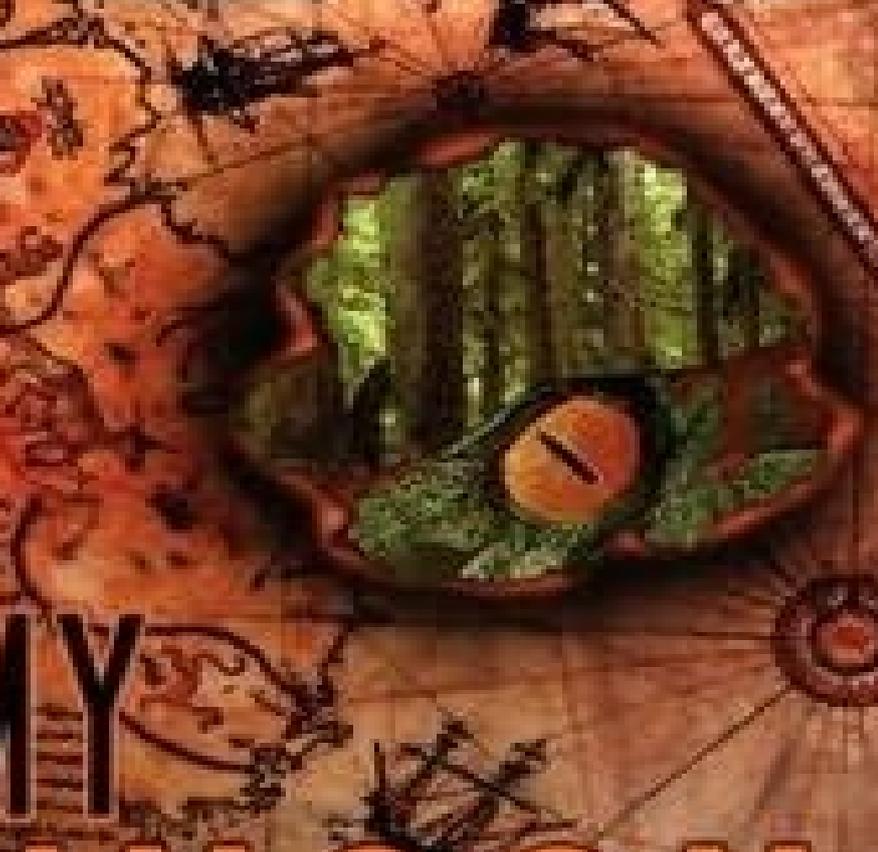


"A NEW DARK CONTINENT OF TERROR. TRESPASS AT YOUR OWN RISK."
—James Rollins, bestselling author of *BLACK ORDER* and *THE JUDAS STRAIN*

ANTARKTOS RISING



JEREMY
ROBINSON

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE DIDYMOUS CONTINGENCY* AND *RAISING THE PAST*

Antarktos Rising

Jeremy Robinson

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For Dad

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“The more rapidly a civilization progresses, the sooner it dies for another to rise in its place.” -- *The Dance of Life by Havelock Ellis*

"If Antarctica were music it would be Mozart. Art, and it would be Michelangelo. Literature, and it would be Shakespeare. And yet it is something even greater; the only place on earth that is still as it should be. May we never tame it." -- *Andrew Denton*

“Antarctica represents the last great unknown of modern civilization. She abounds in secrets yet to be discovered and prizes yet to be claimed. She is a shrewd mistress who keeps her most private treasures hidden beneath a skirt of ice that I for one, would like a peek beneath.” -- *Antarktos by Dr. Merritt Clark*

"Great God, this is an awful place." -- *R.F. Scott on Antarctica*

“They are dead, they shall not live; Rephiam*, they shall not rise.” -- *Isaiah 26:14*

*Rephiam is typically, incorrectly, translated as “deceased.”

Prologue

“The only thing more dangerous than freezing to death out here is your jackass stubborn streak.”

“Aimee, do you know what your name means?”

“Of course. Love.”

“And do you know who else shares your name’s meaning?”

“No, Merrill, I don’t.”

“Freya. She was the Norse goddess of love and fertility.”

