

SILVIO D'ARZO

THE PENGUIN  
WITHOUT A TUX

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Englisch translation of text, without illustrations  
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## THE PENGUIN WITHOUT A TUX

*What follows, boys and girls, is the story of poor Limbo and how, one fine day, even he managed to have his tux.*

*And if your teacher by chance might say that this story is a bit strange and that these things never happen, well: too bad for him, I am sorry. All that there is for you to do is to change teachers within a day's time. And to tell him to open his eyes more widely.*

*But you, meanwhile, must open your ears.  
Here it is.*

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## FIRST CHAPTER

*Where one fine day, an egg cracks open and from it pops a penguin. — Where it comes to be known that even names have their own importance. — Where, as far as mothers and fathers are concerned, the world is the same wherever you go.*

When an egg cracks open, you know, there is always a mess: and the bigger the egg, the bigger the mess. And this is as clear as day. Well. In the end, when that egg broke into pieces — and it was quite a large egg at that — what happened was a triumph.

The fact is that from that egg, on my word, a penguin — who was one day, one hour, and one minute old — poked his head out; and if you can ever be truly happy in this world, Mama and Papa were just that, and they were very proud of themselves.

«My, what a forehead! Have you seen what a forehead?» the mother ecstatically said. «It almost makes me nervous. Honestly.»

«Three times the size of the teacher's would be an understatement,» sputtered the father, strutting his stuff. «The forehead of an artist. That's all.»

«And his profile? Have you noted his profile?»

«How could I not? What a question! Of course I've noted his profile. You, though, have you noticed the color of his eyes? Have you realized that?»

«If I've noticed the color of his eyes? Are we kidding around? They're beautiful. There is even a hint of blue.»

«Only a hint of blue? Thank you very much. That's nothing!» the father said, quickly offended. And what do you make of the violet? And the icy blue, huh? Let's hear it.»

«But I've looked even more closely than you. And if you really want to know, listen to this: you haven't even realized that he has a voice that sounds like music.»

«Ah, is that so? So I would ignore his voice? I would not even notice it? In other words, I would be an unworthy father? Well all right. If you're interested, madam, (when they became angry, the father and the mother addressed each other formally), it would be precisely me — yessir, me, his father — who appreciates that voice. Absolutely. But you, however, it seems to me, have not by any means noted the contour of his body: a herring gull, by comparison, is no more than a broken barrel. But let's forget about it, now: good taste, madam, has never quite been your strong suit, I would say.»

«When I think that I married you, I almost should admit that you are right.»

And they began to snort angrily and to make long faces: and

then they raised their backs and circled around each other, one here and the other there. But then, soon after:

«Did you hear that?»

«It seems...»

«I would say...»

«He's talking in his sleep...»

«I'd say *singing*.»

«Should we go see?»

«Of course. But on tiptoe.»

And so, they did nothing but look at him, and warm him with feathers and breath, and watch over him as he slept, and tell him stories of seals and gulls, and yes, in short, dote on him quite a bit.

A day passed, and then another, and then another. And the penguin grew, you see.

«You know what? I don't believe this. By looking at him and watching over and warming him, and yes, doting on him a good deal,» said Papa Penguin smacking his forehead with a wing, «we forgot one thing.»

«My goodness,» said the mother, «is it something expensive?» (Because — you should know this, too — they did not have a trace of money.)

«No, we forgot about a name. At his age, all the others will have one, and some will already even have two. We will call him Limpopo. Do you like it? It was the name of my late grandfather.»

But the mother made a strange face.

«As for liking it, I do, of course, I don't want to say that it's a bad name. But — what do you want me to tell you? — it seems a bit too long for him. He is so small, look...»

«That doesn't mean anything,» said the father, rather bothered. «You know that he will grow, right?»

«Then...then,» she said, even more indecisive than before, looking at the ground, «then perhaps he will never remember it himself. It's rather difficult, you see. Won't that make him look bad? Then everyone will end up laughing.»

«That's just what a woman would say. You're even blushing,» said Papa Penguin, beginning to snort angrily. And since he had begun to snort angrily, in the end the mother decided to be straightforward.

«Look, Limpopo is too beautiful a name for him. Don't you see? A name for a rich man, a very wealthy one, even for a head tribesman. Remember, too, that your grandfather was Vice-Vice House Counselor.»

«Only one Vice,» corrected Papa Penguin.

«And instead (he doesn't know yet, my goodness) he will be the poorest penguin in the world. And he will never have the tiniest speck of anything. And his life will be a struggle for him. And so, if you allow me, I would think of giving him a name that doesn't draw attention, a simple name, then, that maybe doesn't even mean anything.»

The father hung his head in silence. And to seem nonchalant, he pretended to buff his sleeve. And he gave a cough, too.

«Yes, what you say is true. It is. The poorest penguin in the

world. And life will truly be a struggle for him.» And he gave another cough. «So then let's call him...Let's call him Limpo, do you like that? Limpo doesn't imply anything at all: and besides it's not a real name.»

«The name is even missing a piece...»

«Don't worry about that. We will add it on to him when he has graduated.»

«Classic studies, right?» asked the mother, slightly uplifted.

«No. Business,» said Papa Penguin.

«But that is the most ordinary thing in the world,» the mother said, frowning with displeasure. «I knew this would happen. Allow me to disagree...»

«Classic studies don't make money,» the father said curtly, shrugging his shoulders. «And if you really want to know...»

And they had already begun to get angry and to make long faces. But in that exact moment, the little one suddenly awoke, and he began to beat his wings strongly and move his beak even more strongly and make quite an infernal racket.

«My goodness,» the mother said, rushing over. «It would seem that he almost understood.»

«Of course! With such a forehead, he should certainly understand.» And they both rushed over.

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## SECOND CHAPTER

*Where a tux is mentioned for the first time. — Where Papa Penguin and his wife do not want to hear about it.*

And at last, the big day arrived. Along with the other young penguins, Limpo, too, needed to go off to school. And since he was proper and considerate and was a promising young man who was growing up well, and he was also very polite, he went without complaint: he sniffed a fish for breakfast, he kissed dear Papa and Mama on the beak, and then he went on his way to school.

