

Alex the Parrot-guin

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This is the first draft of the story so expect some rough spots and inconsistencies. I apologize for not inserting the proper accent marks on the Spanish words.

You might note that chapter 10 reads like the end of the story and that was the intent. But the characters forced me to write another 10 chapters. True.

These stories are dedicated to our grandchildren Loveday, Miles, Isaac and Cedar

Ch01-Tierra del Fuego

If you look at a map of South America or a globe of the world, Tierra del Fuego is at the tip of South America near the Antarctic.

Characters: Ruffa – a dog
Harry a seagull
Juanita – innkeeper's daughter
Ephraim and Manasseh – two young Egyptians
Bernie – the ibis
Alex the parrot-guin – the green penguin

Now we all know there is no such thing as a green bird that is half parrot and half penguin but if you happen to be one, it isn't much help. You're just stuck with it.

Alex was the parrot-guin in question. He had the body of a penguin and the wings and head of a parrot. That meant he was a dusky green where normal penguins are black. Looking at him it seemed as if he were a parrot wearing a green tuxedo or a penguin wearing a parrot mask.

He didn't much like fish and diving into freezing water was the last thing he wanted to do. Making a nest at the rocky margins of an ice flow didn't appeal to him either. As there was no Alexa in his life, that was unlikely ever to be essential.

Alex had been made a pet by a sailor who gave him his name. He was so young when the sailor took him that he had no memory of his parents or where he was from. The sailor took him to Tierra del Fuego which is one of the southernmost inhabited places in the world. It's an island, actually an archipelago, at the tip of South America. Being so close to the south pole, days can be days all day and night and nights can be nights all day and night. A real steamy summer day might get up to 50 degrees. But the wind makes it feel like the inside of an ice chest.

Alex was accustomed to central heating and a steady supply of sunflower seeds, fruit, and cooked carrots and squash. He had been traded to an inn owner to settle a bill the sailor owed. To earn his keep he had to learn to say all manner of things to amuse the customers. Some of them weren't very nice. He also had to do a dance with his webbed penguin feet to the music on the jukebox when someone requested it.

It was, as they say, a life. But Alex wished for something better. He'd thought about the possibility of moving to a zoo in a warmer climate but figured a zoo would become boring rather quickly.

Alex and Ruffa the dog would take walks together. Ruffa liked company and Alex was afraid of cats so it was a good arrangement. One day by the seashore they saw an unusual boat. It had the shape of a canoe but it was much larger. At the bow and stern were extensions that went up and curved back like a lizard with his tail in the air. It was one weird boat. Two young men sat in it rowing and seemed relieved to have found land. With them was an ibis named Bernie. Alex didn't think much of ibiss'. They tended to root about in the mud for crustaceans. But at least this one could speak pigeon. People of different languages often can communicate speaking pidgin which is a forming of simple phrases to convey meaning. There is a lot of pointing and gesturing but it works. Birds use pigeon. It take a lot of head bobbing but it works and it's such a simple language even sparrows understand it.

After the usual how do you dos, Alex learned the ibis was from Egypt as were the two young men. They were Ephraim and Manasseh. It seems they'd taken a wrong turn after the first cataract on the Nile river and after 3200 years of rowing, or so it had seemed, managed to get themselves to Tierra del Fuego. They were feeling a bit hungry. The ibis had his beak in the mud already.

Ruffa ran back to the inn to get Juanita, the innkeeper's daughter. And after a few back and forth trips all eventually were at the inn with the ibis and Alex moving the conversation from Egyptian to pigeon to Spanish and back again. To say a little was lost in translation is an understatement. That pigeon is missing words for Sphinx and mummy is the least of it. Pyramid comes out as something like "pointed statue".

As this was moving very slowly and was more like charades than translation, Juanita took them over to the Universidad de Las Bellas Artes y Mechanismo Automotivo, Which means roughly the University of Fine Arts and Auto Mechanics. Prof. Loco was able to give them some help. Hermano Loco had been a world traveler because when a warrant was sworn out in his name he would find the nearest border and cross it. And he picked up bits of language in his travels and had once been in Egypt.

The good professor informed them that although the authorities weren't aware of them so far that, because they had no papers, they would soon find themselves back in their boat drifting south for a visit to Alex's kinfolk. Even Alex thought that was a sad fate. Juanita chimed in with an idea. "You could put a sail on your boat and go up the coast of South America. I have an old oilskin table cloth, you could use that."

Now the problem with such a voyage was they had no more navigation aids than before. Now the Polynesians had a perfectly good and very sophisticated navigation scheme but Tierra del Fuego was fresh out of them.

All that could be used by an untrained navigator was the constellation Crux (pronounced Krucks) which is known everywhere else as the Southern Cross. If the bow of the boat was headed away from it, you were going north.

All that said, our would-be travelers had no knowledge of the treacherous winds and high seas they

would encounter. They were after all at the tip of South America near Cape Horn. In the days of the great sailing ships it took particular skill for a sea captain to round the Cape and sail up the western coast because the wind was rarely favorable. Sometimes ship and crew would have to wait over a month to pick up a good westerly wind.

So, it should come as no surprise that when our travelers got out to sea on a cloudy day and lost their bearing that they went someplace they had no intention of going. Our little crew consisted of Ephraim and Manasseh, (it was their boat), our friend Alex, Ruffa, Bernie the ibis and Juanita, who'd made the make-shift sail.

They had been at sea three days and the winds had been getting colder and colder when they came upon a small island. Juanita said, "That island isn't on the map." Alex said, "What map?" It was an old one her father had bought at the estacion de petrol (Gas station). As no one knew which way they had been going, they agreed she could be right.

As they got closer they could see the island was either rock and ice or rock partially covered by ice. But on the side facing them were some sort of monuments placed in a regular manner. Even closer they took on the shape of some kind of figure. Then a fog came in and hid them from our traveler's eyes. By this time they were at the shore and dragged their boat up onto the beach to make it safe from the waves.

They found shelter in a cave and found signs that others had done the same. Fresh water seeped down through the rock ceiling and they collected it in a jug that Juanita had brought. They started a fire and Alex, rather reluctantly dove into the sea and caught some fish and brought them back for dinner.

Ch02-An Ancient People

In the morning the wind drove the fog out and they were able to explore their little island. To their great surprise the monuments turned out to be great stone statues that looked exactly like Alex. The tops looked like parrot and the bottom like penguin. It gave Alex the shivers as it might mean this place was home. Why couldn't it be some place warmer like Vina del Mar, Chile or Lima, Peru?

When they turned away from the statues they found some 50 men with an elder bowing low to the ground. They were bowing in Alex's direction. The elder spoke and Ephraim could understand parts of what he said. It was ancient Egyptian. Ephraim and the elder talked for quite awhile and then he turned to the others and said: "These men and their families are a cult that worships the ancient god Seth. Seth was the one always pictured as a man with the head of an unknown animal. He was the god of chaos and everything upsetting to the Egyptians. Thus he wasn't much of a crowd pleaser except to his followers. Seth's reputation meant they got invited to few parties. The fact they had removed to this remote island meant they had most likely been asked to leave at spear point. As far as they are concerned, Seth has returned. By that they mean Alex."

Alex was having some rather some dark thoughts. If I must be a stand-in for a god, why not in Miami or Hollywood? Juanita was bothered too. She hadn't signed on for this voyage only to be marooned in an even colder place than home. Ephraim and Manasseh were happy they'd found countrymen, so to speak.

The Sethites, for that is what we will call them, supplied Juanita with a nice warm sealskin coat. Bernie the ibis was shown a cave where warm springs flowed and his usual diet lived in the mud. Ruffa survived on a diet of fish but dreamed of stew bones and sheep shanks. Alex had to get used to the locals hitting the deck every time he walked by.

The island was quite isolated as it was further south than the sea lanes in use at the time. Someone had to be heading to Antarctica to even come close, and few did. But Alex puzzled about how the Sethites got there in the first place. Manasseh came to him one day all excited and said he had been in a cave filled with small boats not much different than theirs. Alex thought, "What do I have to do to get these people to move off this rock and head north?"

Sometimes matters get taken out of our hands. In this case a bit of smoke was seen issuing from the highest point on the island. The ground shook repeatedly. The water from the warm springs got so hot, Bernie couldn't forage there anymore. Juanita said, "I think this island is a volcano and I don't want to be here when it blows its top." The hair on Ruffa's back bristled and he growled from time to time.

Alex went to the head elder and told him the time had come to move off the island as it was about to self destruct. Everyone took that with great seriousness because Alex was their god incarnate. Supplies were gathered. The people packed up their belongings. The ancient boats were patched and made seaworthy again. The whole island was on alert. Those who weren't convinced of the danger soon joined the others when a vent opened up partway up the slope and molten lava flowed down to the sea hissing as it hit the water.

Ephraim and Manasseh rummaged through the boat cave and found a few ancient navigation aides they understood with which latitude could be determined. Also there was a tablet that gave information about the useful stars and constellations used to keep on course. It was the GPS of its day by which I mean the Guide to Pharaoh's Seas.

Once more our travelers would be at the mercies of the seas and the Sethites as well. But it was all for the good. They were scarcely two kilometers out to sea when the volcanic explosion took place sending bombs of stones and lava into the sea on all sides. Everyone wiped their collective sweating brows from having had a such a close call. The Sethites chanted an ancient ritual prayer to Alex for having come to save them from death.

Alex, on the other hand, prayed their next landfall would be somewhere in the sub-tropics. This god business was alright but he'd trade it any day for a temperate climate and a steady supply of sunflower seeds.

As I mentioned earlier, Ruffa was getting a bit sick of fish. Most of the time his tail hung between his legs. The weather was mixed. There was the feeling maybe they were going in circles. But one afternoon Ruffa's tail went up and he turned his face toward two o'clock. Juanita was at the tiller and she turned the boat that way and now Ruffa faced the bow. Whatever his sensitive nose had picked up they were headed straight for it.

Ch03-The Smugglers Cove

As they rounded a spit of land, Ruffa's nose pointed them toward a small cove. There they could make out two men tending to a barbecue made from a steel drum. The smoke coming their way smelled very enticing.

Juanita was wary though because men in such an isolated place could mean trouble. Who could tell what they might be up to? At one point one of them picked up a rifle but when he saw their odd boats he put it down again.

Juanita explained they were travelers who were lost and needed some help and, if possible some food. They were most gracious. They had recently slaughtered a sheep and had plenty of meat. Ruffa was very happy they weren't fishermen.

Alex asked if they were herdsman and Juanita gave him a kick in his shins for his troubles. That was a painful way for someone to tell you to shut up

As to where they were, the men answered they were north of the Straits of Magellan on the coast of Argentina. Alex had intended to sail up the Pacific but they were on the Atlantic side instead. The men wouldn't answer any more questions as it was quite apparent their hosts didn't want them to be able describe this location to anyone.

Plan A was to try and create a shelter for the night using the boats turned on their sides but instead they were shown a cave that had electric lights along with a stock of provisions. A local waterfall had been harnessed to drive a small electrical generator. Such luxury. However they must get up and pack by first light and be on their way.

When Alex, Ephraim and Manasseh, and Juanita got together to talk that night she said she'd seen two high speed boats loaded with boxes heading out to sea as they'd rounded the spit. These men were probably part of a smuggling gang that was moving contraband to the Falkland Islands and perhaps even to Chile.

The Straits of Magellan would give them access to Chile on the west coast. Otherwise one must cross the high Andes mountain range to get from one country to the other.

