was good with a stick shift, piloted the pickup; the rest followed closely behind with the contraption. The penguins watched this bizarre parade with interest, but did not seem terribly alarmed. When the humans left, they returned to their counterfeit nest. The true indication of success came in the form of two eggs, which Shelly noticed three weeks later. The eggs were smaller than normal but still viable. Sometimes it took a year or two for young penguins to become successful breeding pairs. Diesel was just getting started.

Angela had already selected names for the chicks.

THE SKY WAS DARKENING WHEN ANGELA entered the dining room. She was too nervous to eat, with thoughts of a man off in the darkness, shivering and hungry. But she needed to make an appearance for the sake of continuity—humans being creatures of habit, too—and she needed supplies. The dining room had been a storage shed in its first life. Now it consisted of two long tables and a propane stove, four small windows covered in plastic. There were no overhead lights, but candles and portable fluorescents created a warm environment for the nine researchers—three men and six women, including Angela.

Shelly Sparks, the director of Angela's research camp, was a tall, trim woman in her late forties with long black hair. She always said that you could tell what month of the breeding season it was by the length of her roots. She dyed her hair before she arrived at Punta Tombo in late August and not again until the last of the penguins had traded in their old feather coats for new and returned to sea. *We molt together*, she'd say.

Shelly could never resist making light of the scabs and

stitches and torn gloves that no naturalist escaped, and that evening she invited Angela to show off her new wound during the meal. Angela stood and waved her swollen hand like the Queen, which was met by cheers from the junior researchers who had long since forgotten that she, too, was human.

Angela caught Doug's eyes and glanced at the floor. She was avoiding him now. He had followed orders earlier and stayed close to the nest, but when she told him to fetch the first aid kit for her hand, he was incredulous. *Why don't we return to camp together?* he asked. One sharp glare from Angela had been all it took to send him off on his one-hour round trip. She got a secret thrill from putting him back in his place.

While Doug was gone, Angela had deposited her castaway in the northern reaches of Back Bay (Shelly had named parts of Tombo after neighborhoods of Boston, her hometown). Angela assembled the man's waterlogged tent between bulbous Lycium bushes. He had a pronounced limp and was shivering.

"I need to get you dry clothes," she told him.

"I've been wet before," he said. "All I need is food. And liquor couldn't hurt."

Shelly was heading back to the States in the morning, to give exams to her Boston University students and to squeeze more money from donors, leaving Angela in charge for a week. Her departure gave Angela hope that she could keep the man hidden.

Angela folded a large piece of lamb into a napkin, no small feat, as she was a vegetarian. She excused herself from dinner and exited through the back door, by the storage room, where she grabbed a bottle of Malbec.

Outside, Angela peeked underneath the pickup truck, a ritual she now dreaded. The female was there waiting, her head swaying erratically from side to side, the chicks chirping loudly, calling out to be fed.

Diesel should be back by now. Back with a belly of food

to feed his chicks, to relieve his mate so she could go back to sea to feed herself, continuing the relay race of raising their young. Another day and this penguin would have no choice but to abandon her chicks.

Angela opened the creaky door of her trailer. Now that she was second in command, she no longer crammed into the *cueva*, and while an eight-foot, 1970s-era trailer that leaked wasn't exactly high living, it was a big step up. Mostly, it was privacy. It also came with its own penguin, Geraldo, who nested under the trailer, between its cinder-block foundations. In early mornings and late at night, Geraldo brayed loudly, calling out for any and all potential mates. Angela was long past being awoken by penguins, but she still liked hearing him flap his wings against her floor.

Unlike Diesel, Geraldo had at least selected a nest that was guaranteed to be around for awhile. But here at camp, these penguins were still a kilometer too far inland; the most desirable nests were nearer the water, closer to the swarms of anchovies, krill, and sardines the birds relied on. Penguins waddled to the ocean two or three times a week, and adding a kilometer of pockmarked land to the journey made these inland nests less desirable. But the younger males took what they could get, even if they ended up with "starter homes." Angela sighed as she entered her trailer, knowing that Geraldo would likely be single for another season.