«See you tonight,» said Limpo, turning around and drying his eyes with his elbow. «I'll bring you home an A, if I can.» And at the turn, he disappeared.

«Let's hope for the best,» thought Papa Penguin to himself. «Yes. Let's hope so,» said Mama Penguin. And she began to shake her head.

«That would be a terrible thing,» thought the father again to himself.

«Undoubtedly,» said the mother. «Terrible.»

(By now, they knew very well that for them, thinking and speaking were one and the same.)

But instead, a half hour later, the boy was already coming back.

«It didn't go well,» thought the mother, this time to herself.

«Ah, I see him. I see him, unfortunately,» he quickly replied to her.

«That's not good,»

And they both were like two fish out of water.

«Papa and Mama, please excuse me,» said Limpo in the best way possible, because he truly was very polite, «but you forgot something... You forgot to dress me in my tux. All the other students have one: and they looked at me in a certain way and they whispered things to each other. And one did nothing but point at me with his finger, and someone else came up to me just to smell me. Can you imagine? To smell me, I tell you... Then the teacher didn't even allow me to enter. 'Nice upbringing,' he said to me, 'really, coming to class wearing only a shirt!' Imagine the embarrassment. 'Forgive me, Sir,' I quickly replied to him, but always with due manners, 'though in this case, upbringing has nothing to do with it. It's absent-mindedness and nothing more, and now I will quickly run home, I will go put on my tux, as is proper, and in another half hour I will be here.' And now, dear Mama and Papa, you must also excuse me, but could you pass me my tux? I

would hate to make the teacher wait: it wouldn't be very polite, you see?»

The truth was that the father and mother could not buy one for him, and they looked at the ground, and they didn't know what to do.

«What if you tried to give him mine for today?» quickly thought Papa Penguin.

The mother raised her eyes to him, she looked at him for a bit, and then she shook her head two or three times.

«No, no, Attilio. It's truly impossible,» she thought in response.

«By now it's stained and torn and fraying, and there isn't a decent inch of it. And plus you are four times larger, and it wouldn't look good on him at all.»

«This is true, I know...I know, I know,» said the father, indecisive, and he scratched his head with his wing.

«And think of the office, of your colleagues... Impossible.»

«Ah, yes, yes, truly impossible.»

«Then, forgive me, Pop...» began the boy in the meantime.

And the father mustered his courage. He coughed once, coughed twice, pulled his jacket close to his chest, and then he finally resolved to speak.

«I'll tell you. I'll tell you, dear Limpo. I will treat you like a man... No more and no less than a man, am I making myself clear? And...it should make you happy...»

«Thank you very much, Papa...Thank you so much...I am very happy.»

«Good...let's say that...somehow...how can I put it?... It's not as if it's been forgotten. We don't really have your tux.»

Limpo looked first at his father; and then, after a bit, also at his mother: and then he began to think.

«There isn't a tux for me *at all*?» he asked in a whisper.

«Unfortunately, no, not anywhere.»

«And tomorrow?» he asked with a bit of hope.

«And...not even tomorrow, I would say... I don't think so.»

Limpo then turned to look at his mother.

«I shall tell you...I shall tell you, dear Limpo,» the mother said, bowing her head. «No, not even tomorrow. Nor the days after tomorrow.»

Limpo stayed silent for a while: and it was clear that he was about to cry.

«Well, Papa and Mama, please excuse me, but may I know the reason why?»

«Of course: you have the right,» the father said, coughing again. «The fact is...you see?...Am I making myself clear?... that is to say, I, I...I must go to the office... And now it's late. And I really cannot tell you...»

«The reason why? You want to know the reason why? Of course. You have the right,» the mother said, bowing her head... «Here it is in two words... My God, oh dear! But it's nine o'clock and I need to run out grocery shopping. And now it's late. And I really cannot.»

And all three of them went out: and an orphan and a widow put together were surely happier than they were.



### THIRD CHAPTER

*Where Limpo takes the plunge. —  
Where it's proven that being a father or a mother  
is the hardest thing in the world*

So, after three or four days and after thinking about it for three or four nights, Limpo — always politely, of course — called his parents aside.

For one or two seasons, he wanted to go to some other place, where no one, absolutely no one, could recognize him and point at him on the street. So, he would surely find himself a job, put some money away, and in the end, returning home, he would be able to buy his tux.

«Considering,» he added, «that, without me, even you, dear Mama and Papa, could put some money away.»

Clearly, his father and mother didn't even want to hear about it. «Out of the house at your age? You can't be serious.»

«But have you any idea of what a white bear is?»

«Or a walrus?»

«Or a seagull with a big beak?»

«No. I haven't had the pleasure of meeting them yet,» replied Limpo with his good manners, «but I think that when one is polite, no one could do him harm. If they are older, I will grant them, as is proper, the right of way. If, however, he is a seal or even a bear, I will offer my arm and help him cross the street. That way I won't make trouble with anybody. But, if you, dear Papa and Mama, wish that I not go, I will stay.»

And in fact, he stayed for five or six days.

Except that, every time he put his head outside of the door, he soon needed to come back home, because all the other young penguins did nothing but turn around and look at him. Some pointed at him, and some others even laughed. And no one — even this needs to be said — no one wanted to play with him.

Now, he didn't say anything, because he was indeed a polite penguin, but he stayed in the darkest corner of the house and waited for bedtime: and in an entire day, he didn't eat anything but a little piece of fish, and it was only to please his elders. Because of this, you see, he became thinner every day.

Then, when the seventh day came around, Papa and Mama whispered to each other for about an hour, even more, and they finally decided to take the plunge.

«Limpo,» said the mother in a slightly strange voice, turning her head away, «your father has something to say to you. Come here and listen carefully.»

«Dear Papa and Mama, here I am,» said Limpo from the back of the darkest corner in the whole nest.

«Limpo,» began the father, rather hesitantly, giving a cough and then another: and he smoothed the cuffs of his suit and did nothing but look at the ceiling. «Your mother has begged me to tell you something.»

«Also on behalf of your father, you see,» the mother pointed out.

«At the request of your mother, of course,» the father wanted to specify in his turn.

«Dear Papa and Mama, tell me,» Limpo said, lowering his head slightly.

«Well...here's the thing... You know how it is... We — your mother and I, you see? — so to speak...in a certain way...if you can put it that way...»