The Falklands lay out to the east in the Atlantic and had plenty of small coves that smugglers could use. Juanita felt they had better move on before their luck ran out. Smugglers can be a pretty violent bunch.

Bernie the ibis was picking about the cave and brought Juanita several coins he'd found that seemed to be copper or brass or some combination of those metals.

Alex found two video game machines up against the wall that seemed to be modified. Juanita said her father had gotten into trouble with machines like that. They turned the video game into a game of chance with a payoff to the winner. Before the authorities discovered them, her father had made more money from his illegal machines than the rest of his business.

Bernie said since he'd found the coins he wanted to play them. He stood on Ruffa's back and pecked away at the game's touch screen. He had good eyes and a quick beak. He managed to score a jackpot.

Juanita tied the coins up in her kerchief before they retired for the night.

As they sailed out of the cove and back to the ocean Juanita recalled what she knew of her geography. North of Argentina, which was very big, would be Uruguay, which was very small. And beyond it would be Brazil, the biggest country in all of South America.

Now the problem was that if they made it as far north as Sao Paulo, Brazil they would be in the tropics. Traveling in an open boat with no shelter would be very unpleasant as the weather in the tropics varied little with hot and humid being the norm.

Alex was feeling pretty good with the sun on his feathers. Some of the children of the Sethites had seen the sun only on rare occasions.

Juanita took one of the coins Bernie had won and scratched it with a pin from her sewing kit and the color down in the scratch was the same as the surface. So it wasn't some cheaply plated coin. Whatever the metal it was solid and a little soft.

They were able to track the coastline and not get blown out to sea. They spied a small village and pulled into their harbor to beg some provisions and stay for the night.

Once the villagers looked over the newcomers and determined they would be moving on and not causing any trouble, they were left alone. Juanita asked to be introduced to one of the patriarchs of the village. Thus she met an old priest, Father Martin. She showed him one of the coins and asked if it meant anything to him. "Indeed it does my dear. As a young man I searched for such coins but found few. I see few of them these days but I still have my old assay kit."

Father Martin rubbed the coin onto a special stone and then added a second scratch from an assay needle. He put acid on both scratches and they watched as the needle scratch reacted to the acid but the coin scratch did not. After several more trials father Martin said the coin was at least 22 karats of gold. "It was probably minted in Spain in the 16th century. That was when 22 karat Spanish coins became common."

Juanita went to the local banker with Father Martin and with his endorsement was able to exchange 3 of the gold coins for lots of pesos. Enough to buy food and supplies and outfit each boat with a canopy for the oarsmen to shield them from the hot sun. And she didn't forget to buy some nice bones for Ruffa to chew on.

They could go on this way but Juanita and Alex feared word would get out that they had gold and that could be very dangerous.

They weren't quite certain what to do next when they had a visitor. Al the seagull, who was an old friend of Alex's, dropped in on them. After Alex shared some fish with him for old times sake, Al gave him some news. About 100 km further north there was a lot of activity because a Hollywood studio was filming location shots for a movie. Maybe those outsiders could help them.

For the next few days Al would lead the way for a bit and then come back and play checkers with Alex

for an hour or so and take off again just in time to steer them away from shallow water and rocks.

Ch04-Punta Tombo

If you have a world atlas or can use one at the library, you might want to follow our travelers. All the seagull was taking them to Punta Tombo or Point Tombo. If you can't find it in your atlas, I'll tell you where it is. On the east coast of South America is a big C shape. That is the Golfo San Jorge. In English we'd say the Gulf of Saint George. Just above it is Camarones and further up is Rawson. (Rawson is the capitol of Chubut province.) Punta Tombo is about halfway between those two cities.

While we are looking at the map go a bit above Rawson and you will find an odd bit of land sticking out into the ocean. It might be an island but it is a peninsula because it is connected to the mainland and only surrounded by water on 3 sides. This is the Peninsula Valdes and it is a park and nature preserve.

People travel from all over the world to come here and see the wonders of nature. There is a seasonal migration of southern right whales and you can see them slap the water with their tails. You can even take a boat out and be right in the middle of hundreds of them. There are also elephant seals that weight over a thousand pounds and come here to mate. You can see them on the beach and walk near them, but not too close.

At Punta Tombo there is the largest colony of magellenic penguins outside of Antarctica. How many would that be? Imagine the entire population of Washington, D.C., every man, woman, and child, turned into penguins. It would be about that many. Come to think of it, if all the Congressmen could be turned into penguins it might be a good start.

Alex in his adult life rarely saw a penguin at all. So it was quite a shock when the boats pulled up onto the shore and faced this vast colony. Alex took a refreshing dip in the water, which was warmer, and shook himself and flapped his parrot wings to dry them when an amazing thing happened. The nearest penguins formed ranks and followed him. Every time he flapped his wings another 50 joined in. It wasn't long before Alex was waddling along the sands followed by 500 penguins in formation.

This puzzled everyone. Alex most of all. It didn't bother the Sethites, since Alex was leading, they joined the parade.

The filmmakers, who'd been filming a penguin nesting site under some bushes soon caught site of Alex and turned their camera on him. Their consultant from the natural history museum had never seen anything like it. When he looked with his binoculars he saw that the leader of the march was a mix of penguin and parrot. But when he looked further down the beach and saw the Sethite's boats, he thought he was in ancient Egypt. What a find!

The man's name was Owen Thomas, Phd. Dr. Thomas was what his colleagues called him but he went by Owen most of the time. So Owen came over to Ephraim and Manasseh and tried talking to them but he didn't know enough Egyptian. And he couldn't talk to the Sethites because they spoke ancient Egyptian. That left Juanita who spoke a little English and Owen fortunately remembered some of his high school Spanish.

In a small cafe over cups of mate (pronounced “mah-tay), a very popular beverage in Argentina, Juanita told the story of their travels to Owen with some assistance from the locals, who made your business their business. By and by he had an idea. “Do you suppose the Sethites would go with me to England?” From what Juanita knew of England and its soggy climate she figured it was at least warmer than the Antarctic island where they’d been living. She said she’d ask them.

Owen now realized he had a problem because their boats would be an important part of the exhibit he had in mind. The boats had to be collected before Argentina realized they were antiquities. The only way that could be done was perhaps to sail them up to Uruguay where the officials might be a bit more accommodating. The other option was to collect them on the high seas using a steamship rigged with the proper hoists.

Such problems. Owen was more at home with penguins than with officials and skullduggery. He’d have to pass the prospect and problem along to his bosses. Not his cup of tea. He asked one of his would-be helpers there in the cafe what the mayor’s name was and got a surprise. His name was Fluellen; as Welch a name as there could be. Rawson, yes, of course, the province had been settled by the Welsh. Maybe there was hope after all.

Owen sent Juanita to the marketplace to look for a leek. She wasn’t familiar with such a vegetable but Owen was certain she’d find one.

Owen had briefly met the mayor on his arrival but had missed the significance of his name. Now he went to the mayor’s office and said, “P’nawn da prynhawn da.” (Noun dah pren howda). That’s, “Good afternoon” in Welsh. The mayor was surprised and they worked their way through much of the Welsh language they’d learned from their respective grandfathers before lapsing into English.

After talking for an hour they drove out to Punta Tombo to the boats and the Sethites. Juanita bowed and presented the mayor with the leek she’d bought in the market. The mayor was pleased and all smiles.

The grand march of the penguins had finally broken up in favor of finding fish for their chicks and a tired Alex was enjoying a cool sea breeze while sitting under a canopy.

The mayor looked over the boats and the people. He told Owen that as the boats weren’t of Argentinean origin and had come from elsewhere he didn’t think they should be treated as local antiquities. He really didn’t want to deal with that problem directly but thought it better that when they’d made arrangements to leave he’d have the local justice issue a writ ordering them out because they were undocumented aliens. He said no one would argue with him about that and it would keep the whole antiquities issue off the table.

Unfortunately for our travelers progress had caught up with the movie industry and digital dailies of the days filming sent by satellite that showed Alex leading the penguins had reached a producer in Hollywood who’d given the order, “Get that bird!”

Ch05-The Leek and the Visitors

We pause to consider the leek. It is in the onion and garlic family. It looks like a large green onion with a white bulb and a green stalk. Leeks are valuable in that one can delay harvesting them without the leek deteriorating. Refrigeration is a very modern invention. A vegetable that doesn't decay could make the difference between having food or starving. Leeks were known to both the Welch and the Egyptians and many other peoples.

To the Welch they are a national symbol and date to the time of Saint David, the patron saint of Wales. He lived in isolation on bread and water and leeks. It was he that suggested the Welch wear leeks in battle to identify themselves to their fellow countrymen.

To commemorate St. David, a Welch family will affix a leek to their door on March 1st, St. David's day, and the man of the house will wear a leek on his jacket.

As long as we are talking about the first of the month, do you know about "rabbit, rabbit"? It is to be said on the first day of each month to bring you luck. It is a very old superstition and there are a number of variations. I leave it to you to look them up.

At the airport in Trelew, to the west of Rawson a small two engine plane from Buenos Aires landed with several passengers. One was from the Union of Egyptian Museums and the other from Hollywood. The one wearing a shirt open to his naval with gold chains about his neck and dayglow sneakers was not the man from the Museums. If the attire didn't tip you off his constant use of, "Baby!" "Sweetheart", and "God bless you dear" would.

The man from the museums brought with him a medical technician. He took photographs of the Sethites and their boats and recorded their speech. After some negotiations with the elder the technician took blood samples from 6 of the men. And with that he and the technician were away late that afternoon on a charter flight back to Buenos Aires.

The man from Hollywood wanted Alex's webbed foot on the dotted line. Just how legal such a contract would be is in doubt but that didn't stop him from trying. Alex spoke very little English so Juanita and Owen had to help translate what he was saying.

The man from Hollywood said, "Sweetheart, everyone is buffo about penguin movies."

Juanita and Owen said to Alex, "He says the moviegoers like movies about penguins."

The man from Hollywood said, "Trouble is dear, there are no stars. Just a lot of birds doing cute things and it's hard to tell one from another. We need someone to focus on who stands out and that's you." Juanita and Owen translated that as "He says because you look different from the other penguins he wants to feature you in their movie."

Alex said, "What would I have to do?"

Said the man from Hollywood, "Well, the marching bit you did the other day was good. You could do

more of that. Maybe we could have you fight with an elephant seal. The audience always roots for the underdog. Don't worry though we'd do it all with special effects. In the end you could stand atop the elephant seal and spread your wings and let out a squawk of triumph.

When Juanita and Owen got to the part about the elephant seal, Alex was clearly disturbed as he had no concept of special effects and the idea of getting any where near an elephant seal gave him the shivers.

The man from Hollywood went on: "Naturally sweetie we'd have you go on the road tour to promote the movie and appear on all the talk shows and have your photo taken with the stars. We'll do all your close-ups on a soundstage. You'll have your own dressing room and get invited to all the big parties. We might even arrange a parade down Sunset Blvd.

Oh there will be Alex tee shirts and Alex mugs and action figures. You will have fan clubs. The world will be at your feet."

It was all too much for Alex. His ambitions in life, simply put, were a warmer climate and a steady supply of sunflower seeds and Ruffa to keep the cats at a safe distance.

He was happy to be in such scenes as could be shot at Punta Tombo but said no to any scene with an elephant seal. Juanita, assisted by Owen, was to act as his agent. The chorus of helpers back at the cafe advised a piece of the gross for Alex's pay as Hollywood accounting rarely produces a net on even the most successful movies.