“If you’re thinking I’m feeling in any way fertile right now, you can go straight to hell. I bore you one child. I’m not going through that again.”

“The birth or the conception process?”

“Both, if you don’t clamp it.”

“You’re misinterpreting my remarks. I simply meant that Freya, love goddess of the Norse, lived in a very cold land. And despite the cold, she was loving . . . and fertile—ouch!”

“All your accumulated knowledge of the ancient world won’t change the fact that I am freezing cold, hungry, and five miles from camp.”

“Don’t hit me again. I could have chipped the fossil.”

“Merrill, the limb has been preserved on this giant ice cube for millions of years. I think it will—”

“You know, it might not be that old. And you must have this confused with the Arctic. Antarctica is a continent . . . with land.”

“I swear, I will . . .”

“What?”

“The sky.”

“My . . . Where’d that come from?”

“Merrill?”

“Wrap up the fossil! I’ll get the other side. Fasten it tight!”

“There isn’t time! Merrill!”

“Aimee?”

“I can’t see you through the snow!”

“I’m here!”

“I can’t see anything!”

“Leave the fossil! Follow my voice!”

“What’s that noise?”

“Ignore it! We need to find each other!”

“Merrill, I—*hmp!*”

“Aimee? Keep talking so I can find you! Aimee? *Aimee!*”

Shift

Chapter 1

Anguta grew more terrified as each paddle stroke carried his bone-and-sealskin kayak across the unusually placid Arctic Ocean and closer to the whale. His knotted muscles shuddered in spasms, not from the cold but from the realization that his lifelong goal might finally come to fruition. At age fifty-seven, the idea of single-handedly killing a sixty-foot humpback and towing its carcass back to the village seemed a ridiculous task. And while this rite of passage had been a long time coming, his aging body didn't feel up to the job.

Grasping a bone-tipped spear in his gloved hand, Anguta did his best to ignore the throb of arthritis attacking his knuckles and waited . . . patiently . . . for the leviathan to return to the surface. Three days of tracking and sustaining himself on cured salmon had taken him this far. If he didn't take the beast this year, he would return to the arctic waters off the coast of Alaska to try again—and he refused to consider that option. This was the year. He knew it.

“Come to me, whale,” Anguta mumbled through his thickly scarfed mouth. “Come to me and I will honor you with a quick death.” Anguta knew the death would only be quick if he were lucky enough to pierce the whale's eye and penetrate its brain on the first blow. Otherwise, his first strike would tether his kayak to the whale's body and a day-long struggle between man and beast would begin. The tradition belonged to his tribe alone, and Anguta was the only man who had yet to achieve the task. He had tried every year since he was nineteen.

Anguta cursed himself for finding the largest humpback in the entire ocean. He had hoped to find a young calf, newly weaned from its protective mother, but instead he had encountered a large bull, perhaps close in age to Anguta himself.

The old man's only consolation was that he was not cold. After years of fruitless arctic hunting trips, he had learned that technology could be useful. His outer layers were traditional Inuit—furs of caribou, bear, and seal hide. This covered him from head to toe, leaving only his eyes exposed. Underneath the furs was a combination of moisture-wicking fabrics and a military-grade thermal bodysuit. His eyes were sealed behind a face mask that not only warmed his skin, but by virtue of its tinted surface also dulled the harsh glow of bright sun on white ice.

Anguta let his eyes wander across the mirrored water which perfectly reflected the cloud-speckled sky. He looked for any distortion that would reveal the presence of a rising whale, but saw only sky. His thoughts drifted with the clouds. He pictured his wife, Elizabeth, a French Canadian originally o

of Quebec, feeding the dog team. Their marriage had been extremely unconventional at the time but was more common these days. Though shunned at first for his choice of wife, Anguta and Elizabeth's marriage had produced five children and seven grandchildren, all of whom he now missed greatly and wished were there beside him, hunting the whale. His marriage and half-breed children had already broken so many of his people's customs. Why not one more?

