

A BOUNTY OF BONE  
[The Eunis Trilogy – Book Two]

A NOVEL

PG LENGSFELDER



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1	
<b>Bemidji, Minnesota - New York City - Great Falls, Montana .....</b>	
Chapter 2	
<b>New York City .....</b>	
Chapter 3	
<b>New York City .....</b>	
Chapter 4	
<b>New York City .....</b>	
Chapter 5	
<b>Johannesburg, South Africa .....</b>	
Chapter 6	
<b>The Silver Mists, Haenertsburg, South Africa .....</b>	
Chapter 7	
<b>The Pafuri Gate, South Africa/Mozambique .....</b>	
Chapter 8	
<b>Parque de Nacional de Limpopo, Mozambique .....</b>	
Chapter 9	
<b>Mapai, Mozambique .....</b>	
Chapter 10	
<b>Guija, Mozambique .....</b>	
Chapter 11	
<b>Nyanga, Zimbabwe .....</b>	
Chapter 12	
<b>Tete Province, Cahora Bassa Dam, Mozambique .....</b>	
Chapter 13	
<b>Zambezi River, Mozambique .....</b>	
Chapter 14	
<b>Zambezi River, Mozambique .....</b>	

Chapter 15  
**Zambezi River, Mozambique** .....

Chapter 16  
**Zambezi River, Mozambique** .....

Chapter 17  
**Songo, Mozambique** .....

Chapter 18  
**Karatu, Tanzania** .....

Chapter 19  
**Karatu, Tanzania** .....

Chapter 20  
**Ngorongoro Conservation Area, Karatu, Tanzania** .....

Chapter 21  
**Geita, Tanzania** .....

Chapter 22  
**Geita Goldmine, Geita, Tanzania** .....

Chapter 23  
**Karatu, Tanzania** .....

Chapter 24  
**Ngorongoro Conservation Area, Karatu, Tanzania** .....

Chapter 25  
**Karatu and the sawmill, Mto wa Mbu Village, Tanzania** .....

Chapter 26  
**Karatu, Tanzania** .....

Chapter 27  
**The sawmill, Mto wa Mbu Village, Tanzania** .....

Chapter 28  
**Karatu, Tanzania** .....

Chapter 29

<b>The remote fringes, Karatu, Tanzania .....</b>	
Chapter 30	
<b>The remote fringes, Karatu, Tanzania .....</b>	
Chapter 31	
<b>The remote fringes, Karatu, Tanzania .....</b>	
Chapter 32	
<b>The remote fringes, Karatu, Tanzania .....</b>	
Chapter 33	
<b>The remote fringes, Karatu, Tanzania .....</b>	
Chapter 34	
<b>The remote fringes, Karatu, Tanzania .....</b>	
Chapter 35	
<b>The remote fringes, Karatu, Tanzania .....</b>	
Chapter 36	
<b>The remote fringes, Karatu, Tanzania .....</b>	
Chapter 37	
<b>The sawmill, Mto wa Mbu Village, Tanzania .....</b>	
Chapter 38	
<b>Outskirts of Mto wa Mbu Village, Tanzania .....</b>	
Chapter 39	
<b>Karatu, Tanzania .....</b>	
Chapter 40	
<b>Selela Lake, Mto wa Mbu Village, Tanzania .....</b>	
Chapter 41	
<b>Mto wa Mbu Village, Tanzania .....</b>	
Chapter 42	
<b>Ngorongoro Conservation Area, Karatu, Tanzania .....</b>	
Chapter 43	
<b>Lowlands, outside Ngorongoro Conservation Area .....</b>	

Chapter 44

Lowlands, outside Ngorongoro Conservation Area .....

Inspired by real events.







## CHAPTER 1

**Bemidji, Minnesota**

**New York City**

**Great Falls, Montana**

Kingdom Lake had grown cool, cooler than even I could handle. The walleye and Green Heron didn't seem to mind, but the afternoon wind on my shoulder reminded me, winter soon. *Another season. Where you gonna swim now?*

I'd slipped out of the lake and dried off, the Jack Pines beginning to sway. I'd been thinking about Momma and me and the farmhouse, how—even after I'd finished the rehab of the house—the three of us were incompatible. And how it was almost Halloween and I'd toughed out the masquerade for another year, as if it brought me safety. Safety in sour familiarity.