The mayor suggested a local lawyer to draw up a stiff paragraph in the contract concerning the licensing rights to Alex paraphernalia. And so it was settled. The film crew got their orders and the man from Hollywood was on the next flight out.

Alex had a busy week of it including a number of close-ups so the studio could model him for animated special effects that would be added later. So much for fame and excitement. What Alex wanted was a nice quiet walk down the beach with Ruffa.

A week later the man from the museums returned along with several assistants who would work on the logistics of moving the Sethites and their boats to London and setting up an international tour with these people whom time forgot. It was a big undertaking. A linguist flew in to try and explain things to the Sethites who were more than a bit puzzled. Imagine being isolated and alone on a small island for centuries and suddenly being front page news. If anyone felt sympathy for them it was Alex. Would they ever live normal lives again?

Ch06-The Paper Chase and the Partings

In the United States the most common identification people carry is a driver's license. When traveling outside the U.S. a passport is required. It is issued by the government and recognized by other governments. But none of our travelers had any sort of identification whatsoever. For Alex and Ruffa and Bernie and Al it wasn't such a big deal. They were after all animals. But for Juanita, and Ephraim and Manasseh, and all the Sethites it was a big problem.

There are buildings full of people and computers who issue identification papers and there are police and federal officers and soldiers charged with keeping non-citizens out of any country. Although she didn't have a driver's license, Juanita could claim to be a citizen of Argentina. And a bit of checking could verify that. The rest of them were not so lucky.

In due course a member of the consular corps from the United Kingdom flew in to try and arrange papers for Ephraim and Menassah and the Sethites. It was not going to be easy. There were all those single spaced ten page forms on two sides to fill out with information that didn't exist.

Owen suggested a little white lie. A fiction to move things along. Based upon their travels it was conceivable the Sethites had been found on one of the South Orkney Islands, parts of which were claimed by the U.K. That would make them her majesty's subjects and help grease the wheels of the paper chase. Ephraim and Manasseh were another matter.

There was one way to tackle their problem and that was to contact the Egyptian Embassy in Buenos Areas. Juanita supplied the pesos and phone calls were made. There would be fees of course. The good news was that all this was possible. They would have to travel coach so there would be enough money to pay for a seat for Bernie the Ibis. It was his money, after all. Juanita had just enough gold to pay for their airfare back to Cairo. Their boat was another matter. They hated to part with it but the museums were willing to buy it to use in comparison to the ancient boats of the Sethites.

A few mornings later after lots of good wishes and goodbyes, Ephraim and Manasseh boarded a small plane at Trelew and were on their way on the first leg of their long flight back to Egypt.

Months later when the movie came out under the title "Alex the Amazing Parrot-quin" Juanita received a mailing tube with several posters showing Alex at about double his actual size. She took one of them and sent it to the Sethites in London in care of the museum. Alex had promised he'd come for a visit when the movie opened there. Hollywood had made the arrangements for him to go first class. That's a good way for a flightless bird to fly.

In the meantime a few checks had arrived from the movie company which Juanita put in the bank. At Alex's suggestion they hired an English tutor so they would be prepared to meet the English and eventually the Americans. The man from the tourism office in Buenos Aires had come down and provided some funds to make a few road repairs prior to the expected influx of tourists.

Senora Rosa had worked at a girls finishing school in Buenos Aires before retiring to Trelew. Not only could she teach English to Alex and Juanita but she also worked on Juanita's posture and poise. In her home she had a room with one wall of mirrors and a long banister-like bar as in a ballet studio. Alex had to walk the length of that bar without falling off which is a neat trick when you have webbed feet. When she was done, Juanita was so improved she could pass as a fashion model. Senora Rosa also helped Juanita pick out a stylish but modest wardrobe.

The Senora set a table as it would be found in the most posh restaurants or in the finest homes in London and explained proper table etiquette. It's awful to use the wrong fork or knife when everyone is looking at you. Or to do or say something that is very embarrassing. Juanita was glad to learn about finger bowls. That they were for the light cleaning of your fingers between courses and not some sort of

weak soup.

As the weeks went by they became more confident. Even Ruffa was taught to raise his paw to shake hands or bow his head on a sign from Juanita.

Juanita had written her father explaining where she was. A father has joy in a son but a daughter is a responsibility. She needs a match made for a good marriage. He was relieved not to have to worry about that for the present but he loved her and missed her and was glad to know she was safe. Juanita's mother had died when she was quite young and she had no brothers or sisters. She hoped things would work out that she could provide for and care for her father in his old age.

They got a postcard from Egypt from Ephraim and Manasseh with pictures of camels and pyramids. They were fine. They had gotten home safely and their father Joseph was happy to see them.

They received a DVD of the movie in the mail and went over to the mayor's house to watch it. There were a number of scenes with special effects that had Alex doing things that were impossible. It was a shock. Now what would people expect of him when they met him in person?

The film company had made arrangements for their trip to London which Alex was only doing out of loyalty to the Sethites. He wanted to be sure they were okay. He'd like to take Ruffa with him but the film people wouldn't pay for it so they left him with Senora Rosa.

CH-07 To London

They took a charter flight to Buenos Aires and a jumbo jet to Heathrow airport in London. In Buenos Aires the check-in clerk wanted to know if she wanted to check Alex as baggage. Alex came very close to saying something sharp to her but held back. Juanita presented his ticket. The clerk raised her eyebrow but issued their boarding passes.

Rather than be offended to have a bird riding with them in first class, the passengers all wanted his footprint. That was as close as Alex came to an autograph in those days. Juanita had rigged a rather stylish portable cat box for Alex's convenience. Humans who are taller than 4 and ½ feet find that dealing with the close quarters and slanted walls makes the commodes on aircraft a real challenge. For Alex they were impossible. The last thing he needed was to fall into one. He was glad Juanita was so smart and considerate.

This arrangement also spared him the ignominious fate of being run over by a stewardess pushing a beverage or food cart down the aisle. A Stew did come by with headphones so he could listen to music or watch the in-flight movie. He said, "No thanks." Someday Apple might come up with an ibird. He could only hope.

When you travel great distances you cross many time zones and your body loses track of when you should be awake or asleep. For example if you fly from San Francisco to New York you must set your watch ahead 3 hours. Thus when it is noon in San Francisco it is 3 PM in New York. There is a similar difference between Buenos Aires and London. Normally it is 3 hours but in summer England observes daylight savings time but Argentina doesn't so then the difference is 4 hours.

It was 9 o'clock in the evening in London but Juanita and Alex felt it was 6:00 PM and for them it was. That feeling would last for a few days. They decided to walk around the fancy hotel they were staying at. They went by the dining room and the maitre d', a rather snooty middle aged man greeted them. The sort who would make you wait an hour for a table when he had 20 empty ones. He smiled at Juanita and said, "Would you like us to prepare that bird for your dinner?"

Juanita was shocked and speechless. Alex looked at him and in his best English said, "Not today my good man. But if you don't mind, I'd like to bite off your nose and eat it as an appetizer." With that he spread his wings and flapped them. All of the blood drained out of the man's face and he fled down the hall. Juanita said, "I think we're going to have to use room service from now on." And so they did. The problem was the only thing Alex could find on the menu was fish.

They went to the museum where the Sethite exhibit was located. They bowed when Alex walked in. He found they'd carved several more statues in his likeness. At the gift shop miniatures of those statues were selling rather briskly. They also demonstrated their skills at weaving and pottery and basket making. And those items were selling as well. The problem was finding a place to dwell when they weren't at the museum. The rents in London are some of the highest in the world. The board of directors solved that by letting them construct their huts in a park that was on museum grounds. They had a bit of a set-to with local authorities who claimed they'd built houses without a permit. The museum claimed it was simply an extension of an exhibit and for the time being the museum was winning the argument.

On the part of the Sethites there were the sounds of London to contend with. There was the rattle of the underground trains that passed near by, the automobile horns, and aircraft overhead. The Sethites had experienced the rumbles from a volcano, and there is no noise like hundreds of seals cutting loose with their honks at all hours of the day and night. So while they were used to a primitive environment, London was in many ways the same. Just the source of the noises was different.

Before long they were sleeping soundly at night and only had to cross the park and go up the steps of the museum to be at "work". Many a Londoner envied their short commute.

The next morning Pamela Tipton from the London office of the film distributor met them in the lobby. She was fluent in 4 languages one of which was Spanish so Juanita and Alex were very comfortable with her. Pamela was a fortyish brunette who wore a stylish business suit. She was very crisp and efficient but she also had a good sense of humor.

She gave them a short tour around the city using the underground. She said you could be looking right at your destination and take a half hour to get there in a car or bus because of the traffic.

One of the places they stopped was Harrod's Department store. It's world famous. Besides objects of art and stereos and furniture and all manner of things, they had many little restaurants and a food court. Juanita bought several bags of tropical nuts for Alex. Later he said it just didn't seem right not having to crack open each nut with his bill. The nuts were very tasty though.

In the afternoon they made a public appearance at a movie theater. Alex was taken aback when he saw

dozen of Alex dolls behind the counter of a gift shop in the lobby. He couldn't get over it.

The next morning Pamela took them on the underground again and as they climbed up the stairs they found a little group waiting for them. There was a guide and several boys with pet ducks, and a goose who had dropped in unannounced. One popular way of seeing London and its historical places is to meet a guide at a specified underground stop and take a walking tour with him. In honor of Alex, this was an especially arranged waddle tour.

Alex got plenty of exercise that morning and so was relieved when the afternoon activity was a limo tour to Salisbury Plain to see Stonehenge. Now I must ask you to go to the library or the internet and call up a picture of Stonehenge. There were several phases in its construction dating as far back as at least 4500 years and perhaps longer. Many theories have been proposed about Stonehenge but the one in favor is that once man engaged in agriculture it became important to mark the position of the sun with regard to the seasons. Thus one knew when to plant crops. Pretty important at a time when calendars didn't exist.

Their tour continued on to Bath where Juanita and Alex saw the underground baths built by the Romans when they were in Britain. Nice warm water provided by nature. Pretty impressive to see that the Romans enjoyed life and didn't spend all their time with gladiators and lions and such.

That evening Alex made a walk on appearance between acts at the London Palladium. In the old days he would have been a speck in someone's binoculars but now a special video display made him 10 ft tall. Being somewhat tired from the day's travel and feeling a bit silly, when he walked on he did a bit of pigeon head bobbing and waved his wings. The orchestra drummer picked up on the rhythm and his fellows did a riff on a popular tune and Alex picked it up and moved in time to it. This little happenstance led to the Alex dance craze after the clip showed up on the news. For the moment he was the pop star to watch.

Ch-08 The Talk Show

The following week with Pamela handling public appearances some days and being a tour guide on others, she was contacted by the producer of "A Personal Moment". It was a popular interview show hosted by Ian Snow. They wanted both Alex and Juanita because they were worried about how conversational Alex really was.

The show was taped in the afternoon with a small audience and then played back in the evening.

The interview got off on a bad start with Mr. Snow cracking a sort of "Polly want a cracker" joke. Alex cocked his head and said, "It must be pretty embarrassing for you to interview a bird." That kind of caught Snow off-guard and he got a bit more serious. He inquired as to Alex's background and Alex told him what he could.

Then he asked about the fame Alex was enjoying. Alex gave him a sober response. "I'm aware Mr. Snow that I'm the novelty of the moment. I have no career planned. I'm a show business accident. I know that. Do you mind if I talk of some other things?"

Snow told him to speak up. "I spend part of my time in the water and part on land. And even down in Tierra del Fuego the effects of man are evident. Those little plastic pieces for holding 6 bottles together are all over the ocean acting as snares. There is no place so far away that plastic bottles and other debris don't wash up on the beach.