Chapter 2

Looking down at the canteen in his hand, Dmitriy Rostov wished that it was full of vodka instead of water. But his lust for the clean spirit's warmth on his tongue lasted only a moment, a much shorter duration than it had only a year ago. Dmitriy, at the age of thirty-seven, had learned he was an alcoholic, a plague that claimed 45 percent of his Russian compatriots. It was said that two-thirds of Russian men die with a bottle in their hands, a fate Dmitriy had resigned himself to . . .

"Dima, come see this."

. . . until he'd met her.

Viktoriya Petrova.

"Coming, Vika," Dmitriy called as he picked his way across the stone-strewn shoreline of Vadim Bay. The bay was part of the Kara Sea, a remote region off the northern coast of Siberia which could only be navigated during mid-summer. The bay was a large U-shaped inlet with cliff walls on either side. Behind the rocky shore grew a forest of strong pines that creaked and swayed in the salty sea breeze.

Rounding a boulder, Dmitriy came face-to-face with Viktoriya; it was the closest their faces had ever come to touching, though still not quite close enough for Dmitriy. She was bundled in a red parka and thick snow pants. Even in the summer, the temperature at Vadim Bay, located hundreds of miles north of the Arctic Circle, was cold enough to chap the skin.

Surprised by Dmitriy's sudden appearance, Viktoriya stumbled back and tripped over a loose rock. She yelped as she plummeted down.

"Vika!" Dmitriy's strong and steady hand had sprung out before he could think about what to do and snagged the arm of her parka. Her descent stopped. Dmitriy thanked God he was sober. A year ago she would have fallen to the rocks and he would have laughed drunkenly. He realized now that he would never have come this far without her encouragement. He had been headed for a very early retirement from the Ministry of Emergency Situations, but when Viktoriya had been assigned as his new partner, she had seen something worth saving in him. She had an iron will and whipped him into shape; when the reviews came in, his report showed a marked productivity increase. Now only ten days away from his fortieth birthday, he was a new man. His job was saved.

No. More than his job. He not only began to care for himself while on the job but also at home. Showering daily, brushing his teeth, wearing deodorant—all the good habits that Dmitriy had abandoned during his days as a drunk returned. The pale, oily-skinned, puffy-faced waste of a man he had, under Viktoriya's influence, changed to the core. He'd shed pounds, smelled clean, and when he finally began shaving again, displayed the handsome face of which his mother had once been so proud. It wasn't that Viktoriya had changed his mind—she'd infected his heart. Like his person, he kept his

apartment neat and nicely decorated. Just in case she came to visit. Just in case the day came that I would tell her everything he felt. He'd always imagined being at home, in the city, on that day. But here, alone, in the wild, he felt brave. Today would be the day.

He pulled her up until her cushioned body rested against his. They were closer still than ever before—close enough for Dmitriy to smell the subtle fragrance of her perfume. Rose.

“Vika, are you all right? I didn't mean to startle you.”

“Fine. I'm fine.” Viktoriya looked into his eyes and paused for a moment. Unspoken words flashed between them, stripped away his bravery, and transformed his mind into that of a nervous fourteen-year-old boy on his first date.

Chapter 3

From her perch high above the city of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Mirabelle Whitney could see the trip into town for an ice cream wouldn't be worth it. Not for another few hours, anyway. Her royal red, nineteenth-century Victorian house sat atop Prospect Hill, the tallest hill in the seacoast region two hundred feet. From her second-floor bedroom deck, she had clear views of downtown Portsmouth and the ocean beyond. To her left, she could see Kittery, Maine, across the Piscataqua River, and to her right she could see the thick tree lines of Greenland and Rye.

This was the view that kept her anchored. There wasn't a single time of the year when the scene dulled. Her eyes lingered on the downtown again. The congestion that clogged the streets and spilled onto routes 95, 1, and 16 was due to the combination of summertime revelers and rush hour traffic.

Tonight, she thought. I'll get ice cream tonight.

Whitney stretched her lean body, allowing her midriff to peek out from between her white tank top and khaki shorts, absorbing every ounce of warmth she could. She wasn't a huge fan of the moist New England summers, but she knew warm summer air would soon be a thing of the past.

Sweet ocean air passed through her nostrils as she breathed deeply, took half of her long blond hair and rolled it into a bun on the side of her head. A quick jab with a decorative chopstick she'd saved from a trip to Tokyo held the bun in place. As she rolled up the other side, a frigid breeze tickled the hairs on her forearms. She shivered.