«Attilio, for goodness' sake, come on, wrap it up!» said the mother.

«In other words...and to be clear...because at the heart of it — you know how it is — there are no misunderstandings...»

«Attilio!» the mother sighed nervously.

«That's all, dear Limpo,» the father concluded, always looking at the ceiling, more confusing than ever. «Have I explained myself clearly?»

But Limpo, after thinking about it for a good moment, shook his head no.

«Of course...of course, you have been very clear, Papa. But something eludes me all the same. I'm sorry.»

Then the mother intervened.

«Just see how he's expressing himself! To speak for a half hour without managing to say anything! I will explain myself in two words.» And then, turning to Limpo, without ever once looking him in the eye:

«Mothers — you know how it is, right, Limpo? — mothers are always better suited for this... Children always understand them better, don't you think so? And I, for one...as... as your mother...»

«Cornelia, for goodness' sake, come on, wrap it up!» said the father.

«A mother — you understand me, right, Limpo? — a mother, above all, incubates her son for more than three months... And this is most important, I'd say...»

«Cornelia!» the father sighed nervously.

«Okay, that's all, Limpo,» concluded the mother, turning redder than a carnation. «Have I explained myself clearly?»

But Limpo, for the second time, and after having apologized again, made a small sign of no.

Then the father and the mother whispered to each other.

«You know what? We'll tell him together,» proposed Papa Penguin.

«That's a wonderful idea. Both at once. But first we'll have him close his eyes.»

«That's an even better idea. Well said. That way it'll be easier for us... And I would almost have him cover his ears as well... That way, it'll be twice as easy.»



## FOURTH CHAPTER

*Where Limpo has his first experience;  
and he makes a deal with three strange friends.*

And Limpo started his life. And life was indeed very hard for him.

He would walk from morning to night, always with his knapsack over his shoulder, and, only a little before nightfall, he would stop to sniff his fish a little and close his eyes for a few hours. And the next day, the same. And the day after, still the same. So it went for days and weeks and even a month. And the worst thing about it was that he didn't manage to find even a little work anywhere. And even worse was that no one, truly no one, took interest in him, even by chance, and he was alone, and even more alone than alone.

And then one night, a seagull with a big beak, with the ruse of wanting to show the way, robbed him in flight of his old knapsack. And for Limpo — since at that time there wasn't a living soul on the street — there was nothing to do but cry. But in the morning — when he had cried and cried again and then cried some more — since he was slightly familiar with the law, he went out to report his theft.

«You must pardon me, sirs. But it was all that I had, you see? And now — I am very embarrassed about needing to confess this, sirs — but now I have absolutely nothing left.»

The Seals looked at him a little: and then, still watching him, they began to whisper amongst themselves (because they were not well-mannered in the slightest); and then they turned to the right and to the left, then again to the right, then again to the left, no more or less than you do with a doorknob, and, finally, they sniffed him everywhere, so much so that they had to sneeze.

«Ah, we are sorry, too, *More-Or-Less*...obviously,» grumbled the commanding Seal of the office, who must have been very important, so important that he was even decorated. «We are sorry too, aren't we?»

All the other Seals, who had less command than he did, if at all, made a terribly sad face, and they were almost about to cry. «But a theft to you is not a theft at all...that's the trouble. You are not a seal, nor a walrus nor a penguin, nor a seagull with the big beak. You — don't be angry, okay? — but you — be patient, my dear *Something-Or-Other* — you are absolutely nothing. Try to make a bit of an effort: you will see that one who is absolutely nothing cannot have absolutely anything taken from him. It's clear, isn't it, *Something-Or-Other*?»

The other seals, who had less command than he did, if at all,

nodded their heads, each and every one, and they remained open-mouthed for a while, since there was no doubt that he was speaking seriously.

«Thank you very much, sirs. And pardon me sincerely for the disturbance and for everything,» responded Limpo, lowering his head. «I see that you really do learn something new every day.»

«No doubt. Of course. And on Sunday you can easily learn two things,» said the Seal with high importance. «And since today you have had the fortune of learning something from us, now you give me that fish of yours... And best wishes and salutations, and safe travels, and a fond farewell, and best regards to your family and compliments and courtesies, and, finally, yours truly... What more can you want for a fish?»

The other Seals opened their mouths again because they had never heard anyone speak like that in their lives; and some, out of jealousy, became green with rage.

Limpo, meanwhile, kept thinking to himself.

«Ah...that's that. Since we really, really like you, you know? So proper and considerate and so full of ideas and clever ways,» added the Seal with importance after having done his calculations carefully, «in addition, I want to give you a nice *au revoir*. Are you happy? A little extra, you see?»

«Certainly. Flattered and touched, sirs,» responded Limpo with the nicest manners in the world, and by now he had thought things over three times, and he'd had enough time to figure things out. «There is a problem, though. One that is absolutely nothing cannot give absolutely anything. Of His Illustrious Lordship most humble servant, et cetera, et cetera.»

And he went back to the street. And the commanding Seal of the office, who must have had a great deal of importance, opened his mouth with great importance.

«Yes. Today I truly learned something. And, thinking carefully about it, that seal deserved much more than this poor penny fish,» Limpo thought, setting off northward, toward the immense icy expanse, where it was easier to find work.

«If you are poor and alone, and if you're also in the midst of kind strangers, open your eyes, mouth, and ears wide, and take care to always do things yourself. Those are the greatest friends in the world.» And, since he had quite an appetite, to properly celebrate his three new friends, he decided to break the rules. He sniffed his fish twice in a row.

## FIFTH CHAPTER

*Where Limpo does every job in the world. —  
Where Limpo begins to study  
and comes to know absolutely everything  
— Except for one thing.*

And he arrived at the snowy expanses of the North. Since he was proper and considerate and a promising young man, and not being too ambitious besides that, Limpo at last found work. And, I've said, he was very polite: he responded to everyone with the utmost courtesy, and he was polite to everyone without expecting anything in return, and this, which goes without saying, gave him great pleasure.