A few minutes later, Doug knocked. "You look like you're going somewhere," he said when she opened the door.

"Just up the hill, like always."

"You need a companion?"

"I think I can manage tonight."

"You sure?"

"I'm quite sure."

She could tell that Doug was not accustomed to rejection, and he loitered around her trailer as she headed up the hill.

Fifty yards into the darkness, Angela heard movement and stopped.

It was Doug. "Centaurus is going to be brilliant tonight," he said, squinting as she turned her flashlight on him.

"Doug, go home."

She watched him sulk back to camp, then waited another fifteen minutes to be certain he would remain there. She knew that eventually she would have to humor him and take him along on a trip or two. How quickly the object of her affection had become one of annoyance.

Her mind wandered as she hiked through the darkness toward the tent, the moon not yet making itself known. Why was she harboring this man? Maybe it was transference, caring for this lost soul as a way of making up for another lost soul: Diesel's. Maybe it was the scientist in her, the opportunity to study a human for a change, instead of a penguin. Or maybe she simply found him too attractive to share with the others.

She opted for the scientific explanation. After devoting a lifetime to studying hundreds of thousands of penguins, her life had become consumed with numbers and averages. The average-sized penguin. The typical lifespan. The standard rate of reproduction. Statistical outliers were always left out of the calculations, as they should be. But now Angela found herself face-to-face with a statistical outlier. A human anomaly. Not average in any way. And not so easily dismissed as a number.

She found him standing outside his tent, looking back over the water.

"How long do you need?" she asked.

"A few days."

"You cannot leave this campsite," she said. "I will bring you food and water. But under no circumstances do you start a fire or draw attention to yourself in any way. And by no means do you set foot on the tourist trail."

"People will just think I'm one of you."

“You’re not one of us. This is a provincial reserve, not a campsite, and it’s surrounded by private land. If the *guardafauna* doesn’t shoot you, the ranchers surely will.”

He sighed loudly. “You’re the boss.” She handed him her flashlight and a large water bottle. When she offered him the lamb he waved her off.

“I don’t eat meat,” he said.

“You have to eat something.”

“That will suffice,” he said, pointing to the bottle of wine. Angela had forgotten a corkscrew, so he carved an opening with his pocket knife and took a long drink.

The moon was rising and, with it, the volume of the penguins around them. She studied his face in the dim light as he watched a penguin lean forward and let forth an escalating progression of honks.

“Do you have any earplugs?” he asked.

“You’ll get used to the noise.” Angela remembered a protein bar she’d tossed into her backpack last week and dug it out.

“Thank you,” he said, tearing open the wrapper with his teeth. He sat on the ground and inhaled the bar. She sat across from him. Angela could tell the man was starving, and yet he’d turned down the lamb. Most of the other naturalists at Tombo were meat eaters, and it always bothered her that they could devote their lives to protecting one animal while consuming another.

“We have something in common,” she said.

“What’s that?”

“I’m a vegetarian, too.”

He took another swig from the bottle and studied her face. She averted her eyes, focusing on a penguin as it passed behind him, the bird’s white belly glowing in the moonlight.

“How’s your hand?” he asked.

“All stitched together,” she said, holding it up as proof.

Despite being alone with a strange man in the middle

of the night, in the middle of nowhere, she was not afraid. She never really felt alone out here, surrounded by knee-high chaperones peeking at her from under bushes and within burrows. Some hovered nearby, cutting wide swaths around the tent as they trekked to the water.

Angela didn't ask the man who he was or what he was running from. There was something freeing about knowing nothing about someone, about him knowing nothing about you. Her research camp was a soap opera, one that grew more incestuous by the day. Everybody knew about her crush on Doug, including Doug. Angela never deluded herself. Although her body was slim and athletic, she did not display it in a way that that attracted men's eyes. She had a chest, she knew, that might catch an eye or two, if she hadn't tethered it under a sports bra that could be washed in a bucket and dried on a clothesline in ten minutes. She dressed for fieldwork, wearing cargo pants for function rather than fashion, layering on dusty shirts and sweaters in the region's dark green and taupe. She had always dressed to blend in with the landscape, not stand out.