Ocean breeze is cold today, she thought.

After finishing the second bun, she looked at her reflection in the window glass. She looked like an anime version of Princess Leia . . . a dark-skinned, nappy-blond-haired version. Whitney smiled. For the first time in a long time, she thought she looked good. Maybe it was the reflection of Portsmouth and the ocean in the background that caused her to cast a fairer gaze at herself. She wasn't sure. But her brown skin and darker brown eyes hadn't looked this vibrant in a year.

Whitney knew that while her outward appearances were improving, her heart was still healing. No amount of exercise or sleep could erase the torment she had endured the past year.

Cindy Bekoff, her friend and psychologist, believed Whitney's upcoming trip to Antarctica was an excuse to flee from the pain. "There aren't many places on earth more remote," she had said. "You need to deal with your pain before moving on."

What Whitney hadn't, and wouldn't, tell her, was that it was where *he* was . . . it was where he had been hiding all this time. She wasn't running from pain; she was accelerating straight toward it.

The wind reversed direction, flowing up and over the red Victorian home's shingled roof and heading for the ocean. As the gust spilled across Whitney's body, she took note of its sudden warmth.

The temperature shift struck her as odd—a cold front and heat wave battling for supremacy. New England was known for its drastic weather changes, but this variation in temperature during a mid-summer day seemed downright freakish.

Chapter 4

Longing for home and family, Anguta failed to notice the first ripples in the water's surface. Something was rising. Bubbles expressed from the emerging creature churned the surface and snapped Anguta's attention back to the task at hand. Raising the spear over his head, Anguta waited for the right time to strike.

The water parted to expose the dark gray flesh of the humpback's hide. Still Anguta waited. An early strike might connect with the beast's tail, causing the man to be thrashed about with every pull of its mighty fluke. As the whale's head breached the surface, Anguta focused, waiting for the moment when the whale would exhale a spray of mist and expose its eyes.

Anguta felt his heart stop when he made eye contact with the whale, but there was no exhalation from its blowhole to trigger his throwing arm. He stood solidly, gripping his spear, muscles taut, but he did not throw. He stared into the eye of the creature, which appeared to be blinded by cataracts. With a heavy heart, he realized that he and the whale weren't so dissimilar. They'd sired families. Traveled the Arctic. Fought the elements. And they'd grown old. Then he remembered their crucial difference. He was a hunter. Years of failed hunts flashed through Anguta's mind, and all the mercy he felt for the blind whale evaporated quickly as the spear sailed from his hand.

As soon as he released his hold on the spear, he knew his aim was true; it was a killer shot into the humpback's eye. The tow line unfurled at Anguta's feet as the spear covered the twenty-foot distance to the whale. The tip of the spear struck home, dead center in the whited eyeball—and glanced off.

The sound and physical reaction of the spear would have been no different if Anguta had flung it as a stone.

He followed the ricocheted spear with his eyes in disbelief at what had happened and annoyance that he'd have to retrieve the spear. But when the weapon struck the ocean, it bounced again. The surface was frozen.

There's no ice here, Anguta thought. Perhaps an iceberg?

The old man scanned the world around him. It was white and frozen. His eyes turned back to the whale. Its skin sparkled with frost—it was frozen solid. It was only then that he noticed the biting cold nibbling at his skin. He had never felt such a degree of cold through his arctic gear. The sensation was similar to rolling stark naked in the snow.

As his muscles involuntarily twitched, working to warm his body temperature, he tried to get his bearings. He had to find shelter. But as he searched the newly frozen ocean for a glimmer of hope, his goggles fogged and he became as blind as the now-petrified whale.

Frustrated and panicked, Anguta removed his goggles and immediately regretted the decision. His eyeballs froze. A jolt of savage pain threw Anguta off his feet and ripped through his body. Image

sailed through his mind: Elizabeth, the kids, their little ones . . . would this cold front reach them well?

Anguta's body hit the kayak with a thud, solid as stone.