Except that if someone suddenly started staring or laughing a little at him, and perhaps scratched his head and asked Limpo, «But you, my friend, can you at least tell me who you are? To me you don't look like a side dish, nor meat, nor fish, but you must be something, otherwise what is the point, right?»; well, if someone talked to him that way, Limpo would immediately start to cough and cough until the other had forgotten about him altogether or was already at home sleeping. (Always keeping his wing in front of his mouth, of course.)

In short, he did all sorts of things. He looked after the seals for fifteen days when the mothers went out to sea: he brought messages from one family to another when the bears suddenly appeared (on the snow, being all white, not even the bears managed to see him): he warned the seagulls when he caught sight of schools of fish.

And then, furthermore, he dealt business.

And afterwards, the Penguin and the Seal and the Walrus and the Seagull and the Reindeer, since it's fitting and the law says so, would all say:

«Well, my dear little *What-Are-You?*: now what do I owe to you?»

And Limpo, who had already meticulously added up the bill, and also checked it two or three times, would reply without further ado: «Ah, sirs, don't be silly. For yesterday, so much: for today, so much: for tomorrow, a small deposit... I am your servant, ladies and gentlemen. And on Sundays, also *Very respectfully yours.*»

And whatever Limpo earned, he surely put aside to finally be able to buy himself his tux. And every evening, before putting himself to bed, he gave a glance at his possessions and he rubbed his hands a little, too. Just a little, of course, because Limpo was very polite.

Now, one fine day, he had an idea. And the idea must have been a good one, too, because he smacked himself once, and

then again: and if he didn't smack himself a third time, it was only because a seal gave him a strange look.

«My, what a fool! What a fool,» thought Limpo. «While I'm here working morning to night, the others are going off to school every day, and they end up learning a great many things. So, when I'm finally able to return and, maybe, buy my tux as well, I'll still be a laughingstock... At my age, attending only first grade is laughable.»

And, since he was full of ideas and clever ways, in a day's time, he changed his system.

When the seal, walrus, reindeer, penguin, and seagull paid him what they owed, Limpo now took only half of it, and then he would say: «Keep the rest, sirs.

It's nothing at all ... If anything, when you have the way and time and wish for it, you will be so kind as to tell me why...» and he immediately asked fifty *whys* regarding things that he couldn't understand. Why, for instance, the seal swam like it did, and the penguin (that hadn't hurt anyone) could not fly, and the seagull only flew, and then a hundred and another hundred and even more.

Sometimes, all alone in the dead of night, all alone, without Papa and Mama, he would hear the cry of the sea: sometimes, in the middle of the ocean, he would see immense icebergs that went on and on and on and never stopped: and as soon as he could, he would run to ask everyone why.

Time passed like this, and each day, Limpo learned something more: and each day his possessions increased: and now, before long, he could go back home and buy himself a beautiful tux.

Now, there is only one thing that I do not know in this world,» he said one day. «As soon as I learn this, too, I will be back on the road home.»

More than once, he had seen the seagull, the seal, and the walrus flee: he had seen them go crazy from terror and, sometimes, even death: and he heard their babies cry.

Not once, however, did he see the white bear. The white bear attacked, slaughtered, killed, walked peacefully over the ice, and was always truly happy. And his cubs never cried.

«Why is this? Why must this happen?» Limpo couldn't help but ask himself. «By any means, there must be a reason why.»

But no one ever knew how to answer him.

«Now that's enough. You're boring me... *Bits-Of-This-And-That*, now you're going too far. Enough. You've become a broken record,» everyone would say, pretending to yawn. And if, by chance, Limpo tried to insist, the walrus, seal, reindeer, penguin, and seagull, changed the subject and talked about the weather.

And then, for a little while, they could not even laugh anymore. «Why is this?» Limpo wondered, more suspicious than ever. «There must be a reason why.»

## SIXTH CHAPTER

*Where Limpo succeeds in seeing the White Bear up close.  
And that is precisely how he understands everything.*

But one fine day, something happened.

«Servant of yours, ladies and gentlemen,» said Limpo to two old Walruses, making a slight bow to them. (This, too, is included in the bill.) «The service that I have performed for you today is only a very modest tribute that I have allowed myself to do for you, and I hope that you would like to accept...»

«A...what?» grumbled the old Walrus, already eyeing him with suspicion. «As far as I know, we have never asked you for a...what? And, get it in your head, boy: we will not accept it for free.»

«Okay, this always happens. I knew it,» his wife twisted her mouth with a certain displeasure. «You can never really trust these outsiders that are neither meat nor fish, nor anything. You tell them to do one thing, and they go and do something else. And then, besides all that, they want to impose upon you. But who has ever told you to give us a...yes...in short?»

«On top of it, he comes to us in...a shirt.»

«And in front of me, a lady, no less.»

«What cheek!» snorted the old Walrus between his whiskers.

«You can even say cynicism, Evaristo,» the wife raised her shoulders, indignant.

«But everyone, let's not misunderstand,» Limpo explained with the utmost courtesy. (He had already learnt — you see — the most difficult words.) «I want to say just this: starting from the next moon, I believe that I will not be able to work for you anymore. I am going away: I am going home: to my homeland, so to speak: to see my father and mother again... my most respectable parents. And so this is the last service I will offer to my dear clients, with a discount of one hundred percent. [He already knew, you see, how to do calculations.] So that you remember me a little.»

Upon hearing these words, the Walrus and his wife made a most gracious face, and they all became very sweet and they gave their best wishes and smiles and *bonjours*.

«I have been to Patralara once,» said the Walrus, curling his mustache. A charming country; I envy you.»

«Don't forget about us,» the wife deigned to smile.

«That shirt is very becoming on you.»

But in that moment, Evaristo the walrus and his wife abruptly changed expression. They moved their faces here and there to smell the air, they crinkled their noses twice, they shook



their whiskers just as many times, and then they turned around and ran like crazy.

«But everyone, just a moment... Please listen to me,» Limpo called them, waving his arms. «I don't know your customs yet: I apologize... If I have offended you... listen, everyone...»

In that exact moment, the loudest roar in the world shook the whole seashore and the immense icebergs. The seagulls took flight; the seals suddenly disappeared into the water; the penguins began to wail and beat their useless wings.

It was none other than the voice of the bear. Limpo, at this point, was on the verge of fainting.

A White Bear, with four cubs, had appeared on the expanse of snow, seven hundred feet below him.