We all came from the sea and much of our bodies is salt water. Why would you want to spoil and poison the source? The atmosphere is getting warmer and the ice is melting. As much as it hurts and imperils we creatures who feed in the sea, the sea holds big surprises for everyone. Once they take hold, every life on the planet is threatened.

It is silly that you must listen to a bird tell you these things. They are there for your eyes to see and others have delivered the same message. I'm afraid the land and the sea will cast you out if you do nothing."

Juanita's eyes grew big. She'd never heard Alex talk of such things. It was apparent that while he was willing to play the clown he was unwilling to play the fool.

Snow and members of the audience asked question but Alex maintained his seriousness on the subject..

When the show aired it made headlines and clips from it were on the news and on the internet. One paper headlined "Half Parrot Half Penguin is 100% Environmentalist".

It's one thing for the scientists and teachers and a few government officials to bang the drum for such a cause but when a bird tells you to go out the door and look for yourself, you feel a fool if you don't.

Alex really didn't start anything that wasn't underway already. People were way ahead of their politicians in knowing that things couldn't go on as they had for the past 100 years or more. Change had to take place. And if conservation and technology could help, people were willing to try it even though various vested interests had proved conclusively that it couldn't be done.

All Alex had hoped was that a few more people would wake up to the world as it is and opt to make it better.

That one TV appearance increased the number of people who found Alex interesting and their love and demands on his time just wore him down so that he wanted to go back to Punta Tombo as soon as possible.

Pamela took them on a ride up to the Lake Country so they could see where Beatrix Potter had lived. She was the author of Peter Rabbit and quite an accomplished artist. They found she was also an expert on raising sheep. Alex in his travels had seen almost as many sheep in England as there were in Argentina. There are lots of sheep in Argentina.

One visit Alex asked Pamela to arrange was to a children's hospital. It was done without publicity but nonetheless a few photographers followed them there. There were children who would be cured or at least helped and others for whom the future was much less certain. What they all appreciated was not being forgotten. Alex and Juanita went from ward to ward and bed to bed and managed to produce some

smiles from their new friends.

They also visited a bird rescue center where sea birds who'd come in contact with oil spills were cleaned and cared for and then released back into the wild. The success rate for such efforts was still very low. Alex knew that over a 100,000 penguins had died from exposure to oil. He wanted the center to know he was grateful for what they were doing.

Then Pamela thought it was time to play tourist again and they visited the new Globe theater which was modeled after Shakespeare's theater of the same name. The stage was empty except for a stepped riser so Alex hopped up to the top of it and playfully began, "To be or not to be..." the famous soliloquy from Hamlet. He did the whole thing. People crowded around Juanita to ask how he knew that speech. She said, "Oh, I know it too. It was one of the exercises our English teacher put us through to teach us diction and enunciation."

All of this turned into pictures and stories in the newspapers and on television. Only now Alex was getting a little respect where before he had only been a novelty to fill in space between the advertisements and commercials. One of the tabloids started a rumor that the queen wanted to adopt Alex. Well, it was good for a laugh.

Ch-09 Back in Rawson

To say that stories about Alex and Juanita were popular in Argentina would barely cover the enthusiasm occasioned by every new photo or TV clip of the two of them in London. They were good will ambassadors for the country.

In Rawson something was stirring. It was the heart of Glyn Fluellen, the mayor's son. He had seen Juanita when she and Alex were first in Rawson. He'd judged her to be a simple country girl, not particularly attractive, and poorly educated.

Glyn's mother was Flor and her sister, Glyn's aunt, was Rosa. When he visited his Aunt while she was instructing Juanita and Alex he'd been amazed at how different Juanita was from when he'd first met her.

Each new picture of Juanita in a magazine or on television, dressed in tasteful clothes and with a simple but attractive hair style made him long for her. He had her picture under his pillow. He walked about as if in a dream. If you talked to him he didn't hear. Flor was concerned and talked to her sister. Rosa said it was a grave matter for which there was no cure and winked at her sister. Flor now understood what was ailing her son.

Certainly Juanita was poised and attractive. But she was no competition for the great beauties of the day. What she had that made her unique was that, as they say in the computer world, "what you see is what you get". There was no pretense, no false face. Juanita was refreshingly real. That made her attractive to many men; not just to Glyn.

In Buenos Aires there was a plan underway for a motorcade from the international airport in Ezeiza back into Buenos Aires which is about a 20 mile ride. This was for the convenience of all the public

officials who wanted to be photographed with Alex and Juanita and have some of their magic rub off onto them. There would be a grand dinner party and many speeches and then our travelers would be allowed to take their charter flight back to Trelew and Rawson.

On the flight back from London Alex mused about whether it might be possible to just have the money and skip the fame. Many actors and performers only come alive when they are in front of an audience or being pursued by autograph seekers. Fame was wearing very thin for Alex. A quiet walk with Ruffa looked better and better.

He was beginning to notice the glow from Juanita that told him the girl had become a woman. He hoped she would find the right man and marry and have a family. While it would change his life not having her near all the time, that was okay. She should be happy. If somewhere there was a lady parrot-quin, Alex would be delighted to meet her.

When their plane taxied into the airport at Ezeiza there was a big crowd to greet them. Glyn was there with his parents and had a bouquet of roses to give to Juanita. But when the moment came, Glyn realized the shoe was on the other foot. His heart sank. She was the sophisticated lady who'd been to London and he was the country boy from Rawson. He wanted to run and hide but he smiled, took a deep gulp and handed Juanita the roses.

After the dinner that night there were some folkloric singers and dancers and the high point of the evening was Alita and Iago doing the tango. The most Argentinean of all dances. The tango is so dramatic and stylized that one is drawn into it. Juanita's eyes flashed as she watched Iago in his poses and embraces with Alita. At times she almost fainted. This did not go unnoticed by Glyn.

Flor had told her husband about Glyn's obsession with Juanita. He too thought they would make a good match. But Glyn would have to work hard. Once they were back in Rawson, he sought out Senior Fredrico. The old man had been a dance master and still took on a few private pupils. Could Glyn learn the tango? The old man stroked his beard and said, "I think you have given me a challenge."

Boys are all over the place when it comes to how they walk and stand and move their bodies so this was going to be a team effort. Aunt Rosa was pressed into service to make him less like a boy and more like a man. She made sure to slyly mention to Juanita that Glyn was learning the tango. "Oh, said Juanita, I would so much like to learn too." Barely disguising her glee, Rosa said, "Perhaps I can arrange for you to learn it together."

Alex was happy. He'd noted Glyn's mooning eyes every time he caught site of Juanita. What he thought he kept to himself. One must not lead these affairs of the heart. They must blossom for themselves.

To learn the form and function of dance is hard. To learn it as a team is even harder. One starts out clumsy and develops grace. The moves of the dancers are not complimentary and then they are. The next step is that each partner is thinking the other's thoughts and anticipating every move. The dance master then calls for a student recital and parents and relatives come from near and far.

Juanita and Glyn could in no way be compared to Alita and Iago. But they gave the tango the fire and the smoldering sensuousness it demanded.

Having found each other in the dance, Juanita and Glyn now sounded out their friends about whether it could be a match. There is a very old custom to observe. Every friend and family member must now come up with a reason why it is a bad idea. She is unworthy of you. He is not your kind. And so it goes. If there is really love, all those bad opinions will be ignored and they will do what they desire.. Alex just claimed he was a bird and didn't know of such things.

Ch10 The Future

Now my readers this is where I should tell you about the joyous wedding and all the family members who came from all over Patagonia. I should describe the festivities, the fine attire, the food and the dancing. I should tell you that Juanita and Glyn lived happily ever after. It would be easy enough to do but life is more complicated.

They were both young. They each had a high school education but not much more. Is that enough to provide for a family in a rather hostile world? What are the choices? Glyn could go to Buenos Aires to the university and Juanita could wait for him in Rawson. But what would happen in Buenos Aires? Glyn would be learning and Juanita standing still. As Glyn got older and matured maybe his love for Juanita would transfer to someone he just met.

With Glyn away there wouldn't be much to keep Juanita in Rawson. She might go back to Tierra del Fuego to be with her father.

Perhaps Juanita should go to university too. We know she's bright and resourceful. Perhaps she is more practical than Glyn or has a better head for business. We need to find out. She too will grow and her interests and outlook might change. Perhaps what could have been a fairytale ending to our story when they were both 18 won't look so good when they are 24.

If they stay in Rawson they will be dependent on tourism. To the north on the Rio Negro there are abundant fruit orchards. In much of Patagonia, which is an area that takes up half of Argentina, there are sheep and cattle. These are all good businesses and one can make a living from them. However, a few live very well while the many just survive.

There is little in the way of technology and industry. For that you must go to Buenos Aires or even leave the country. With a proper education you will be in demand.

Happily ever after would be fine if one didn't have to eat, pay the rent, medical expenses, insurance, the cost of cars and appliances, education for the children, and taxes. If all these matters had to be settled before a couple got married, there would be very few weddings. Love is very impulsive. The essential matter is that you can be whipped around by circumstances or you can be in control. One has to come out of the dream long enough to deal with reality.

And what of Alex? Will he be happy in Rawson or Punto Tombo after starring in a movie and going to London? He once would have been happy with just a warm climate and a steady food supply. Unsolved is the mystery of whether somewhere there are more birds like him who are half parrot and half penguin. Will he involve himself in environmental issues and perhaps become a spokesperson to

publicize the plight of endangered species?

The possibilities are endless. The future is hazy and lies beyond our vision. Happily ever after could be the outcome. But it is more likely that Juanita and Glyn and Alex will work for their future. It won't come to them by magic.

Let us wish them our best and hope the future will bring them together instead of apart. That perhaps Alex will find his love in some as yet unknown land where man has never been.

And now a sort of happy ending. The Fluellens are having lamb for dinner tonight and Ruffa will get a nice bone to chew on.

Ch11-The Expedition

Owen Thomas was at his desk when he took a call from Sir Stanley Stiff. Sir Stiff was in charge of fund raising for special projects and he had a modest proposal. "Would you consider heading an expedition to that unknown island the Sethites came from? We have a sponsor.

This came as a surprise. At any given time a museum has plenty of proposals for research that need funding so this was the odd case of some funding that lacked a proposal.

Owen told Sir Stiff that he would need some startup money; not much, about 5000 Euros. Then he could flesh out the details and come up with a real budget. A few days later he got a commitment for the money.

The island in question was in that part of the Antarctic in which the charting was less than precise. Owen contacted a friend at NASA concerning whether they had any infrared satellite photos that would betray the presence of a volcanic island. Owen assumed the island had quieted down since the timely exit of the Sethites so they would have to find an image made during the period of volcanic activity.

The high resolution images of the earth are made by spy satellites. Certain of those images are made available for scientific research. A number of private satellites also produce images that are available on the internet but they are of lower resolution. Still it's a little disconcerting to recognize your car in the parking lot of an apartment complex while looking at the internet.

Owen was able to examine some images from the applicable time period and after some work found a suspected hot spot and requested a higher resolution image of just that area. What he got was ambiguous in that there were two tiny islands either of which might be volcanic. He worked out their coordinates so he could determine the best way to get there.

When it's winter in the northern hemisphere it's summer in the southern hemisphere. In the Antarctic it's not the time to go to the beach. It just means you are less likely to encounter severe weather. What with global warming there are many chunks of ice floating about that can severely damage a ship of any size. Sonar is needed to avoid icebergs and this is not the place for weekend sailors. A seasoned captain and crew are essential.