Chapter 5

Dmitriy stared, willing his mouth to form words to express his love, but he remained silent. He swallowed audibly and felt a sick feeling in his stomach. He glanced to the side, avoiding her penetrating eyes as his silent embarrassment grew, and noticed she was holding her Geiger counter. He remembered why they were there and wondered if she had found something important. He didn't really care at the moment, but it gave him something to say. "You wanted to show me something?"

She seemed startled by the question. "I, uh . . ." She noticed Dmitriy's eyes on the Geiger counter. "Oh, yes, I . . . Look at this."

Viktoriya pulled herself away from Dmitriy's arms and stepped out toward the waterline where small, frigid waves lapped against the shore. She stopped and held out the Geiger counter. Sweeping left to right, the counter clicked slowly at first, then rapidly, then slowly again. She repeated the sweep two more times.

Dmitriy stood next to her and studied the shoreline beneath her feet. It looked as harmless as the rest of the beach, but he suspected something was buried there. He looked at the Geiger counter gauge as she swept it over again. The radiation levels read slightly above normal, but not high enough to kill them. Enough to shorten their lives by a few hours, perhaps, but otherwise safe.

They had been sent to the far away place to investigate mishandling of environmental pollutants during the Cold War. Siberia, at that time, had been used primarily for dumping toxic waste and exiling criminals. Now, after all these years, it was finally being recognized as a natural wonder. But severe damage had been done, and Dmitriy believed they were about to uncover more evidence of his country's environmental neglect.

He bent down and scraped several small stones aside. As he set his eyes on a larger stone, he felt sweat gather on his forehead. He was hot. He wrote it off as exertion—he still wasn't in very good shape—picked up the large stone, and tossed it to the side. Beneath it were more stones. This was going to take a while.

"Dima?"

Dmitriy turned and saw Viktoriya removing her parka.

"Are you hot?" she asked.

"Da, but I think I haven't worked this hard in . . ." He noticed she was sweating, too.

Something was wrong. The temperature had risen. Removing his parka, Dmitriy let the heat soak as he attempted to remember a time in his life when, if ever, he'd felt the air so hot. He couldn't. The temperature seemed to be rising exponentially.

"Dima . . . the radiation?"

Dmitriy looked into Vika's eyes and recognized fear. Had the radiation sprung a leak when he

removed the stones? Were they being poisoned? He took the Geiger counter from her hand and swept the area. He shook his head. "No, something else."

Still the heat rose.

His throat began to sting. He took a swig of water and offered the canteen to Viktoriya. She gulped it greedily.

The trees behind them groaned as they bent under a burst of pummeling wind. The wind was dry and hot, like bending over an open oven. Dmitriy blinked his eyes as the moisture was wicked from them. Something was very wrong.

"We have to leave!" he said. He glanced up the shoreline where they had landed the helicopter a football field away. "Get to the helicopter!"

He took Vika's hand and helped her across the loose rocks. The rising heat made his heart beat wildly in his chest, urged him to sprint at full speed. But he couldn't leave Vika behind. She had saved his life. She was his life. He would not let her die now.

Viktoriya slipped on a stone and fell forward, but Dima was there to catch her. He swept her into his arms and stumbled toward the copter.

The heat continued to rise. Dmitriy struggled to keep his eyes open. The heat was so intense that he felt as though his eyes were peeled grapes. He looked at Viktoriya. Her eyes were clenched shut.

They were halfway to the copter now, and Dmitriy was wheezing. His body was dry. Every bead of sweat that his body produced evaporated. A loud *crack* drew his eyes back to the forest. He saw a tree falling to the ground, pushed over by the punishing winds, but what shocked him was the state of the trees. The needles, moments ago vibrant green, were now tinged brown, dried out. Dead.

A rising cloak of darkness, like an evil apparition, caught Dmitriy's attention as it plumed into the sky above the forest. It assaulted his nose first: acrid smoke laced with sulfur. The trees were burning and while he couldn't see it, he suspected a volcano had erupted. The blackness poured out from the tree line and rolled over the beach. Dmitriy found it impossible to breathe.