He was bigger than a large horse, and his legs were big enough to crush a seal, or even two: and his mouth...his mouth...his mouth...to not see that mouth, Limpo quickly shut his eyes. And, to be absolutely sure that he wouldn't see anything, he even covered them with his wings.

«My God,» he said in a whisper, forgetting his grammar and everything, «I've never seen anything worse than this. And I don't want to see it ever again. And now, finally, I understand why the bear is indeed happy and can walk around peacefully, and why his cubs never cry. Now, I know truly everything.»

And he stayed there, his eyes closed, shaking, without even an ounce of strength left to run and hide in his nest.

«Yes...yes... Now I understand everything. I know twice as much as a teacher, and then some.»

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## SEVENTH CHAPTER

*Where Limpo is more confused than ever;  
and he has crazier and crazier thoughts. —  
Where, to clear his thoughts, he must  
put a piece of ice on his forehead.*

He dared to reopen them only a little while later, when he felt his ears ringing from a blast louder than thunder, and the bear's roar, in comparison, was at most a cough.

The Great Bear took a leap forward and then fell on the field of snow: he shook himself off, doubled over, gave one last tremendous roar, and then stretched out. He was dead. Around his body, the snow began to turn red. The four bear cubs began to cry. They sniffed him, licked him all over, blew sweetly on his face, whispered in his ear, looked at each other with dismay, and then they resumed crying.

Now Limpo didn't believe his eyes: and he rubbed his eyes two or three times.

«My God, my God. This is new. I had never, ever known. Even the white bear ends up that way: like the seal, the walrus, the seagull, the reindeer, the penguin. No more and no less than them: just like them. And even the baby bears cry exactly like the baby seals and baby seagulls... My God, my God, I would swear that the bear cubs have the same voice...the same voice identical to the other baby animals!... But how can one even say such things, my God?»

Four or five men came out of a crevasse in the mountain driving a dog sled: they fetched the four bear cubs, tied the Great Bear by its legs, and dragged it away. They were happy and calm, and they laughed. They disappeared westward. On the immense expanse of snow, there was nothing but the large red stain.

A minute passed, and then another one. And all around there was silence. Except for Limpo and the large red stain, you could see nothing but snow upon snow.

And then, from all around, seagulls with big beaks descended, seals resurfaced from the water and began to run along the icy expanse; from their nests in the crevasses burst the walruses in droves: and finally even the penguins dared to expose the tips of their beaks. And then everyone — everyone, you understand? — seals, penguins, seagulls, and walruses, began to run, to whoop, to dance around the large red stain, holding hands. They were like third-graders, I tell you.

«It's over. It's truly over,» they all cried, still running and shouting and dancing and jumping. «Now we can breathe... He finally met his match... What a day...what a happy day for us!...»

And in saying so, they all embraced.

«Please forgive me if I had not greeted you on the street that day. Pride has nothing to do with it, you know? The fact is that now I'm truly a little near-sighted or a little far-sighted, or perhaps even both.»

«Don't even mention it. Are you kidding? Nonsense.»

«As soon as I can, I will return those six fish to you that I had taken by mistake that day, with one hundred percent interest... A grossly idiotic error, I tell you...»

«Do you want to truly offend me now? Keep the interest and the six fish and everything. And it was no mistake, you understand? I had put them there as a gift for you.»

«It's not true at all that I don't want my daughter to marry you or that I'm going around saying that you are a good-for-nothing or that you're also always drunk. On my honor, I have always thought the contrary.»

«Ah, people. What can I say? People. If they aren't gossiping, they're never happy! And to think that I don't drink...»

And they hugged and kissed again.

«Hey, kids, everyone out, even you. Nothing to fear, children! It's over.»

And, first one, then another, and then another — scared half to death — and even the little ones finally came out of the nest. And, after giving a deep sniff to the stain and understanding everything, they, too, made a circle and danced and sang and whooped and made an infernal racket.

«Hey... One moment. Look up there. Can you be that crazy?» a seal suddenly said, stopping.

The others looked up, too, seven hundred feet above them, and all alone, more alone than alone, they spied Limpo.

«Hey, What-Are-You?, come down.»

«Come dance with us, Bits-Of-This-And-That.»

«Why do you look like you went to a funeral?»

«Was it your uncle, perhaps? Come down.»

«Do you maybe want to go into mourning for him?»

But Limpo, with the utmost courtesy, shook his head no. And all the others soon resumed dancing.

«How crazy! How very crazy!» they said, and they continued to whoop and sing and dance all around the large red stain. And in the meantime, Limpo spoke to himself, giving a strong shake of his head, trying to clear his thoughts. «My God...my God. Those four bear cubs, what a voice! I would swear...if it wasn't crazy, I would swear that it sounded like mine...yes...mine, just like mine, when I am alone and it's night and the sea screams outside, and I think of dear Papa and Mama! Who can make heads or tails of this? It might be my nervous exhaustion.»

And to clear his thoughts even more, he put a nice piece of ice on his head.

## EIGHTH CHAPTER

*Where Limpo is about to return home,  
to see dear Papa and Mama again,  
and to buy a magnificent tux for himself. —  
Where the winter storm occurs:  
and Limpo sits and waits for Death.*

And yet another season passed.

Limpo wrapped his ears very tightly, as if he had the mumps, and furthermore, he fasted, did gymnastics, (he even learned to walk on a tightrope), ate fish six times a day to boost his vitamins, and in the end, well, he was truly healed. And now he was happier than ever.

«Well,» Limpo decided one evening, after doing his calculations and checking them again, as well. «I am almost done, I think, and so I will be able to get myself back home. At this point, nothing is left for me to do but to earn something like a quarter of a third of a half of what I had earned in September minus a half of a third of a quarter of what I had earned in October, and to learn why Man is different from everyone and why his children never cry: Only that.»

And the days passed: and weeks: and even a month: and Limpo saw a Man's reindeer hunt, and another terrible bear hunt, and an even more horrible massacre of a group of walruses: and his question was finally answered. Man was secure, and peaceful and happy: and his children never cried.