Loved the house, of course, and my wetlands. But Momma—*holy crap*—she stung at everything I did like a wasp; she called *me* ungrateful, useless, and a serpent. Every day alone gnawed on my heart, betraying something.

As the temperature dropped over the lake and woods, the moisture in me, around me—around everything—started firing my body frequencies. When it came in waves like this, as it had since I was a child, I expected rain or wind or *something*. But the blue sky still held enough saffron to light the lake in a false warm glow. So, I waited. Then, as if by decree, purple clouds gathered in the west, coming quickly and soon all around and over me. A Presence. The clouds twisted, overrun by fast moving roots.

The orange fingers of the western sun spread across the sky, until I was alone, the sky sealed in exquisite flame. And I thought, *how can I ever leave Minnesota?*

A howl of air sucked at the cloud cover; flames parting, a theatre curtain or portal opening, introducing a perfect circle allowing the hidden blue sky an eye on me, while all else was a dome of Indian Paintbrush. A hole in the sky inviting me to leave.

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“A Cavum or Fallstreak Hole.” My old high school friend Gordon Mingle, a meteorologist, trying to make scientific sense of my phone call and what I’d seen.

“Very rare yet glimpsed all over the world.”

I cradled the phone like an anchor. “It was if . . .”

“What?”

“As if it was holding me, telling me . . . I don’t know what.”

“Yes, you do. Your intuition again,” Gordon said. “Follow it.”

“No, it’s just science.”

“Sure, both things can be true,” he said. “Tiny water droplets *colder* than freezing but they haven’t yet frozen. It’s like they’re waiting for a reason to freeze and then something—maybe an airplane or a large flock of birds or some other force—wanders through and turns the droplets to ice crystals. And when they grow and fall, they open a hole in the sky.”

“That’s what I saw?”

“And the hole expands as the neighboring droplets freeze. You are very lucky. And this is not your first time with such phenomena. I wonder if you’d join me in New York?”

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Even with Gordon running interference for me, his TV channel boss, a guy named

Charlie Grissom, probably wasn't prepared to meet a disfigured thirty-nine-year-old albino woman, a hideous brown birthmark staining my left cheek from eye to chin. Momma's "Mark of the devil."

Grissom sat back, more skepticism than fear. "Gordon tells me you have an aptitude for weather and that he'd like you on his team." Hundreds of Lucite-embedded butterflies studded Grissom's wall.

Apparently, Gordon had mentioned nothing about my—how-shall-we-say—divination approach to weather forecasting: I smell rain before a cloud appears. I hear thunder before the sky strikes white. I feel wind before it cossets a tree. Where and why this instinct resides in me, I don't know. When it will imbue me is still a riddle.

I tugged at my hair. Gordon smiled and nodded at me. *Play along*. "Well," I said, "I've always had a feel for weather, even as a child." Gordon frowned. *Don't go there*.

I regrouped. "You see my background is as a researcher. . ."

"Genetics." Grissom with a bitter taste in his mouth.

"Yes. DNA and cellular research, but I also understand weather patterns; they're not so different." *They're not at all the same*.

"She's very good." Gordon tossed his head, somehow younger, making it casual and inevitable, but still without merit.

Grissom scrunched his face. "But Eunis, you're not a meteorologist."

"No, but I . . . detect weather patterns." *Under the right circumstances, whatever they might be*.

Grissom started to say something but stopped, tapped his desk, and began to

stand up, end of interview.

Gordon saw it slipping away. “Charlie, let me try her for a month. You won’t be disappointed. You know I need help.”

Grissom shook his head. “I just don’t see . . .”

“I’ll pay her out of my own salary,” said Gordon.

I looked at Gordon like he was crazy. “No.”

Charlie Grissom exhaled. “If I didn’t know you, Gordon Mingle, I’d say . . .”

“What?” Gordon shared a sideways smile with Grissom.

“Nothing, never mind.” Grissom waved us both off.

A step out of the office, Gordon turned to me. “See.”

“You’re an optimist,” I said, “and that’s what worries me.”

“You’ll make your mark on the battlefield,” Gordon said.

“It’s also where I’ll most likely die.”

Nevertheless, I was hired at Weather One TV.



In June 1805, Lewis and Clark portaged around the mammoth waterfalls of Great Falls, Montana. The ordeal took them three weeks and eighteen harrowing miles. It almost killed Meriwether Lewis. Seems crazy taking on an odyssey like that.

More than 100 years later, in 1912, the falls were dammed—eighty-seven feet high.