He struck out for the helicopter again, Viktoriya now a dead weight in his arms. He glanced down to check her condition, but found his eyes blinded by the heat and smoke. A jagged boulder caught his shin and he fell forward, dropping Viktoriya and landing on top of her.

The intensity of the heat blistered Dmitriy's skin. His scream was cut short from lack of breath. Through parched eyes, he looked back at the forest in time to see the trees explode into flame. The heat washed over his body, blinding, searing, and suffocating. He hoped that Vika might survive the inferno protected by his body, but he sensed that she had already passed. So close, he thought. So close.

With a seismic boom, the gas tank of the helicopter exploded. It was the last thing Dmitriy heard before his parched body burst into flame.

Chapter 6

Mirabelle Whitney glanced past her shoulder and out at the town. Everything looked normal. Traffic was still congested. The red brick buildings still glowed in the sun. But something was off. She leaned out her bedroom window to look further.

Strawberry Banke was a well-maintained park, complete with historic buildings and a flower garden. It was often used for functions during the summer months: clambakes, lobster fests, and charity cook-offs. Whitney searched the sea of people for a sign of today's event. She found the answer in the gleaming white glow of a veil caught by the seaward wind: a wedding.

Whitney looked away quickly, avoiding her own memories, and moved her eyes out to sea.

What she saw next made her forget the pain from the emotional scab that had just been picked open. The ocean seemed more distant. In its place was a very long beach where there had been no beach before. This was a port town. If you wanted a beach, she thought, you go south to Hampton or north to Ogunquit. Not to Portsmouth.

Whitney noticed the wedding party and park patrons clambering onto the docks along the river. They saw it, too. She followed the waterline up the Piscataqua River and saw that its shores had shrunk inward. The water that remained was quickly rushing out to sea.

When she looked back, all that was left of the coastline was a small river flowing out of the Piscataqua and a sliver of blue, far on the horizon. The ocean was gone. All that remained was a sandy expanse speckled with grounded boats and flickering reflections of light that Mirabelle realized were struggling fish drowning in the open air.

As the hordes of vacationers began running in droves, fleeing Strawberry Banke and flooding into the downtown streets, Whitney realized what must be happening.

Tsunami.

Remembering a lesson learned from the killer waves that had recently struck Indonesia, India, and so many other countries, people headed for high ground. Whitney watched as rooftops began to fill with people in a panic. The top level of the five-story parking garage was full in minutes, and people on the lower levels struggled to get higher, but room was running out.

Whitney tore her eyes away from the impending train wreck to wonder if there was something she should do. She couldn't get any higher without heading up Route 16 into the mountains, but she should do something.

Whitney turned from her deck and entered the house. She walked into her bedroom, which had once been a decorative masterpiece but was now a laundry disaster area. She took the hallway stairs two at a time, moving swiftly. One by one she swept through the downstairs rooms, closing windows and locking doors. She paused at the front door and looked out at the green grass of the estate that had

once belonged to her parents.

She missed them now.

A hiss of leaves drew her attention to the green maple trees bordering the yard. The wind had picked up, but was still headed out to sea.

Whitney slammed the door shut and headed for the basement. Two years ago, she had converted the basement into a base of operations for her photography work. She spent six months of every year at a location in one remote part of the world or another, shooting landscapes and animals that most people avoided for fear of life and limb. It was dangerous work, but exciting and rewarding. She worked in the field, but this was her home base for expedition prep, film development, and camera maintenance. For the past year, the room had served as the staging area for her upcoming Antarctic venture. The dim basement was now stacked with food supplies. Gear for surviving the frozen wasteland filled the main room, and electronic gizmos lined the workbenches. Leaning over the GPS satellite phones, she picked up a pair of binoculars and charged back up the stairs.

As she passed through the bedroom, she noted the time: noon. It had taken her five minutes to look up the window and doors and return to her bedroom. She burst onto the deck and squinted against the sun, which shone down directly above her. She put the binoculars to her eyes and colorful blurs filled her vision. She adjusted the focus and settled on the parking garage. Like penguins huddling from the cold, a mass of humanity crammed itself onto the top floor of the garage, some dangerously close to spilling off the edge. She lowered her view. The next two floors were also full, and everyone was moving in one direction—up.