There were some research vessels that doubled as supply ships that stocked the scientific station on Bird Island off of South Georgia Island and also the British Antarctic Survey. They would have the most experience in those waters. Normally they sailed from England to Montevideo, Uruguay and then to Stanley in the Falkland Islands before heading to the Antarctic.

Owen suspected that the unknown island might be part of an arc of small islands known as the South Sandwich Islands. Some of them were known to be volcanic.

There was a helicopter available that had been used for a research project based at South Georgia Island. But to use it they would have to be able to stow fuel for it on the research vessel and space was at a premium.

Fortunately the museum had an expert who excelled in such details. His name was Max Frankel and he reveled in pulling everything together to make it work. Owen was fortunate to be able to hand the planning over to Max. He'd rather dissect bi-vaes in the lab for a week than do any of it. He gave Max a spreadsheet of all the must-haves for the voyage. Then he choose the team of scientists who would accompany him.

George Wells would be his archeologist. Liz Alexandra would be his geologist. She would install tilt meters as soon as they got to the island to give them adequate warning if the volcano decided to suddenly wake up. Eman Kadok would be their photographer. Robert Potifar wouldn't go with them but would be available to examine any pottery shards or hieroglyphics if such were found.

Max spent some time contacting Brits and Americans who'd recently done tours at research stations in the Antarctic to determine what equipment and clothing worked best. If the team or a portion of it had to stay on the unknown island for several days, they'd better have the right gear or they'd be candidates for hypothermia. One of Max's assistants, who was something of a joker, put a booklet in Owen's backpack on 101 things you can make with seal blubber.

This would not be a quick trip. The ship they would take did detailed oceanographic research as it traveled. And that was considered more important than to make ports of call on schedule.

In finding out what he could about the islands in the area, Owen was fascinated to learn about the research station on Bird Island near South Georgia Island. It was named for the many birds that live there. It was unique in that there were no rats. Ships had managed to bring rats to many islands including South Georgia and they devastated the ground nesting birds. They would eat their eggs and chicks. Bird Island had been spared. Owen hoped, if time permitted that he would be able to visit Bird Island. He'd make some calls and try to arrange permission to visit the island. It was off limits to casual visitors.

Max worked extra hard because the ship would leave with or without them. The members of the party all had punch lists of things they were to do and the deadline for doing them. Max was a relentless taskmaster but it was all for the good.

One evening Owen wrote a letter to Juanita and Alex to tell them about the expedition and how excited he was. Alex got a chill just thinking about going back to that island. He hoped that cave with the warm

springs was still there. It was the only nearly warm place on the entire island. With that in mind he and Juanita worked up a map using such landmarks as they recalled and marked the approximate location of the cave with the warm springs and the cave where the boats had been found. They faxed it to Owen.

Owen took the map to the Sethites and after they understood what they were looking at, they made some corrections and additions that would later prove quite helpful.

Ch-12 Juanita Gets Busy

Glyn Fluellen had gone to university. If their love was real, it would survive his absence. Juanita was a realist. She knew what it was like to barely get by. She had the determination to succeed. She always kept her eyes open. The trip to England had given her some ideas. She and Alex had talked over their finances. The movie money was substantial but it would trickle off to nothing over a few years. She agreed with Alex that there was only a slim likelihood of another movie being made. The public is very fickle. Soon penguins would be as about as popular as last year's rock stars.

There was enough money that they could try their hand at business and Juanita had an idea. Glyn senior, which is to say Glyn's father, had invested in three of the motels that catered to the seasonal tourist trade. He was a partner with several other businessmen and they spent a lot of time complaining to each other of the fact that it would be a fine business if it lasted all year long. As it was profits were good in season but the return on their investment wasn't great.

Juanita asked about leasing a space in the lobby of the La Manana, motel. She needed a space that was about 100 square feet. She would also need a storage closet and running water. What was she planning? She was going to open an espresso bar called Café Alex.

She was willing to sign a lease for a year and certainly had the money to cover it. He was concerned about her startup costs what with having to import an espresso machine from Italy. She told him no, it would come from Australia. The Aussies had become very enthusiastic about espresso and lattes and so forth and now made one of the finest machines you could buy. She was also planning on selling smoothies to the tourist's kids. Glyn Sr. had no idea what they were.

She hired an architect to draw up plans. They were to be generic enough so that the basic design could be used elsewhere. Soon a cabinet shop got to work on the counter and cabinets and a plumber extended the existing water and drain lines and installed the sink and other fixtures.

Glyn Sr. was impressed with Juanita's drive and resourcefulness. He thought his son was lucky to have such a lady for his fiancée.

Alex, while enthused about Juanita's plans, was lost in a jungle of his own making. He was wondering who he was. By form he was a bird, but in speech and thought he was more like a man. Man had evolved to have a bigger brain than his antecedents which permitted speech. Alex could speak but he was beyond the smartest of parrots. While they can make logical use of learned phrases and are certainly intelligent, he was more than that.

He recalled with a smile the story of a 3 year old boy who suddenly developed self awareness and

asked, "What am I here for?" Alex wondered about that too. But whereas the boy could have asked, "Where did I come from?", and gotten an answer; Alex could not.

One day he and Ruffa had been taken out to Peninsula Valdes and he had watched a school of orcas (killer whales) come through and devour seals. That graphic scene was etched into his mind. Alex devoured fish but preferred nuts. What was out there that might have a taste for Alex?

These thoughts were put aside because Juanita had arranged a trip to Buenos Aires for a photo session. She also had meetings with several coffee roasters who imported the best Brazilian coffee beans. Alex's picture was to appear on napkins and coffee mugs and tee shirts. Alex was certain she intended to open more than one espresso bar and he was right.

Glyn Sr. got a call from a property owner in Trelew who owned a storefront near the museum. He was checking references. Juanita had signed an option to rent his storefront. He assured the man everything was okay. Even though he had invested in a number of businesses, he felt Juanita's entrepreneurial drive exceeded his, when he was her age.

Glyn jr. in Buenos Aires was having the usual university experience. The first two years, which is called lower division, he was required to take a number of core classes in language, science, math, history, and the arts. Perhaps one or two of the professors would provide him with essential insights but the rest might just be pious airbags or little tin gods or teaching assistants. One take notes and parrots back the professor's prejudices in blue books during exams. This teaches a student how to tolerate fools, but little else.

In upper division students declare their major which defines the course of study. That is where one's useful education begins. The chances one of your professors will prove to be a mentor are much greater.

Glyn was discouraged to find that his fellow students, many of whom came from wealthy families, lacked the interest and dedication to be scholars. They also lacked career goals and frankly didn't care. A university degree would admit them to some sort of social club and that was all that mattered.

Glyn read the classified employment ads in the newspapers. There certainly weren't many ads looking for graduates with art history degrees. What was in demand were medical workers, MBAs, accountants, various types of engineers, computer specialists, and so on. All of them required difficult time consuming studies. No social life. Well, so be it, he didn't have lifelong financial support from his family, some of his classmates did.

In his letters home to his family and Juanita he expressed these feelings and everyone responded that he was on the right track. Two of the majors he considered for the future were geology and viticulture. There were oil and natural gas wells in Chubut province and just to the north of Rawson, in Rio Negro, there were wineries. Those were two occupations he could do near home or anywhere else in the world.

Ch13-Search in the Antarctic

Their gear and helicopter fuel had been offloaded on South Georgia Island. The helicopter could take four passengers and a pilot or two passengers plus equipment. The latter way was how they would use

it.

Owen and Liz would do the initial exploration to find the right island. They would travel with essential survival gear so they could spend up to 3 days on an island without re-supply. Liz would look for cinder cones and lava flows to try and find something recent so they could avoid islands where such things might have happened thousands of years ago. She had a infra-red telescopic scope that could find hot spots from the air.

The meteorologist at the research station on South Georgia Island checked the satellite weather images to determine the extent of cloud cover and also used weather balloons to check the prevailing winds. He told them they had about a 30 hour window in which to get their work done. Weather changes quickly in the Antarctic and he assured them there might be days or weeks when they couldn't fly at all.

About 10 o'clock that morning there was a lull in the wind and they took off. Their range was such that they could go to one island and come back but to go to a second on the same trip would give them no safety margin. Unlike a fixed wing aircraft, a helicopter is inherently unstable and the pilot is constantly doing multiple corrections just to keep it in the air. The helicopter had a rubber raft but that begged the question, if they went down, who, if anyone, would rescue them? An ant in an ice cube tray had a better chance.

For their purposes the names for the islands in the arc were renamed A, B, C, etc. instead of their historic names. That made radio communications easier and there was less chance of a misunderstanding. Some of the islands were eliminated as they were too small to have supported a population. Islands D and E were the most promising and on their first trip they went to island D.

There were clouds over the summit of island D so Liz couldn't check for a volcanic cinder cone. Her infra-red scope didn't show hot spots as they went around the island. The pilot put Owen and Liz down on a level ledge above the beach and he waited for them as they got out to explore. They looked for caves and lava flows or any signs of habitation but didn't find them. They saw plenty of seals and penguins and sea birds but little else. At 3 in the afternoon they called it quits and the copter took them back to South Georgia Island.

The next two days there were high winds and rough seas so they didn't attempt a trip. The third day the wind was better but they were given only a 20 hour window at most. The pilot circled island E and it looked more promising. There was a cove where the Sethites might have launched their boats. The island peak had a definite cinder cone. They circled several more times and Liz found a hot spot partway up the slope that matched the description of the lava vent they'd been told about. The pilot was keeping a running GPS log of their position which was being radioed back to base every few minutes. He dropped them off on a flat ledge and waited while they searched for a cave. They were successful and their gear was offloaded. They hauled it into the cave and established a camp. The hot magma in the earth raised the temperature of the cave to nearly 10 degrees C (50 degrees F). They could shed a few clothing layers while they were there.

They climbed the nearest slope and established a small radio repeater and tested it with the pilot as he headed back to South Georgia Island. Given the earth's curvature they couldn't use it to communicate with the base at South Georgia but when the helicopter was in the air, the pilot could reach them.

They had a small generator with them so they could light up the interior of the cave and look for any markings or artifacts that might be there. They were quite warm in their respective sleeping bags that night but both had troubling dreams. Liz told of floating down a big river into a strange land. Owen recalled being lost among the stars. Neither knew what to make of their dreams.

They took rock climbing gear with them as they explored the perimeter of the island. There were a number of beaches but getting from one to the next meant climbing over rough rock formations. They tapped eyelets into the rocks to aide them climb up one side and repel down the other. By early afternoon they found a second much larger cave and also some huts made of stone. The only vegetation was some small clumps of grass and lichens and a few low shrubs. How the Sethites maintained a balanced diet was something of a mystery. They must have harvested kelp from the sea. Perhaps the low shrubs were edible.

Owen and Liz did some digging in the cave near a spot long used for fires to see if there were layers of pottery shards or other waste that would tell them how long the Sethites had been there. They were careful not to disturb the rest of the cave as their archaeologist would be very unhappy with them.

The night passed with both of them again having strange dreams. At 8 in the morning the squelch broke on their radio receiver. It was the pilot who was on his way with George Wells, the archeologist and Eman Kadok, their photographer. He was also bringing supplies and more fuel for their generator.

The helicopter landed a bit after 9:30 but this time the pilot had to frighten some seals and penguins away in order to clear a space to land. There was an elephant seal at the far end of the beach but he stayed where he was.