Yet during those times Doug tagged along on her nightly trips up the hill—the closest thing to a date she'd had in years—Angela found herself wishing she'd packed something sexier. It felt almost romantic the way Doug, an astronomy major before switching to biology, pointed out the Southern Cross and the creatures of the heavens, like Leo and Pisces. Angela realized that she had been coming to Punta Tombo for fifteen years, had identified every square meter, every bush, plant, bug, rodent, mammal, and moss, and yet she'd never bothered to tell one star from another. She spent her life looking down.

Doug got her thinking about children for the first time, simply by asking if she had any. But he was only a flirt, only interested in Angela for her knowledge and experience. Perhaps he was angling to co-author a research paper with

her, to leapfrog the postdocs. Their profession could be as ruthless as nature itself; not everybody would get the research grants or the honorary professorships, see their names in news articles. With people and with penguins, scarcity drove them to do extreme things.

Even Angela was not immune. A month ago, she nearly flew into a fury when Doug and the others did not show up for an outing, until Shelly told her it was Thanksgiving and they were in town calling their families.

So Angela was glad for a new, albeit mysterious, companion. As they sat together in the dark, she found herself thinking of the body under her filthy work clothes, a body kept in camouflage suddenly yearning to be noticed. A body that had not been touched in a long time. A body that, just now, wanted to remember what it felt like.

She took the bottle when the man offered it to her. With each drink he became a bit more talkative, as did she. He asked for her name, and she told him.

“They call me Aeneas,” he said.

“You’re kidding.”

“You’ve not heard of me?” He appeared surprised. “Surely you’ve read about me in the papers.”

“We don’t exactly get home delivery here.”

He explained the name, an alias, and his pursuers—various coast guards, police bureaus, and intelligence agencies.

“I do battle with whaling ships,” he said.

“Like Greenpeace?” Angela asked.

“They fight with words and water guns,” he said. “We fight with the hulls of our ships. We ram them. We mangle their props.”

“You sink them?”

“On occasion.”

“Is that why you’re here?”

“No.”

Angela left it at that. She didn't want to know more, to find out anything worse.

"Are you married?" he asked.

"Do I look like I have time for a marriage? Out here attending to wayward men?"

A sneeze broke the silence that followed.

"What was that?" he asked.

"A penguin."

"Penguins catch colds?"

"They sneeze to exhale the salt from their beaks."

"I could probably do the same," he said, rubbing his nose. "I was married once."

"You?"

"She was a volunteer. Earnest. A scientist, like you. Told me I was full of shit one day, and I was hooked. We made it official in Ushuaia. Had the ceremony on the ship in the middle of the Drake Passage. It's not easy saying *I do* with forty-foot waves lapping at your feet. That time of year, the sun never sets, the body never gets tired. There's a sense of collective euphoria. It's as if you've stepped outside of the world and none of the old rules apply. Eventually, however, you have to head north again. Where there are roads and traffic lights, yards that need to be mowed, bills to be paid. She traveled with me for a while after her tour was up, but I think she thought it was a phase I was going through. She went back to LA and waited for me to settle down, to return to her. I didn't. And she divorced me in absentia."

He took a long drink. "You find that amusing?" he asked.

Angela realized that she had been smiling. "No. It's—it's that word."

"What word?"

"*Absentia*. When I was a kid, I used to think absentia was an actual place. I even spent time looking for it in the atlas at the school library."

“I’ve been living in absentia for years,” he said. She saw his lips curve upward, into a private smile, as if he’d forgotten she was there. And as the silence lingered, once again she felt left behind.

The bottle was empty, and reluctantly she stood to leave.

“Come here.” In one smooth motion, he stood, grabbed her waist, and kissed her. She felt the scruff of his unshaven face bite her chin as she kissed him back. Then, remembering where they were, she pulled away. “Wait,” she said.