Whitney removed the binoculars and shook her head. Looking through the field glasses again, she turned her gaze toward the ocean . . . or what used to be the ocean. It had not returned. In fact, she could no longer see any water, save the trickle of the Piscataqua, all the way out to the horizon.

She wracked her brain for an answer. A sinkhole. Something must have opened up in the ocean and sucked the water down . . . something huge. It was the only answer.

Keeping her vigil, she scanned all of Portsmouth. Word of the phenomenon must have reached every nook of the seacoast town by now. The only cars she could see were driving away from town. Even the emergency vehicles were clearing out. They weren't fools—all the sirens, flashing lights, and ladders in the world wouldn't stop whatever was coming. Downtown was deserted, except for the rooftops. Whitney felt the anticipation of every soul on whom she gazed . . . all waiting for something to happen.

She paced about the house unsure of what to do or think. She frantically cleaned her counters and shined her sink; ridiculous, given the situation. When she could no longer stand staring at her warped reflection in the perfectly polished sink, she looked at the clock. It had been an hour.

She looked again at the parking garage; it looked less congested. People were lowering their guards, moving down to the lower levels, some even out onto the street. Whitney wanted to shout at them to run, to leave town, but they seemed slow, almost dazed by the surreal events.

Whitney looked up, forehead furrowed. It was past one o'clock, but the sun still appeared to be directly overhead. In the past hour, the sun had not moved.

“What . . .?”

Everything changed in that instant.

The sun began moving.

The wind shifted directions, billowing southwest from the barren ocean bed.

The temperature dropped and continued to fall with every gust.

Biting her lower lip, Whitney raised the binoculars to her eyes.

She saw an illusion. It had to be. A wall of blue and white churning water surged back into view, spilling from the northeast straight for shore. As the wall grew closer, she knew it was real. A tsunami

more massive than she'd ever imagined the phenomenon to be, was headed straight for her home town.

The people atop the parking structure were the first to see it. They were also the first to realize they weren't high enough to avoid it. Whitney shuddered as a collective wail of panic and despair rose from the city below. Tears brimmed and spilled over onto her face. They were all going to die. And she could only watch.

She'd seen death before and knew she lacked the stomach to witness what was coming. Turning away from the city of her childhood, from the home she had made, from all the places and people she loved, Whitney ran to her bedroom and closed the deck doors behind her. The distant voices were silenced. She leaned against the wall and slid down to the floor, hoping the water wouldn't reach her as well.

The next minute was spent in silence as she waited. In her mind's eye she saw the citizens of Portsmouth clambering over each other, trampling the weak. She knew it was human nature to step on the next guy if it meant saving one's own life. She felt certain a number of people were already dead long before the wave struck. A sob escaped her as she remembered Cindy's office was downtown. The tears flowed freely now.

Then the voices returned. Grew louder.

Closer.

Whitney stood, opened the door, and stepped out onto the porch. Her timing couldn't have been worse. A seventy-foot wave of water slid through Portsmouth and consumed it all. The people still on rooftops ceased to exist. Those on the streets were swept up and churned in the grinding waters as easily as the brick, concrete, wood, and mortar that held the city together.

The voices returned: "Open the goddamn gates!"

A small group of perhaps fifteen people had flocked to her front gate, probably neighbors who knew her home stood on the tallest peak of the hill. She cursed her father for building the eight-foot stone wall and metal gate that sealed off the estate from the rest of the world, protecting her from unknown predators.

Whitney glanced toward the downtown. The rising waters had consumed the city and were now racing toward her, pounding up the steady incline. Whitney dashed back into the bedroom, calculating how long it would take her to reach and unlock the front door, sprint the hundred feet to the gate, unlock and open it by hand, sprint back to the house with fifteen people, and shut the door behind her.

Too long.

If only she'd fixed the gate's remote! That kind of thing hadn't been her concern lately, and she'd let it go for six months.

A slight vibration in the floorboards at the base of the stairs reinforced the idea that she wouldn't have time. Still, she had to try.

She reached the front door, unlocked the deadbolt, and flung it open. Vaulting down the five front stairs in one leap, Whitney hit the driveway at a sprint. She heard roaring water, breaking glass, and the horrid wrench of metal as the unseen torrent pounded relentlessly forward.