Owen and Liz took George and Eman to the cave and over the rocks to the other beach and cave. By the time they got back it was getting dark and the wind was picking up. They had dinner and settled down for the night. Liz told them she would be up early to observe the penguins as they left to forage in the sea. Typically they go out at dawn.

The night passed with George and Eman also having weird dreams. When they got up in the morning Liz was gone but then she'd said she would be. When they got a fire going and fixed breakfast and 8 o'clock came and went without Liz they began to get worried. That worry increased when George, who knew something about tracking, said he didn't see her footprints in the sand outside the cave.

The weather was really bad and they didn't stray far from the cave. The helicopter wasn't up so they had no radio contact with the outside world. In the afternoon the weather eased up and they combed the island but they didn't find any trace of Liz.

Ch14-Alex's Powers

The opening of the espresso bar at the La Manana was a week away and Juanita was very busy. Ruffa and Alex went for their early morning walk when something unusual happened. A car pulled up alongside them and two men got out. That they were up to no good was immediately apparent. One man had a gun and the other a rolled up gunny sack and was coming toward Alex with the intent of

kidnapping him. Ruffa bit the first man in the ankle and was very tenacious. The man couldn't shake him off. The man with the sack was thwarted when Alex spread his wings. Alex felt something strange arising within him and in a loud voice said, "Stop!". The man with the gun fell to the pavement and was still. The man with the sack was frozen in position and then he too just crumpled to the ground.

A passing motorist had observed the attempted kidnapping and called the police. The police called an ambulance which hauled the two kidnappers away. The ambulance attendants just shook their heads. They'd never seen anything like it.

The police took a report and then Alex and Ruffa returned to the house. There was a woman there. She was wearing cold weather gear. She seemed quite disoriented. She said her name was Liz Alexandra.

After some confusing jumps across time zones by phone and by internet, word reached South Georgia Island by way of London that Liz was safe and in Rawson, Argentina. Even though it was not good flying weather, the helicopter took off and gained enough altitude to relay a message to the team on Island E. They couldn't believe Liz was in Argentina.

Juanita came home right away when she heard the news of the attempted kidnapping. Alex told her what he knew and then introduced her to the still very puzzled Liz. All Liz remembered was going to sleep in the cave with the intention of getting up early. How she was suddenly transported to Rawson was a mystery.

While Liz and Juanita talked Alex reflected on recent events and decided that it seemed more and more likely that he was not of this world. By some means, like Liz, he'd traveled across space and time. That mysterious mechanism seemed even more likely when he learned weeks later that the Sethites settlement on the island was fairly recent. There was nothing to indicate they'd been there hundreds or thousands of years. And then there was the matter of the two men now under watch at a local hospital who'd been stricken by his word. He was going to have to be careful.

When Glyn received a letter from Juanita about these events he grew quite concerned. Like Alex he realized there was something going on that was very powerful. She was with Alex much of the time. What if he should say or do something that would bring harm to her? While she and Alex were very close, it was also apparent that Alex had no idea of the use or extent of his powers. Glyn lost sleep worrying.

Juanita saw to it that Liz was supplied with the basic necessities of life like a several changes of clothes, toiletries, and a light sweater to replace her heavy jacket. The local paper ran a story, "Missing Woman Found In Rawson". Down in the body of the story it was related how she had just suddenly appeared. It didn't cause much of a stir in Patagonia, but when a clipping service picked up the story and it got to Hollywood, it raised eyebrows. Our man from Hollywood girded his loins, so to speak, and was on the next available flight to Argentina.

The grand opening of Café Alex took place as scheduled. It drew many people from town and most of the tourists. There had been a great thirst for espresso, and lattes, and cappuccinos. When there was a lull in the great buzz of the day, if you listened carefully you could hear local businessmen kicking themselves for not having thought of the idea first.

The carpenters and cabinet makers were already at work on the fixtures for Café Alex 2 in Trelew. Alex was very proud of Juanita but he excused himself to go to the hospital to visit the men who'd attempted to kidnap him.

There was a deputy outside their room. Alex asked him if they knew who the men were. The deputy said no. They weren't local men. The doctor accompanied Alex into the room. He said the men had a condition something like shock. It was unlike anything he'd ever seen and didn't respond to the usual treatments. Alex said to them, "You are okay. You are getting better." Both men stirred a bit after he'd spoken and the doctor didn't know what to think. When the nurse took their vital signs, they were, in fact, better.

Some temporary papers were issued by the British embassy for Liz so she could travel. She said goodbye to Alex and Juanita and boarded a flight to Buenos Aires. In a few days she would be back in London.

All of the team members had been to Island E and back. They'd found a place outlined with stones that looked very much like a burial mound. They moved them aside and dug. In a shallow grave were the skeletons of two birds that appeared to be penguins. There were some dusky green feathers that hadn't decomposed. Owen wondered if they might have found the grave of Alex's parents.

All who'd spent a night in the cave had strange dreams. They wondered if there was something that was causing it or perhaps just the suggestion that if others had strange dreams they should have them too. All felt there was something there that they couldn't see or measure. A typical person would be scared. Scientists always seek an answer to the unknown. Unfortunately the kind of equipment they needed to do a thorough investigation was thousands of miles away.

While waiting for the next survey ship to come with supplies and pick them up, they all got a chance to go to Bird Island across the channel from South Georgia Island. There they saw Macaroni and Gentoo penguins, Wandering Albatrosses, Petrels, Prions, and seals. One two of them could go at a time as the research station had only two extra cots.

Ch15-Alex's Decision

When Alex came back from the hospital to rejoin the party at Café Alex, who should show up but the man from Hollywood. To show some respect he'd actually buttoned his shirt and was wearing beige sneakers instead of his dayglow ones. After stalking his prey for an hour he managed to get Alex off to the far end of the motel lobby away from the crowd.

"Sweetie, I was reading the story of Liz the sci lady. It sounds like she was sort of whisked away from some ice cube in the Antarctic to your place here. Sort of like the way people beam about on Star trek. And then there were those kidnappers you flattened. Do you have some special power or device that does that? We'd be really interested in working you into a plot. Frankly we're at the bottom of the super hero barrel. We'll jazz you up with some flash and sizzle special effects. Something to make the fans pop their pods, swallow their gum, and put their video games on pause."

Alex responded, "I do have such a power. I can move people around at will. In fact if I sneeze you'll be blown back to Norte Americana probably in the vicinity of Provo, Utah. But you'll have to stay there for two years otherwise you'll be turned to dust If you try and leave" And with that Alex threw back his head and said, "I think I feel a sneeze coming on."

The man from Hollywood got a look on his face not unlike Christopher Lee when he gets caught in the sun during the last reel of a Dracula movie. If you're familiar with classic film comedies, the man's departure was in the tradition of, "Feet don't fail me now!"

Alex couldn't remember the last time he'd laughed as hard as he did at the man from Hollywood's sudden discomfiture and exit.

When the expedition team was back at sea they sent a number of their photos via satellite back to London. Liz in turn printed some of them and sent them by express to Juanita to show to Alex. When he saw the picture of the grave he froze. He too thought it likely he was looking at the remains of his parents. How did they die? Did the sailor kill them and take him? Assuming they had powers like his, it was unlikely. Perhaps they'd met their death some other way. He'd never know. What he did know is that if the scientists were going to return to investigate the properties of the cave, he wanted to meet their ship in Montevideo and go with them.

His desire was communicated to Owen. He had enough budget to return with a smaller team and take Alex. That would be a bit into the future as the combination research vessel/ supply ships made only several trips a year.

A month later, when Juanita opened the Café Alex near the museum, Alex got to meet one of the docents. He was Dr. Mendoza, a retired teacher from the university. He had very broad interests and a fairly philosophical view of science. He would stop by in the morning for a latte. He told Alex, "Sometimes we have the right ideas but lack the math or instruments to test them. Perhaps 10 years or even a 100 years later we'll be able to test a theory. Even when we are sure we know something, new evidence can come to light that makes us reconsider." As to the mysterious cave and its properties he said, "Oh, I could venture some ideas but they would just be so much smoke. This is something new. We are just poor three dimensional creatures and thinking about higher dimensions gives us headaches. My guess is that the math to describe the mystery of your cave has yet to be derived."

Another day Dr. Mendoza told Alex about one of his heros, Michael Faraday. "Faraday came from poor circumstances. He was apprenticed at a young age to a book binder, to learn that trade. His master took some delight in the fact that his apprentice was an avid reader and very interested in science. One day a patron of the book binder gave him some tickets to a lecture by a famous scientist, Sir Humphrey Davies. Faraday took along a friend and made detailed notes during the talk. He showed the notes to his master who in turn showed them to the man who'd provided the tickets. The man asked to borrow them and he in turn showed them to Sir Humphrey Davies. Davies had an assistant who wasn't working out and he hired Faraday instead. Thus began the career of one of the most productive scientists of the 19th century."

Alex found the story very interesting but Dr. Mendoza added more. "If we consider Faraday by himself he was very important. But what was more important was that others were inspired by his results.

Faraday did most of his experimental work in the 1830s. His notes were published about 1845. James Clarke Maxwell took Faraday's work and the work of others to derive what are known as Maxwell's equations. I realize all this won't mean much to you so let me make my point. People with ideas feed on each other. It's never just one person. There will be a cluster of scientists and theoreticians who blossom all at once. That's what I love about science. Everything is known and settled until the next great idea and then we are all in a rush all over again."

Alex understood. The cave wouldn't be understood today or tomorrow but it would be understood some day. Someone would have an idea, right or wrong, and it would lead to other ideas. That was the marvel of living. If you use your brain to think, you're never bored. There was always something to learn; something interesting and exciting.

Juanita had Glyn help her find a specialist in franchising. She'd had several inquiries from businessmen wanting to start a Café Alex. She needed to put together a package and price it out. That would require some outside expertise as she didn't want to learn the ins and outs of that business the hard way. There was a limited potential in Argentina once you got outside of Buenos Aires. But then there was the rest of South America. She needed to trademark the business name and the Alex logo in every country in the southern hemisphere. She could see her legal expenses would be high in the near term but the payoff would be worth the effort.

One businessman who contacted her was her father. He wanted a Café Alex in Tierra del Fuego. There was some tourist business there but he would have to depend on the locals to carry him once the tourist season was over. Juanita sent him some blueprints and an equipment list and he got busy. If he could make it pay, it would open up a lot of the smaller venues that normally wouldn't consider buying a franchise. Around Rawson, business people had begun referring to her as Juanita Incorporated.

Ch16- Planet Egloo

If some science teacher hasn't told you that you and all matter are mostly empty space, let me be the first to inform you of your insignificance. Your empty space isn't vacant. There's something there but it's not you, it's something else. Fancy names like parallel universe are conjured to try and describe the fact that we are just an ephemeral space-time slot in a time shared multiverse.

Welcome to the planet Egloo. You'd be there now if we could but shift your temporal phase to a fractally different dimension. Egloo is the home of the parrot-quins. It's where Alex would go if he but knew the way.

The space in the human brain taken up by ill conceived notions, boundless worry and anxiety, bad taste, and greed, in the parrot-quin brain is used to convert natural forces into energy for transportation. Fossil fuel is unknown. Airplanes with narrow aisles and no leg room just weren't invented. Great metal pig-mobiles and highways with potholes and toll collectors never occurred. One simply decides where to go and goes there. Never a need to whack the kids in the back seat to keep them on their proper sides.