“Wait for what?”

She didn’t know. She was certain Doug hadn’t followed her; they were as alone as any two people could be. And maybe this was the problem: that a wish, one she could barely admit she’d wished, was being granted.

She began to say something, but he grabbed her again, this time more tightly, and she responded by pushing against him so that he stumbled backward into a *quilembai* bush. A startled penguin emerged from under him and bit his leg.

“Ouch!” he yelled, flushing out several more penguins, sending them flapping away on their bellies.

Angela attempted to smooth down her jacket, her hair, before turning away. “Good night,” she called out, walking off into the dark.

On the next hill, she stopped and removed her jacket. Her heart was pounding, and she looked back into the darkness. Despite his aggressiveness, she still did not fear him. Mostly, she feared herself, and how close she came to not pushing him away. Instinct served her well in self-defense. But now she was alone again, heading back to an empty trailer.

THE MORNING WAS DRIZZLY, the first rainfall in a month. Outside the office, Shelly gathered food requests from the

assembled naturalists—energy bars, Doritos, Red Vines—and loaded her bags into the pickup truck.

Then she approached Angela. “Can I bring you anything?” she asked.

“I think we’re good here.”

Such departures were frequent at the camp and did not warrant hugs or other displays of affection. Yet Shelly seemed to linger longer than usual. “I’ll see if I can scrounge up another satellite transmitter,” she said, and Angela felt herself wince before Shelly added, “As a backup.”

“Right. As a backup.” Angela forced a smile. Shelly climbed into the car with Stacy, and they left for the Trelew airport.

Now in charge, Angela sent the team, including a reluctant Doug, south of the camp, and she headed north. During the long walk alone, her mind turned to Diesel. It had been Angela’s idea to attach the satellite transmitter to him.

Using a blend of duct tape and superglue, Angela had affixed the transmitter to Diesel’s flank on a cold morning. The yellow device was about the size of a deck of cards, with rounded edges and a three-inch rubber antenna. Once activated, for up to six weeks the device sent signals at five-minute intervals to a satellite twenty miles above the planet. To conserve battery life, the device shut itself off while the penguin was under water and out of range. To a satellite, the path of a penguin looked more like Morse code than a continuous line, but Angela could decipher the data, connect the dots, learn where Diesel traveled to fill his belly. The transmitters cost \$5,000 each, so it was very important to get them back. The key to getting one returned was selecting a bird that had a reason to return—in other words, a male penguin with a new chick. Shelly had thought it was premature to tag Diesel. *Give him another year*, she said. But Angela had insisted.

It was a two-hour procedure, and Doug had helped,

though he'd made it known he did not approve. Although each new generation of transmitter diminished in size, the devices still exerted a drag on a penguin in water, reducing its odds, ever so slightly, of out-swimming a leopard seal or an orca. Doug held Diesel while Angela attached the device. The procedure usually lasted up to an hour, and a penguin usually struggled during every minute. But Diesel was calm. He seemed to enjoy the attention.

*It's a Southern Cross*, Doug had said while looking at Diesel's belly. Angela looked at the dark smudges on his white feathers, how they did indeed form a cross, something she never noticed until now.

*What's the point of tracking them*, Doug added, *if the act of doing so reduces their numbers?*

*Fishing nets do more damage than these devices will ever do*, Angela told him.

This they knew from the dozens of flipper tags they received each year, mailed anonymously from the fishermen who obeyed the *Avise al* request stamped on the back of each tag. Some tags arrived carefully flattened out by hammer, easier to slip into an envelope; others arrived intact, little thin triangles. And Angela always wondered how many tags were left on those ships, or sank to the bottom of the sea.