Not waiting for the gate to be opened, the fleeing group began climbing over it. To the left, a little girl struggled with the smooth metal bars. The others were leaving her behind. Whitney leapt at the gate and clung to it like a monkey. She yanked herself to the top, feeling the muscles in her arms tear. At the top, she reached over and thrust her hand out to the girl. "Take my hand!"

The little girl's fingers intertwined with Whitney's, and the girl was pulled steadily up. A bearded man next to the girl saw that she'd clear the gate first and took hold of Whitney's arm to hold himself.

"Let go!" Whitney shouted as the gate dug into her arm.

“Amber!” another man shouted with shock in his eyes. He lunged at the bearded man pushing the girl back down, and Whitney knew the girl’s rescuer was her father. Amber’s father wrapped one arm around the aggressor’s neck and pushed off the gate with his feet. The action added an unbearable amount of weight to Whitney’s arm, but both men fell to the ground. The father seemed willing to die for his child, and as the two men rolled away from the gate pummeling each other, she realized she would.

The water was upon them.

Whitney pulled with all her might, but her muscles had little strength left. The water hit her like an explosion. Whitney was flung back ten feet, her grip on Amber’s arm lost. She sat up quickly and looked to the gate. The people were gone, replaced by a churning wall of water that roared like a wounded Kodiak bear.

Whitney shouted as she pushed herself up and ran back to the house. Ten feet from the front stairs her feet began splashing through ocean water. A surge of water hit her knees and threatened to knock her down, but she lunged up the stairs, freeing herself from the water’s grasp.

She entered the house, closed the door, slammed the deadbolt home, and careened for the stairs hoping another ten feet would be enough to save her life. She reached the top stair in four leaps. As she stepped into the hallway, a force struck the house so hard that she was shaken from her feet. She fell forward and heard a loud crack, but it wasn’t the house; it was her head. A stab of pain shot through her skull. As she fell, she saw the wooden chest she’d struck as she’d fallen.

It was the last thing she saw. Her vision blurred and turned black.

As her consciousness faded, the sound of rushing water and groaning wood surrounded the house.

Whitney awoke with a start and clasped a hand to her throbbing head. She struggled past the pain attempting to gather her thoughts. As the pulsing headache in her left temple eased in intensity, she remembered: the wave. The people. The death. Despair, rage, and confusion attacked her all at once like an emotional lion pride, circling with hackles raised and talons extended. They wanted to devour her alive. But they were old enemies she’d faced before. Using willpower built over the past year of suffering, she pushed the emotions away and faced her grim new reality.

She forced herself to calm and became more aware of her surroundings. She was still on the hallway floor of her house, but she was freezing. Wondering if she was wet, she checked herself and found her clothing to be dry. She looked down the stairs. Even the downstairs floor was dry.

From her position on the floor, she could see her alarm clock, but the power was out. She had no way of knowing how long she’d been unconscious, but it couldn’t have been long. It was still daylight though the previously blue sky was now thick with ashen clouds . . . and something else.

Standing came only after a concerted effort. Her head pounded with every step, and she found herself walking through the bedroom and toward the deck door with her eyes closed. Hand outstretched, she stopped when she reached the wall. She slid her fingers from the wall to the glass of the sliding door.

When the flesh of her finger made contact with the glass, Whitney yelped and pulled her hand away. The pain was like searing heat, but she knew from experience that it was cold. Freezing cold. Whitney’s eyes flew open and blinked at the brightness. Despite the overcast sky, something outside was abnormally bright.

Through squinted eyes, Whitney took in her new view.

Extending out from ten feet below her home’s foundation all the way to the horizon was a sheet of ice. Thick flakes of snow fell from the sky. She seemed to have been transported to the North Pole. She didn’t dare go outside dressed for summer as she was, but from her view behind the glass she

could see that everything, from Maine to Massachusetts, was buried under hundreds of feet of snow and ice.

And now she was alone, completely, and she feared that the most. More than the wave. More than the cold. Being alone with her thoughts, with her demons, was just about the worst way she could imagine to die.

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