However Egloo has its own inherent frustrations. Even though there is a perfectly good sea, some of the fish have wings and must be caught with a butterfly net. Rather than rotate like other planets, Egloo rotates more like a clock pendulum. It goes halfway round and then stops and revolves back to where it

started from. This causes its moon all kinds of grief. The moon starts to fall toward Egloo when rotation pauses and then it flies back out again when rotation resumes. Rather than a normal orbit it behaves more like the Dow Jones Industrial Average on bad and good days. Its motion is more like a car's in stop and go traffic.

Depending on where you live this oscillation affects your day. If you are right at the terminator between day and night, the sun rises at 6 AM and sets at 6PM only to reverse course so that the next hour is 5 PM. Thus you never experience night. If you start the day where it is noon, you have 6 hours of daylight followed by 6 hours of night. The reversal takes place and you have 6 more hours of night followed by 6 hours of day, albeit backwards. There is no such thing as morning but you get afternoons twice. This situation held back the art of clock making for several centuries until the first reversing clock was invented.

Since no one could tell who was awake or asleep at any given time, the parrot-quins never answered their communicators. An answering system does it for them.

Egloo doesn't have a tilted axis like earth. It stands up straight. Instead of 4 seasons there is just one, a little too warm to be called winter and not quite warm enough to call spring. We'll put winter and spring together and call it wing. Young parrot-quins can always find a snow covered slope somewhere that they can slide down on their bellies.

As they have no simple way to hold a pen, other than with their beak, the parrot-quins learn to use computers at an early age. The Brazil-nut is a popular model. To move around on the screen one uses a wireless fish. Both humans and parrot-quins start out hunting and pecking.

Language is difficult to acquire. Human languages have tenses, masculine, feminine, and neuter noun sexes, the inevitable irregulars one must learn by rote, and words with the same meaning but which are used differently. The parrot-quins have some of the same structures in their language, but a loud screech of the right pitch and duration is often used to express rich content and emotion.

The lady parrot-quins are the ones with all the color. Their green is a bright emerald. Their shoulder feathers are red and their wingtips blue. They are always grooming their feathers or going to a grooming parlor to have it done right. There they sit under feather driers reading bird tabloids and eating chocolate covered nuts.

There is no interest in video games. Trying to catch a krill, cod, or ice fish in the sea takes more skill plus you can eat it.

Rather than have tall buildings crowded together and anemic little green spots called parks, the parrot-quins use nearly 100% of their land for parks and agriculture. There are many orchards with the finest nut trees. Vegetables such as squash and sweet potatoes are grown to provide a balanced diet.

There are fields planted with sunflowers that turn their heliotropic heads to follow Egloo's crazy sun. The sunflower is often pictured in parrot-guin art and is a popular cultural symbol. It is also the state flower of Kansas. That has nothing to do with our story but I just thought I'd throw it in.

Instead of the multiverse portal being located at Egloo's south pole in a cave, it is, in fact, located on the equator in the center of a high bluff. If you were to put on your parrot-guin traveling shoes and go there you might wind up almost anywhere. That is apparently what happened to Alex's parents. Whether they did so on purpose we'll never know.

Oh, I almost forgot, for safety sake every parrot-guin puts on his seatbelt about the time Egloo is set to stop and reverse rotation. While the slowing down and stopping is quite gentle, one still can be tossed about a bit. It's not a good time to be putting your best china on the dining room table. If you have a drink in your hand you can be sure that some of it will spill. Although parrot-guins don't shave, should your father ever go for a visit, tell him not to use a straight razor without checking the time first.

On earth for many centuries man thought the sun and the stars revolved around earth, which was the center of everything. But observation of the heavens and especially the planets gave evidence that was wrong and we eventually sorted it out. So you can imagine how long it took the parrot-guins to figure out Egloo's half rotation given that the sun seemed to be behaving like a car's windshield wiper.

Ch17-Business 1A

Having given you some smiles in the chapter on planet Egloo, let me engage your brain in this chapter to consider some problems. Don't worry, I'll keep it simple. Consider that Juanita has two locations. One is a counter in a motel lobby and the other is a storefront. She pays rent for both. If you divide the rent by the number of square feet she rented, you'll know how much she's paying per square foot. Whatever occupies that space needs to produce more income than the cost of the space in order for her to make money.

In your own home or apartment, how many square feet are there? Maybe you can look at a floor plan or measure each room with a tape measure. Multiply length times width and the answer will be in square feet. Now, how much are your parents paying? Not just rent or house payments but also taxes and utilities and insurance. Total up the number of square feet and divide it into the annual cost to get the cost per square foot.

Your mother or father probably work, so they're paying for their space. But what about you? You don't have a job yet because you're in school. How can you pay for your space? Well an A is worth 3 times as much as a C and a D or an F are worth nothing. Then there's the matter of keeping your room clean. How helpful are you to your parents and siblings? Sit down with your parents and work out a budget and then do well in school to pay for the cost of your space.

Juanita first ran into this kind of problem when she was buying paper goods (cups and plates). If she bought 10,000 cups the cost was less than half per item than if she bought 1000. But she'd been through this before when she'd worked for her father. You have to store them. Was the savings enough to pay for the storage space? It was not. If the space didn't have any other productive use then that was another matter. When a business gets big enough it can pay to have a central storage location to stock supplies in bulk but that would come later.

In any business the profit, which is the amount of money made on a sale, is usually good. If you don't sell enough each day, the raw profit doesn't matter because the cost of running the business will eat up

all your money. Knowing your costs puts you in control and effects your decisions about what to do more of and what to stop doing.

Juanita was running into another not so obvious problem. Café Alex was a success. She was already scouting a third location. Her problem was that just as the business was doing well and expanding, she needed to increase her investment. It would be nice if doubling business doubled the profits and the costs stayed under control but it doesn't work that way. Let's say she was selling bags of Alex coffee and sold one a day. She kept 4 on the shelf. Suddenly she was selling 3 a day. She needs to have more. Maybe as many as 9 or 10. My point is that when you are growing you may suddenly need 3 or 4 times the amount of items to sell. You may have to add more employees. It's perhaps the one problem new businesses don't anticipate, success.

Juanita didn't panic but she did have a talk with Alex. After all it was his money she was using. I'm giving you all these gritty details rather than just say the money came rolling in the door and they were rich and happy, because it wouldn't be the truth. People who are successful work long hours and solve problems daily. Alex solved one problem for Juanita. "Frankly I want you to use the money as you see fit. I have no legal standing with humans so I can't transact business myself. You're doing a good job. If things go right I may be away for a long long time, if not forever." That gave Juanita a start. "Where would you go?" "If I'm right about that cave, I may go home." They sat a long time in silence.

Days were being marked off on the calendar as to when Alex would need to go and meet the ship in Montevideo. Juanita decided to go with him. They'd been through a lot. If he could go home, she at least wanted to give him one last hug and say goodbye.

Juanita had trained one of her workers to be a manager. She was a bright young lady with spirit. She had a given name and a family name but no one seemed to know them. Everyone just called her Salsa. If a customer came on with too much machismo she would put on a smile, kid him shamelessly, and make him laugh.

Glyn would be back from the university for summer break and take care of the bills and payroll. While going with Alex wasn't exactly a vacation, it would disengage Juanita from her daily routine for a few weeks.

Juanita heard from her father. He was coming along in the construction of his Café Alex but had thought some more about the off season. He had 4 recipes for Mate (mah-Tay) of different strengths and flavors. He was going to offer them to his local customers. He also sent along his favorite tapas bar recipes. Tapas bars offer very tasty dishes that aren't intended to be meals. They are a bit like appetizers. They originated in Spain but can now be found in major cities around the world. One samples a bit of this and a bit of that. It is the uniqueness and variety that count.

Juanita liked both ideas. As the motel espresso bar was small and catered to tourists who liked their coffee she wouldn't do mate or tapas there. The Café Alex by the museum was just the place for both. Glyn Sr. reminded her not to forget to put tea and scones on the menu if she wanted to attract the Welsh. Amazing, just when you've grown old enough to stop thinking you know everything, it turns out your parents and their peers actually did know a thing or two.

Alex decided he needed to practice his powers. He had the power to travel at will but like a teenage driver he wished he had an instructor and a learner's permit. He willed himself over to the back entrance of the museum. Amongst the garbage cans was the biggest meanest ferule tom cat he'd ever seen. He closed his eyes and transported Ruffa too. Once Ruffa overcame his confusion about being asleep on the rug one minute and being behind the museum the next, he snarled at the tom cat who quickly ceded his territory.

Alex didn't want to try a long distant transport, like going to the island by himself. He was happy to know he could just get out of harms way if he had to.

Ch-18 The RSS Atlantic

It is 1500 Km (932 miles) from Rawson to Buenos Aires. Montevideo is on the other side of the Rio de la Plata or Silver River. It is actually not a river but the world's largest estuary. At its head end the Uruguay River and the Parana River flow into it. Where it meets the sea it is 290 Km (180 miles) wide. Juanita and Alex flew into Buenos Aires and took a hydrofoil ferry to Montevideo. Montevideo has one of the finest harbors in South America.

They checked into their hotel. The ship would arrive tomorrow and be in port 2 days. They decided to visit Mercado del Puerto, the Port Market. Juanita wanted to see the handcrafts and look over the restaurants and hear the music. The movie DVD had just come out and Alex ran into a lot of fans who wanted to talk to him or have their picture taken with him. Juanita and Alex were exhausted by the end of their visit.

In the morning there was a message from Owen who wanted to meet them for lunch. Juanita asked the hotel concierge to suggest some restaurants. She was interested mainly in Italian food. Unlike the rest of her countrymen she wasn't in love with carne asada which is grilled or barbequed beef. The beef in Argentina is the finest in the world. But Juanita had noticed that the transition from sweet slender senorita to obese senora was by way of the cow and the pig. Juanita wasn't a vegetarian but she did try and eat a prudent diet.

She selected the Café Milan which was noted for its Sorrentinos. They were a local invention. They look like a round ravioli and are stuffed with cottage cheese, mozzarella, and basil in tomato sauce.

Lunch is the big meal in Argentina. In the smaller towns and cities businesses close at midday and the workers go home for lunch with their families.

Owen met them at the restaurant and he had a big steak and Alex had a compote of fresh fruit and nuts. Juanita had sorrentinos.

In a few days they were underway aboard the Royal Research Ship the RSS Atlantic. The team this time was Owen, Liz, and Eman Kadok. Owen didn't have the funds to pay Eman Kadok but he'd signed on for a pay of 1 Euro. Eman had been everywhere, photographed everything, and believed in nothing. When Liz vanished from the island and turned up in Argentina it just shook his jaded soul. Finally here was a mystery worth knowing about.

In open waters the RSS Atlantic made about 12 knots an hour. What was more important was that it could cut through ice at 2 knots an hour. It was every inch the working craft. It had a robotic submersible that could explore the ocean floor. No dance band or dining room. If you didn't like the food and mentioned it, you were assigned to the kitchen.

While they were still in the sub-tropics Eman Kadok used bungee cords to hang some tarps from the walkway grid above. It was unclear whether he was making a windbreak or shielding himself from the sun. Juanita said, "I see you've made a sukkah." He was astonished, "How did you know that?" She said, "My family name is Acacia." He thought a moment and then said, "Your ancestors were maranos." "Yes. I didn't always know that. I only found out a few years ago.

One of the memories I have of my mother is that she would take the holy figures and turn them to the wall on Friday night, then she would light two candles. I asked her why and she didn't know. Her mother had done it and her mother before her. My great aunt is a spinster and she had old family letters and journals. She told me our ancestors had converted on threat of expulsion from Spain. But when the inquisition began our family fled to South America. The inquisition followed coming first to Peru, then Chile, and I guess that's why my ancestors went further south to Tierra del Fuego.