Her life was consumed with attrition and its causes. The unreported oil spills, evidenced by the blackened, shivering birds that staggered upon the shores. The plastic six-pack rings that doubled as lassos. The baited longlines, meant for large fish but difficult for any species to resist. And the most acute and least visible cause of all—the food supply. Penguins depended on anchovies and krill, once abundant and ignored by fishermen, now in demand at salmon farms and for multivitamins. Like penguins, fishermen aimed for the food nearest to shore, and because they were more efficient and rapacious, penguins were forced to forage farther and farther

from their nests, diminishing the odds of a successful return.

Still walking north, and fifteen minutes away from the research camp, Angela sighted a yellow jacket atop Beacon Hill. She rushed toward it to find Aeneas straining his eyes over the water. “I told you to stay at the tent,” she said.

“I needed a higher vantage point. I thought I saw my ship.”

But he did not see his ship, and Angela scolded him as she led him back to his camp. “Do you have to wear that jacket?” she asked.

“You don’t like it?”

“It’s not exactly camouflage.”

“You should talk,” he said.

“What do you mean?”

“With that red hair of yours, I could spot you a mile away.”

Angela felt her face blush at the thought of him watching her, and she was glad for the biting wind.

She had work to do, and she decided that if she was going to harbor a fugitive, she would at least put him to work. She led Aeneas to the farthest reach of the colony, six miles from the park entrance. She could hear him breathing heavily behind her.

“You walk too fast,” he said.

“And you walk too slow,” she countered.

As they hiked along, she began to ignore his harmless taunts. But just as they’d reached the place where she wanted to begin the census, he gave a startled shout, and she turned to see him with one leg knee-deep in the ground. He had collapsed a penguin burrow, apparently twisting his ankle. She bent down to assess the damage—to the nest, not him—and was relieved to find the burrow empty.

“You ruined the nest,” she said.

“This place is a mine field.”

“It’s not any easier for the penguins, but they manage. We’re a mile inland, and look at all these nests. It takes a penguin two hours to get here. But they do it all the time, and they don’t complain. And they don’t collapse each other’s nests.”

Aeneas grunted as he pulled himself up. Angela ignored his grimace and his limp as she pulled out a five-meter length of rope, her notebook, and Shelly’s map of the colony. By counting penguins within five-meter circular plots placed twenty meters apart, they’d get a reasonably accurate population estimate. And although Angela had been doing this on her own, finding the edges of a circle was best accomplished with two people. She stood Aeneas in the middle of one of Shelly’s mapped circles, a measured piece of rope in one hand, her notebook in the other, while she walked the perimeter, holding the other end of the rope, calling out what she found: single male, active pair, one egg, two eggs, inactive nest.

“So is the colony growing or shrinking?” he asked.

“Shrinking. Though I can’t say how much. That’s why we’re here.”

“How many of these circles do we have to do?” he asked.

“You have somewhere better to be?”

“I’m just curious.”

“A hundred or so,” Angela said. “I could try calling your ship from our research station.”

“They’ll call me. Fortunately, my satphone is waterproof,” he said. “Are you trying to get rid of me?”

She didn’t answer him. He’d been there for two nights now, and Angela wasn’t sure how long she could keep him hidden from the rest. At least keeping him close to her kept him away from the others. The circles would last for another day or so, and then what? He drank too much. He continued to reach for her, beginning with her shoulder, resting a hand,

then two, massaging her neck. She no longer resisted. When he drank he also talked, and she found his stories exciting.

That night, she brought two bottles of Malbec. “To celebrate a hard day’s work,” she said. As they began to pass the first bottle between them, she asked him how he’d gotten his alias.

“When we sank this Icelandic whaling ship years ago, I spray-painted *Aeneas* across the hull,” he said. “I figured it would confuse them. It did, for a period. But the name stuck.”

“Why *Aeneas*?”

“Because he was fearless. Because he was a man without a country, a man without a port.”

Aeneas stood and looked through the darkness toward the ocean. He looked anxious to return, and Angela felt bad for reminding him that he was not out there. She tried to steer him back toward land.

“Where will you go when the whaling season ends?” she asked.

“I’ll head north. There’s always a hunting season for something somewhere.”

“Don’t you have a home to return to?”