«Barely sniffing the presence of Man is enough to make the White Bear, the Seal, and the Walrus flee. Man just barely raising his arm is enough to make the White Bear and the Reindeer and the Seagull die. Barely sniffing the presence of the Seal (or the Reindeer or the White Bear or the Seagull) is enough to make Man suddenly appear and just barely raise his arm and kill them. That, therefore, is why Man is always happy and why his children never cry: now I really know everything.»

And, to be sure he remembered those things, he marked the three answers on a notebook and learned them by heart.

At this point, no one could deny him the third-grade diploma. «At your service, ladies and gentlemen,» he said the next day to all his loving and distinguished clientele. (He had also learned to call them that, because Limpo — don't ever forget — was very, very polite. Polite to the point — you see? — that no one, eating lunch or dinner, knew how to clean a herring or sardine bone like he did: and he was so considerate and clever that he resold them as combs at greatly discounted prices, making a zero percent profit.) «I am about to bid you farewell: and if you would like to take advantage of me for the last time, you have but to ask...»

Since it was quite a difficult talk, they didn't even let him

finish. They all murmured a little and were even indignant. «Speak more eloquently,» they all snorted. «You should be ashamed of yourself.» «No one has ever offended us like that, be careful...» But then, to make him see that they understood and that they, too, were very educated: «In short, what are you selling?» «Without a six percent discount, I won't take it; you can be sure about that.» «And plus, I wonder if it is even fresh stuff?» «Hey there, I say, is it good for children?» «Well, come on now, give me two pounds of it, to try out.» And Limpo, with the utmost courtesy, explained how things were. Then everyone looked at the sky, and sniffed the air, and began to watch where the gray clouds went and where the icebergs went, and then they all shook their heads. «Thank you greatly for your kind thoughts. But now it's time to shut ourselves up at home, and we don't need anything anymore. Within three or four days at most, bad weather will begin. Perhaps even a little earlier, this year... Okay; farewell, Bits-Of-This-And-That: best wishes and safe travels and enjoy yourself.» And everyone disappeared in a hurry, some here and some there, to find refuge in their homes as soon as possible. On the immense plain of snow, amongst the crevasses of ice, on the sea, in the sky you could no longer see a living soul. Limpo was alone, and even more alone than alone. The wind blew, night fell. «It's okay,» Limpo said to himself, looking at the sky and the snow and the sea, beginning to tremble. «It's time for me to be on my way: I no longer have even a day to lose. I'm sorry, though, about one thing: about not being able to learn that thing.» And on his way home, without a moment to lose, he began to prepare himself for the great journey. First of all, he thought to remove the wooden sign:

Distinguished Firm  
BITS-OF-THIS-AND-THAT WHAT-ARE-YOU?  
SOMETHING-OR-OTHER MORE-OR-LESS  
and so forth

He recounted his earnings three times, checked them again (so now he was positively sure), wrapped, stacked, piled, aligned, subdivided, and still once more he wanted to check (this way there could be no doubt); but he was so weary that day that he closed his eyes and slept. He awoke only in the dead of night. Now the whole world seemed to have gone crazy: whistles, screams, explosions, and howls among the caves and the crevasses of the mountains shook the whole earth. And the sea screamed even louder: the moving icebergs broke against other mountains: columns of water rolled to shore:

enormous avalanches tumbled down from the mountains. The winter storm was knocking at the door.

«Dear Papa and Mama, farewell,» Limpo said, trembling and crying, all alone inside his hiding place. «I am so sorry, believe me... I have been polite to everyone (you should have no doubt about this. None.): I have granted the right of way to the seals; I greeted the oldest first, I was never offended if someone called me, laughing, *What-Are-You?*, *Bits-Of-This-And-That*, or even worse: and then I worked, I studied, I did every job, and I never stole a single thing. And (this stays between us) except for one thing, I know everything; such that no one could deny me the third-grade diploma. I wanted to return to you on this very day, and I swear to you that it's not my fault if you couldn't ever see me again. I have done everything possible. Dear Papa and Mama, farewell.»

And, plugging his ears with his wings to not hear the bellowing thunder, he lay there waiting for Death.

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## NINTH CHAPTER

*Where Death does not come. —*

*But Limpo becomes crazier every day: he makes a will  
and decides to go to the Doctor's.*

Death, however, did not come. (He had rather a lot to do that day, and he no longer knew which way to turn: and — let's be fair, for once — he took pity.) Little by little, the storm weakened: and at last, dawn broke, too. Slowly, on tiptoe, Limpo finally had the courage to peek out of the burrow.

And what he saw, what Limpo saw that day, was this.

On the shore, a group of men were looking down, in the middle of the sea. And in the middle of the sea, staring intently, Limpo finally managed to see another man. The black, blue, and green waves flung him this way and that; twice, three times, and then ten times, and even more; and the man disappeared, reappeared, disappeared: and it went on and on like that.

The men on the shore didn't look away from him for one moment, and Limpo, too, did nothing but look and look.

Suddenly, two or three gigantic waves rose up and came quickly crashing down, and then nothing; and then still, nothing; and in the end, the sea, too, slowly calmed down. And now it was precisely like it was every day. And the man, just like that, had disappeared.

«What a curious thing. Like the bear,» said Limpo. «I would never have imagined this either. He's dead, too, like the bear.»

In the middle of the group of men, two or three children began to cry.

«Ah no...no... absolutely not,» said Limpo, no longer believing his ears. «Now I can't think straight anymore, I know it; it's a foolish thing, I know this too; but I would swear...I would swear that those children have exactly the same voice as the bear cubs... Can you be any crazier than I am? If I carry on this way, they won't even admit me to first grade.»

And he was absolutely miserable.

The men, meanwhile, picked up the children, who were still crying: and with their heads down, they left. And like that, on the shore, nothing remained but two or three men's hats.

Then, suddenly, from all around — from the sea, from the air, from the burrows, from the crevasses, from the mountains, from the icy and snowy plains — there appeared an infinite amount of seals and walruses and penguins and seagulls. Everyone and their brother was there, I tell you. And they all made a circle around the men's hats, and they

began to whoop and dance and jump and — yes, in short — they made an infernal racket. And then, after a good deal of time, when they had danced and whooped and jumped and made an infernal racket, they called to the young ones. And the young ones at first pretended not to hear, and then they stuck an eye out, and half a head, and three quarters of a head, and then the whole thing (which was quite funny). And the parents, in fact, in that moment began to laugh; but then they took them by the ear, or the tail, or both, and gave them a good scolding, and they made them sniff the men's hats: and all together, in the end, practically holding hands, the elderly, the adults, month-old babies and even younger ones, resumed the dance.