Some Maranos took for names the names of trees which symbolized for them the tree of life. That's how they knew each other. But over the centuries everything faded away and left only the lighting of the candles, amazing isn't it."

Eman smiled, "I am very secular but I still enjoy the holidays. In Israel Sukkot is a big holiday. Wherever I am I try to make a sukkah and eat a few meals there and sleep in it if I can. Somehow the tradition lives on even in me."

Over the next few days Juanita joined Eman at lunchtime and ate her lunch in the sukkah. Alex would join them just to get out of the sun.

Alex had several long sessions with Liz and Owen. They wanted to try and understand what had happened when Liz went from Island E to Rawson. Alex said, "I do have some powers but I don't know the extent of them. When I was threatened by the kidnappers several things occurred. Your transport wasn't something I was thinking about but my anger must have brought it about. I think the cave, whatever else it may be, acts as an amplifier for my powers. I've tested whether I can move myself and I can. Beyond that, I'm afraid I know nothing."

Owen asked, "What do you hope to accomplish when we go to the cave?" Alex responded, "I think I may be able to take myself home. I hope to align myself to a portal that's there. How I will do it I can't tell you but I'm certain it's possible."

Week by week it got colder and colder. Then they docked at Stanley in the Falkland Islands and a few days later they were on their way to South Georgia Island. Another ship would be calling there in a week that could take them back to Stanley. There they would get a flight back to Santiago, Chile. Things were still a bit testy between Britain and Argentina from the Falkland war. There were plenty of flights over the Andes to Buenos Aires.

If Alex was right and he could go home, it would leave a big hole in Juanita's heart. She was used to having him tell her he was just a bird and then he would say something profound and make her wonder. He wanted the best for her and she wanted the best for him.

Ch19-An End and a Beginning

The day came when Owen, Juanita, Eman, and Alex were on Island E. Owen got the generator going and took out the test equipment he'd brought with him. He rigged an antenna and examined the spectrum for any unusual energy. He was looking from below the AM broadcast band to well up into the microwave region. There were spikes that came and went but no sustained bands of energy either inside or outside the cave. He checked for radioactive particle decay but got only the normal background count one sees everywhere.

Eman had brought a camera sensitive in the infrared region that he rigged to do time lapse recording so they would have several days of images taken inside the cave.

Alex was very quiet. It was like he was feeling the air around him. It was on the second morning that he said to Juanita, "I think the time has come." She gave him a hug. He wished her and Glyn a good life. Then he walked far into the cave. A dull aura formed around him and he was gone. Eman's camera showed about what they'd seen with their eyes.

The next day they were back on South Georgia Island. Two days later the ship took them to Stanley. They flew in a twin engine prop plane to Santiago Chile. Owen and Liz took a flight to New York and then to London. Eman was going with Juanita back to Argentina.

They were sitting in the airport lounge and Juanita was enveloped in a dark cloud. Eman tried to cheer her up. "I will miss our little friend too. He was sort of like Gershom." "Who?" "You know, Moses son." "I'm afraid I'm very ignorant of such things." "There is something funny about this Juanita. I the non-believer must teach you about the bible. Wherever my mother is she must be laughing at me." "Okay, so why is he like Gershom?" "Moses fled from Egypt to Midian. He married Zipporah and called their first son Gershom because, "I have been a stranger in a strange land." "Alex was just such a stranger.

When they got to Buenos Aires Eman went sightseeing and Juanita went straight to see Glyn. He knew right away she was very troubled. He put his arm around her and said, "Let's get married." She managed a smile. "You know that's what I want more than anything." "Let's tell our folks and set a date." "No, marry me now. Marry me here." "You don't want the bridle gown and the maids of honor and all that?" "A few years ago yes. But I'm grown up. My father would borrow money to give me such a wedding. But I'm not so selfish as to want him to. If my mother were alive she would enjoy planning a big wedding but she's dead. No, let's get married. We can have a party and invite family and announce our wedding after the fact. I very much need you now; not years from now."

A few days later they were married in the courthouse by a judge with two student friends from the university for witnesses. When they were man and wife Juanita reclaimed that glow that Alex had first noted when they were on their way back from London. Their honeymoon was brief. Just a few days at a resort in Montevideo and then Glyn was back in school and Juanita was back in Rawson.

Dr. Mendoza came in for his morning latte and Juanita told him Alex was gone. She hoped he'd made it to his home, wherever that might be. Dr. Mendoza said, "I wouldn't worry. He was very smart and very capable. Perhaps he will visit us. I liked sitting and chatting with him. Frankly he was more thoughtful and rational than most of my former colleagues at the university."

Ruffa took it very hard. Juanita made sure to take him for walks everyday. He would just lie on the rug waiting for the door to open. He'd give a pathetic little whine from time to time as if his heart were broken.

Both Flor and Rosa noted a change in Juanita. Salsa noted it most of all. She was used to seeing Juanita with papers spread out on a table making notes and doing calculations and talking on the phone to suppliers. Now she was just as apt to stare out into space at nothing and draw mindless doodles.

The mystery was solved when Flor got a letter from an old friend who lived near Buenos Aires. She'd enclosed a newspaper clipping. It was a listing of the marriage licenses issued. One had been circled in pencil. "Why those two scamps!", thought Flor.

That week Juanita invited everyone to a party she and Glyn would be hosting. Flor and Rosa were way ahead of her. They had plans of their own.

Juanita got a call from the manager of the hall she'd rented for the party. There had been a mistake. That hall had been booked by someone else. However they were going to let her have a larger hall at the same price. Juanita suspected nothing.

Her father came up from Tierra del Fuego. She'd booked him a room at the La Manana but Rosa insisted he stay with her. Rosa told him what they suspected and that she and Flor had secretly taken over the party.

When Juanita and Glyn got to the hall on the day of the party they expected to see about 30 friends and family, a table with wine and punch, and a light buffet. When they went through the door they thought they were in the wrong place. A very lively band was playing. There were tables set for a feast around the perimeter of the hall. More than a 100 people were present. Then they caught sight of Flor, and Glyn Sr. smiling and laughing like they were going to burst. There were hugs and kisses. And Juanita's father? He was on the dance floor with Rosa. He was an excellent dancer.

Two local businessmen were sitting at one of the tables. One of them said, "Now there are some pants in that family." The other said, "I'd trade you a truck load of pants to borrow her business sense for a week."

The band struck up a tango and Juanita and Glyn took to the floor. They were still not Alita and Iago but it didn't matter. They were Juanita and Glyn.

Ch20-Family Life

Juanita and Glyn were treated to a Patagonian trek by their families. They hiked through forests and up

mountains. They saw beautiful views and crystal clear lakes and got so close to mountainous glaciers they could hear the ice creaking and cracking. They visited Juan, Juanita's father, and saw his Café Alex and did more sightseeing in Tierra del Fuego. Then it was back to Rawson.

Glyn had most of his lower division classes out of the way and would now take some classes at the Trelew campus of the University of Patagonia. More importantly he'd lined up work with a geology team that was exploring for geo-thermal fields powerful enough to run generating plants. Later in the year he'd have some work with a winery during the harvest.

Juanita had licensed 5 Café Alex franchises in Buenos Aires. They brought some income but certainly not as much as if she had 50 or 500. She'd been featured in several newspaper and magazine articles that brought her to the attention of other female entrepreneurs. She was asked to give several talks. One woman she met was trying to start a boutique with a line of apparel based on folkloric traditions. Juanita thought she had promise and invested some money with her to help her get started.

Back at home something was going on. Rosa and Flor were pleasant enough but there was some sort of subtext to her relationship with them that Juanita couldn't decipher. Glyn put his finger on it. "You're looking at two baby sitters with nothing to baby sit." "I thought we needed to put off starting a family until we were doing better financially." "Yes that is perfectly reasonable and logical but I think we'd better start producing grandchildren if we know what's good for us." Juanita smiled and then laughed.

Months went by. They said nothing until Juanita had completed her first trimester and the doctor said all systems were go. Then they told the family. Flor and Rosa knew. They'd been watching Juanita like the man at the carnival who guesses your weight. From now on they'd be hovering over her like angles.

She wished Alex would come back. She missed him and also he'd be terrific visiting the franchises and meeting the customers. He said he hated all that but Juanita wasn't so sure. If he just came back and went for a walk with Ruffa it would be enough.

It was the slow season. The Café Alex at the motel opened later and closed earlier. The museum location had a steady local clientele so it tailored its hours to those regular customers. In Tierra del Fuego the slow season was a surprise. The Café Alex did well as it attracted a different sort. Businessmen would stop by in the morning. They might bring a customer or business associate for lunch. The slow season provided enough income to pay the bills and make a small profit.

One afternoon Juanita was at home resting and she heard a sort of squawk. She looked down and there was a little downy ball of feathers walking around on webbed feet. Again she heard a noise and off in the corner was another, like the first. Suddenly she looked up and standing before her was a parrot-quin with bright emerald feathers. Its shoulder feathers were red and its wingtips blue. Then she heard a sort of thump in the next room and a familiar voice said, "Are we all here now?" Ruffa went crazy and bounded right over to Alex who was standing in the doorway.

"If you don't stop wagging your tail like that, I'm afraid it's going to fall off." Ruffa was licking Alex who was ducking left and right to avoid his tongue. "Yes, yes, we'll go for a walk. Just give me a chance to say hello."

Alex introduced his mate, Alnea, and his two chicks Alex Jr. and Alexa. “Alnea is trying her best to learn Spanish and I’m still learning to speak Parrot-guin. “Imagine what a shock it was suddenly being amongst thousands of birds who looked just like me. Penguins and Parrot-guins mate for life. As you can see I didn’t waste any time.”

Juanita was filled with joy at seeing Alex. Before long Alex Jr. and Alexa were sitting in her lap snuggling against her. Alex, noting Juanita’s enlarged figure, said, “I see you and Glyn have been busy too.” Juanita nodded.

Just then there was a knock at the door and who should it be but Eman. “I was right. My instincts told me I should see you one last time before heading off on my next assignment. I can see I’ll have to take some family photos.” Eman took a number of photos and one of them was up on the internet that day.

Our man from Hollywood was sitting at his desk making a chain out of paperclips when the phone rang. “Yes Don sweetie, I saw the picture dear. I’ll get right on it next week. Oh, I can’t go now baby. First I have to go to Provo, Utah and look for an apartment. See you in two years. Never mind, I’ll explain it all later.”

Juanita was over at the La Manana going over the accounts and this time it was Salsa who was starring off into space. “You must have a new boyfriend.” “Not exactly, I went dancing with Eman last night.” “He’s a little old for you.” “Yes, I know but I need someone mature. He just swept me off my feet.” Juanita chuckled.

Alex and family took a trip up to Buenos Aires to visit the franchises and talk to a few prospects. After having been to Egloo he was enjoying his uniqueness here. People always took notice of him. Children would follow him around. And his mate and chicks were big hits. They were in the newspapers and on television. Alex had his own internet page. For all the moaning he’d done in the past he was reveling in his celebrity status now. It also made quite an impression on Alnea and she stopped talking about how soon they were going back to Egloo.

Glyn Alexander Fluellen was born a few weeks later at the hospital in Trelew. He weighted 8 lbs 2 oz.. Holding him in her arms Juanita felt tears falling down her cheeks. Her head might be full of business but her heart was full of love. When they were home from the hospital, Flor and Rosa gave the baby his first bath and Ruffa guarded his crib. Alex thought about helping Glyn pass out cigars but he gave packets of roasted sunflower seeds instead.