“My home is the ship.”

“But don’t you rest at all?”

“Do you?”

Angela smiled. “No.”

“As long as there are fishermen out there, I’ll be out there. Fishermen don’t fish anymore. They obliterate, slaughter, expunge. They use vacuums, for fuck’s sake. That’s not fishing. That’s extermination. When you raise cattle, you at least feed them. But fishermen don’t feed fish. They just take. They even take the food the fish eat. Sheer avarice. I could kill them all.”

He emptied the bottle.

“How’d you end up here, in Argentina?” Angela asked.

He paused, then reached for the second bottle. “A

few weeks ago,” he said, “we came across a fishing trawler poaching in protected waters. I got in a Zodiac and started pulling in their longline. One of my volunteers was helping.” He uncorked the bottle and drank before offering it to Angela. She shook her head.

“She was young, and it was her first season with us,” he continued. “She was all fired up, and stubborn as hell. I had a difficult time saying no to that woman. I should have. I should have left her back on the ship.”

He went silent, and Angela waited. She was learning that he tended to communicate in waves of dialogue, broken up by gaps of wind-blown silence. Initially, the silence made her nervous, and she filled the gaps with penguin trivia. But he wasn’t really listening to her, so she eventually let the silence flow over the both of them. She came to enjoy the intimacy between people who were silent together.

“I was piloting the Zodiac, she was hauling in the line. Dangerous work. Every fifteen feet there’s a razor-sharp hook the size of your index finger. Anyway, the trawler saw what we were doing, and they ran right at us. We should have tossed the line and got out of there. This trawler was huge—about twenty times bigger than us. But I thought I could dodge it and keep on pulling in the line. I cut across the front of their bow, too close.” He took a long drink. “I should have left her on the ship,” he said again.

“Did she drown?”

“No. She got caught up in the longline. Pulled into the water. She was sucked into the props.”

“Oh my God.”

“We never found the body. In all my time doing this sort of thing, from the Arctic to the Antarctic, we’ve never lost a life. Came close plenty of times. But we always were a bit luckier than we deserved. Until that day. I only wish it was me who went into the water.”

“I’m sorry.”

“One wrong move, and I’m no longer an activist,” he said.  
“I’m a terrorist.”

“What about your crew? Won’t they be arrested?”

“The ship will be boarded, if it hasn’t already happened.  
But it’s me they want.”

THE NEXT DAY, THEY MADE GOOD TIME on their circles. Aeneas was a reliable partner, quiet and focused, but always quick to make a joke when the opportunity arose. Angela could see why a woman married him. Yes, he belched and cursed like a sailor, but he also listened like a therapist as she rambled on about oil spills and overfishing. She told him that she hadn’t dated a man in three years and not many men before that. But he didn’t judge her, or if he did, he kept his thoughts to himself. For lunch, they sat on a berm overlooking the beach, not far north from where she first discovered him. They watched the wind blurring the tops of the folding waves, blowing spray into the air.

“Did you always want to protect penguins?” Aeneas asked.

“I used to think I was going to study the albatross.”

“Makes sense.”

“How so?”

“The albatross keeps to itself.” He stopped, but she knew where he was headed, and she resisted arguing. He was right, after all; she, too, was a loner.

“Actually,” she said, “my vision isn’t all that good, so my professor at the time told me to focus on birds that I could get a bit closer to.”

After lunch, he helped her attach a satellite transmitter to a male penguin. He had an impressive grip that held the bird steady as Angela applied the device.

“Since we started using these transmitters five years ago,” she said, “the penguins have been traveling farther and farther away from the colony. Some travel more than a hundred miles each way.”

“One hell of a commute,” he said.