«Hey. Just a moment. Look up there. Can you be that crazy?» a seal suddenly screamed, stopping.

The others, too, looked up, seven hundred feet above them, and all alone, even more alone than alone, they spied Limpo.

«Hey there, *What-Are-You?*, come down.»

«Come dance with us, *Bits-Of-This-And-That*!»

«Why do you look like you went to a funeral?»

«Was it your uncle, perhaps? Come down.»

«Do you perhaps want to go into mourning for him? Come dance with us.»

But Limpo, with the utmost courtesy, shook his head no. And all the others quickly resumed dancing.

«How crazy! How very crazy» they said, and they continued to whoop and sing and dance all around the men's hats.

«Yes...yes. It's just like that. Those poor children, though,» thought Limpo with great sadness. «The same voice as the bear cubs... And the same as the baby seals and seagulls and walruses and penguins and every baby...I would swear...I would swear that it even sounds like my own voice, when I am alone, and it's night, and outside the snowstorm screams, and I cry and I call for dear Papa and Mama, but who knows where they are, and so they cannot hear me.»

He started towards the burrow.

«What it's called I wouldn't know,» thought Limpo, «but I am truly afraid that it's a serious illness.»

And, conscientious as he was, before going to the Doctor's, he counted and recounted his things, he checked it again, and he decided to make a will.



## TENTH CHAPTER

*Where an illustrious acquaintance is made with Doctor Walrus. —  
Where Limpo runs the risk of ending his days... —  
But now, this is asking too much, I would say.*

That night, Limpo didn't get a wink of sleep.

«Now it's over for you. Now it's truly over,» he kept saying this to himself, suddenly sitting up on the bed with his eyes wide open in the dark.

«Perhaps it's because you've worked too much this year, or you have never had dear Papa and Mama with you, or you always had to be in a shirt and so you caught a nasty cold, the fact is that now — don't be offended, Limpo — you are nothing but a poor crazy person.»

And he tried to touch his forehead to see if he had a fever.

«Yes... Nothing but a poor crazy person,» he repeated, after having realized that his forehead was beginning to burn.

«And that is as clear as day. But, my God, how can you say that a human baby has my same voice? And the same as the bear cub? And the baby seal, too? Man *speaks* — let's see if I remember — the bear *roars*, the seal...the seal...the seal *trumpets*, that's it. And even I know it: but then I don't know it: and I know I don't know it. But shame on you, Limpo! This here is exactly how crazy people talk.»

And, to verify, he smacked the nearby wall very hard. There came no reply: you could hear only snoring. And Limpo, polite as he was, waited a minute, a second minute, and a third: he rubbed his feet on the floor, red, and then finally he gave another smack.

«What is that? Who wants me at this hour?» demanded a grumpy and sleepy voice.

«Excuse me, Anacleto. Just one thing. It's *What-Are-You? Bits-Of-This-And-That*. Is it true or not that the seal trumpets?»

«What?...what's that?...what seal?» asked the Walrus, rubbing his eyes and getting right out of bed. «Did something happen to the seals?»

«No, no. Nothing, Mister Anacleto. I only wanted to know this. Is it true or not that the seal trumpets?»

Then, from the nearby nest, a huff and a tremendous scream were heard. The walrus Anacleto was about to burst with anger.

«Crazy! Crazy! Crazy cubed, squared, and more,» he huffed when he could finally speak. «Waking me up at four in the morning to ask me if a seal trumpets!...If a seal trumpets... ah!...but that's the last straw...God, my nerves...my poor liver... I already feel an attack coming on!»

And, huffing, puffing, and moaning, he swallowed a few drops of painkiller and he let himself fall onto the bed.

«I knew it...I knew it,» thought Limpo with great sadness, «even Mister Anacleto, who, with all due respect at his age, is the craziest creature in the world, quickly realized that I am crazy. And without even seeing me. No, there's no more hope for me. Dear Papa and Mama, farewell.»

And he waited for daylight to run to the Doctor's.

Now, the Doctor that morning was up to his neck with work, and already since six in the morning, there was a never-ending line in front of the clinic. The fact is — and you, too, can understand, and Mister Anacleto would've understood as well after thinking a little about it, if someone had explained it to him three times — that the day before, due to the Death of Man, there had been a party, and everyone had eaten and drunk, and drunk and eaten, and then had gone back to drinking and eating, and it was that way until sundown. And now everyone felt terrible, and they all had run to the Doctor's.

And to not waste time, the Doctor had them enter — first one, then another, then a third — and to save time, he didn't even examine their eyes, tongue, or stomach. Each time, he would simply say: codfish oil. A spoonful. Up to the brim, though; be careful; and then he would call the fourth and the fifth and the sixth, and, never examining them, he would say the same thing. Because he was truly a capable Doctor, with glasses, a degree, and everything, and so no one could say anything.

And in the end, Limpo, too, came by.

«No need for you to undress,» the Doctor said to him first thing, turning to look out the window. «There's no time to lose today.»

«Yessir, I understand,» said Limpo with courtesy, being polite and considerate as he was, «but I have not undressed. I do not have my tux. It's old news, you see, Doctor...»

«Well, the elderly, starting with me, I've never liked them at all (and the young ones, starting with you, even a little less): you either save it or donate it for charity,» murmured the Walrus Doctor. «Hmph, if you've even lost your tux, then that means that you had quite a good party.»

«No. I swear to you, Doctor, that I...»

«Awful eyes,» the Doctor interrupted without even looking at him. «Tired eyes; red...vacant stare... Ah, yes...really a good party.»

And he continued to look at the street.

«But I give you my word, Doctor...»

«Hmph, thank you very much. But I don't know what to do with it. Keep it, or put it in the bank at seven percent interest: one day or another, it will be of some use to you,» said the Doctor, still not looking at him. «Awful tongue. Terrible tongue.»

«But I am the one that kept talking about the bear cubs. About the bear cub voice... Do you remember, Doctor? I am that one...»