“It’s because of the fishing trawlers. You know how they operate—they take all the fish close to shore. And we can only measure distance. We can’t measure the fear these penguins feel when the fishing grounds they have known their entire lifetimes disappear overnight. Or the stress a female with its young undergoes because the male must travel farther and farther out. All we can measure are the paths they travel. We need more measurements. We can watch them around the clock when they’re on land, but we know so little about their lives out there. And the more we know about penguins, the more we will know about the oceans. If the ocean is healthy, they are healthy. And if the ocean is dying—”

Angela stopped herself. She was rambling, her voice shaking, and she did not want him to see her so upset. She’d finished attaching the transmitter, and she released the penguin and watched him scurry off toward the water. Aeneas was silent. She was thankful until she raised her eyes and realized that he was not watching the penguin but was watching her.

“The Romans used to believe you could tell the future by studying birds,” he said. “They looked for omens, good and bad, in their flight patterns. Wars were waged based on whether or not a particular bird passed by. One might say it was an absurd religion they followed, the leaders relying on augurs to tell them what the flying gods had in store for them. I don’t agree. Nature *is* a god. And you, Angela, are its augur.”

She didn’t know what to say and was grateful when he changed the subject. “What’re those?” he asked, pointing toward three rabbit-like creatures in the distance.

“Those are maras. They’re unique to Patagonia.”

“Do you count them too?”

“No. But they could certainly use an advocate because they’re endangered. They’re strictly monogamous. The ranchers used to say that if you kill one mara, you have to kill its mate as well, because it will never breed again.”

“Romantic, in a ruthless sort of way.”

“Penguins are also monogamous, but practical. If they lose a mate, they’ll rebound quickly. Not maras. They mourn for years, some forever.”

“How long will it take you to get over me?” he asked, a smile on his face.

“Why don’t you leave, and we’ll see?”

He laughed so loudly the maras scattered. And she realized how long it had been since she’d made a man laugh out loud.

“You want to switch?” he asked as they stood to return to their census taking.

Angela was pleased, if a little surprised, to see him taking an interest. And so she taught him the difference between *quilembai* and Lycium bushes, how to guess a penguin’s age by the dark rings in its eyes, how to spot flipper tags from twenty yards. She enjoyed watching him grunt and curse as he crawled on the dirt, straining to see into the burrows. A man of the water, he was far removed from his element, and he lumbered about like the penguins. During lunch, as they sat on the rocks of a dry riverbed, a harmless snake made him spill his water bottle. He made her laugh as well.

During the circles, occasionally she would notice him looking eastward, toward the ocean, even if it was hidden behind the hills. She pretended not to notice, feeling a slight ache in her chest. She wanted to read his mind, to know how he felt about her, but men were a species she’d never understood; she had not been with enough men to draw statistically valid findings.

That evening, she took him to a spot she usually visited alone—the edge of a red cliff that looked out over the water. The wind was so loud they just sat there, sandwiches in hand, as the penguins emerged in herds from the water. She took him there because she knew what he wanted, but as he scanned the horizon she hoped there would be no ships today. She wanted to shave his beard, see his face in full, smooth and warm and up close. Then she caught herself and turned to thoughts of the remaining nests to be counted.

## An IndieReader Discovery Award Winner

“...at once a romance, an adventure story, an environmental polemic, and a keen study of just how animalistic humans are.”

—*Phoebe Literary Journal*

Biologist Angela Haynes is accustomed to dark, lonely nights as one of the few humans at a penguin research station in Patagonia. She has grown used to the cries of penguins before dawn, to spending most of her days in one of the most remote regions on earth. What she isn't used to is strange men washing ashore, which happens one day on her watch.

The man won't tell her his name or where he came from, but Angela, who has a soft spot for strays, tends to him, if for no other reason than to protect her birds and her work. When she later learns why he goes by an alias, why he is a fugitive from the law, and why he is a man without a port, she begins to fall in love—and embarks on a journey that takes her deep into Antarctic waters, and even deeper into the emotional territory she thought she'd left behind.

Against the backdrop of the Southern Ocean, *The Tourist Trail* weaves together the stories of Angela as well as FBI agent Robert Porter, dispatched on a mission that unearths a past he would rather keep buried; and Ethan Downes, a computer tech whose love for a passionate animal rights activist draws him into a dangerous mission.

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