«Heavy stomach. Very heavy. Does it hurt?» said the Doctor, touching his stomach.

«Yesterday the same thing happened. The same thing with the Man, you know?»

«Weak heart,» said the Doctor without turning around, putting a hand on his ear. «So weak that you can hardly hear it.» «On the beach there were four children: and on the sea in the storm, a boat...»

«It beats irregularly. This needs attention,» said the Doctor, feeling his pulse.

«And when the ship sank, the children started to cry. But they were crying in a way...in a way...»

The Doctor coughed.

«Awful cough,» he said after having thought about it. «Be careful. Be careful, I say. It's a cough that I really don't like the sound of at all.»

«...that I would have sworn...I would have sworn, Doctor...»

«And even your joints aren't doing too well, it seems to me,» said the Doctor, trying to bend them. «At your age, you need to take care of them.»

«...I would have sworn that the human children, too, had the same voice as I have. The very same, you understand? When it's night and it's dark, and the sea is stormy, and I am alone, and I think about dear Papa and Mama... The same as the bear cubs. And the seal cubs, and the seagull chicks. My exact same voice, you understand?»

At these words, the Doctor suddenly turned to look at him, and his glasses fell to the floor. He had changed expression. He was a different man.

«What did you say? The same voice? Even the human children, the same voice?»

«Yes, sir. The same.»

«And... and even the bear cubs?»

«Even them, even the bear cubs, Doctor.»

The Doctor started to think, because even without his glasses, he was truly a very capable doctor, and he managed to think the same, in such a way that no one could say otherwise.

«Wait... Wait a moment... Let's see,» and he went back to thinking deeply... «Not arthritis, it doesn't seem to be that. Here arthritis has nothing to do with it... Pneumonia? Who knows... It could be pneumonia... Pneumonia is easy to catch... But I've had that, too, in my time, and all that there was for me to do was to keep warm... But bear cubs had a different voice than I did. Same for the human children... And this I understood very well, even with pneumonia... No, no: I think that this should be scrapped, too. Indigestion, no: because that requires eating; and you say you haven't eaten at all... But why haven't you eaten at all? It was all that simple, no?» The Doctor began to snort and to pull out one whisker and then another, and if he'd had a third, he would have pulled that one out, too. «No: there's something else here. You're hiding something, my boy. My dear, you try to fool me. But you are too naïve for me. The problems are: arthritis, pneumonia, indigestion, and that's it: and even the rocks know this by now, and there's no denying that. And if not, it's not a problem... And you are healthier than I am. Goodbye.»

But Limpo did not move. And the Doctor began to watch

him, and he watched him for a half hour at least, from the front, from the side, from the back; and then, he suddenly made a face sweeter than honey, and he smacked his hand against his forehead.

«I got it. I got it. How stupid of me. I got it! Even human children have your same voice?»

«Yes, sir. The same.»

«And bear cubs?»

«Them, too, bear cubs, too.»

«Ah, but then,» said the Doctor with extreme gentleness, «then my son, you are crazy... It's as clear as day... You are quite a lunatic... a nice lunatic...that's all: and now, as the law requires, we'll have you go to a clinic... Happy? He who seeks, finds, boy: see? Kindly and sincerely and very truly yours.»

And he gracefully clapped his hands; and two seal nurses quickly entered.

«Here we have this young lunatic. He says that human children have the same voice as he does. Same for bear cubs and others... Consequently, since he is crazy, you hold him very tightly now, and then take him to the clinic. We've figured it out, boy, see?»

And he turned to point out Limpo. But, considerate as he was, Limpo slipped out the door. And now he was in the middle of the snow, in the open, and he ran like a herring in the sea.

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## FINAL CHAPTER

*Where Limpo returns home: he sees dear Papa and Mama again. — Not only that: but now he has his tux.*

*— Not only that: but now he even has a diploma.*

So Limpo began on the way home. And he was sadder than ever.

«I have been away from home for two years, without dear Papa and Mama,» he said with each step. «I have worked from morning to night, I have done every job, I have seen the good and the bad: and now, here I am, going home even worse than when I left. Not even a shadow of the tux, and what's more, I am crazy. And even my Papa and my Mama will be ashamed of me.»

Then, after six days and six nights and six days, when he finally arrived at the village, he soon saw a very strange thing. All the other penguins, his former classmates, his teacher, the counselor, the Custodian, and even the Head Tribesman — yessir, even he — had some ugly tuxes by now: old, thin, worn, even more threadbare than a mouse, cheap-looking and all, I say. And they all watched him intently, and they whispered amongst themselves and then they pointed at him: and the smallest, those who were three weeks old at most, stared at him, slightly stupefied, and then ran away. And then they stopped, they turned around again to look at him, and out they went like that.

«Ah...even they quickly realized it. And even the youngest are afraid of me,» thought Limpo with great disappointment. «I am crazy, at this point: and I must have a very strange face.» And he started towards his house.

At the front door were dear Papa and Mama: and even from afar, they were already looking at him in a curious way: and they, too, whispered to each other and pointed at him.

«Poor dears... Poor dears,» he thought, shaking his head. «Well: even they quickly realized it: and they're ashamed of me, and they wouldn't want to be, and they don't quite know what to do. Dear Papa and Mama, here, what a nice gift I bring to you; all that I have doesn't amount to a penny: all that I know is that the human, the bear, the seal, and the walrus have the same voice as I do. Even less than a penny. Here you go.»

And tears were brought to his eyes.

But in the end, he mustered up his courage and tried to take a look at himself.

He couldn't believe his eyes. Impossible. He needed to make sure with his hands.

Now he, too, had his own tux: but it was more soft and lovely and elegant and sparkling than anyone had ever seen: a real Sunday tux, with a pocket watch chain to boot; and all the others were poor and clumsy, and in comparison, they were pitiful. They weren't worth the shadow of a penny.

«No... No. Something is going on here.» Limpo soon be-

came frightened, giving his head a strong shake. «No... this here is not me... This is someone else. There must have been a mistake... But then, where am I? God, look what I've become now!»

But, putting a hand in his suit pocket, he pulled out a nice business card. And the business card said no more or less than this:

MASTER LIMPOPO  
Qualified in Everything and other things

And so, he had no doubt.

And you, boys and girls, believe it. It's true.

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