When I arrived with the Weather One TV crew in early January, those colossal falls towered above us and spread out like the top half of a diamond, glugged left and right with icy fingers, like those of a skeleton, trying to break over it. The rocks below

were blue-white ice-capped islands around which small pools of frigid water crept or stalled. A mass of stone and ice.

Sheila, our bulldog on-air celebrity, insisted that we shoot below the center of the spill, which her producer Rick Kaplan pointed out meant we had to traverse several hundred or more yards of massive rock and glacial footing *without* metal-clawed boots. I put the van keys in my pocket and zipped them up, already so out of my element; me on a TV crew.

The frozen chutes of Great Falls dwarfed Sheila. The combative wind buried most sound, but Kaplan yelled at Sheila anyway. “We can frame you and the falls better from back there.” Len the cameraman gave a small twitch of resignation; he’d been through this before. *Sheila gets what she wants*. Sheila just waved and continued climbing the ice outcroppings.

Len watched them both climb and when Kaplan looked back, Len ran his fingers up and down his upper chest. “Don’t forget to switch on her mike.”

Kaplan couldn’t hear him. He probably said *what*, but all we saw was his mouth move and his questioning expression. Before Kaplan could grab it, his Mets cap flew off and tumbled through the air above the ice floes and dark water then disappeared into it.

“You’d better go down there,” Len said to me. “It’s fucking freezing and with this wind, who knows. We can’t afford a bunch of botched standups. You understand what I’m sayin’?” *Hurricane Sheila might be worse than the cold*.

“Got it.” I’d checked: the temperature hovered around zero, *without* the wind

chill. *Thank you, Minnesota, for toughening me up.*

I climbed down the embankment and shuffled across a small bridge of ice that first Sheila then Kaplan had traversed as they made their way up the tables of rock and ice to the base of the dam. Three football fields across and they were about a third of the way. As I moved through a large cavern of ice, Kaplan had his back to me waving at Sheila to do precisely that, *turn on your mike*. She raised a hand in acknowledgement, slipped off a glove and reached behind her and under her parka to flip on the wireless.

Then in my ears, as strong as the wind, and around my heart: frequencies shifted. Pressure built on my chest. Electrons bounced. *Oh shit, what am I supposed to tell them now?* I stepped into the clear and yelled at Kaplan. “We’ve got to get out of here!”

He didn’t hear me, and I thought to shut up; I needed this job. He started moving back toward me, fighting the wind, not because of my admonition, but because Sheila was taking her place below the dam, signaling Kaplan to scoot out of the shot and for Len to prepare to roll camera.

I had to do something. “Get her out of there!” I screamed.

Kaplan couldn’t hear, so I closed in on him, falling once and cracking my knee on protruding rock. That made him move faster. “You okay?” He lifted me up.

“We’ve got to get out of here. She’s gotta come down now.”

“Hey,” he said smiling, “you don’t know Sheila. She’ll—”

“Now!” And I started climbing to her. *Geez, what the hell am I doing?*

“Are you nuts?” he yelled.



I yelled back, “Temperature’s changing.”

“A little colder isn’t gonna change—”

“This ain’t New Haven,” I said. But I doubted he could hear me anymore, the wind ratcheting twofold.

He tried reaching for me, then tagged raggedly behind as I slipped and fell toward her. He did the same, until she noticed, waving me away. I could barely make out her words against the warming gale. But she was clearly ticked off. “Get out of here,” she hollered. Bulldog turned pit bull.

I got within five yards of her and motioned for her to come down. That’s when Kaplan caught up with me and grabbed my parka. “You’re gonna get fired for this.”

“Tell her to come down, *now!*” I shouted.

That’s when the first loud crack swept across the 300-yard mouth of the falls. “It’s warming. It’s warming *fast.*”

He’d heard the crack. Sheila looked over her shoulder. He tried to reason with me. “We’ll get the shot and then—”

I shoved him, probably a little too hard because he fell backward onto a slab of ice and started sliding away from us. Just as well. I moved within a couple yards of her. “Come on, take my hand.”

“Who the fuck—” She readied to bite.

The second crack ripped through the canyon—a monstrous whip shaking the canyon and beyond. Shelia turned almost as pale as I. I brushed sweat off my cheek. It was already *above* freezing. All around us the wind howled, and hot like an immense

hair drier had been flipped on upstream. Sheets of steam began twisting off the cornices.

“Can we get one shot before—?” she asked.

I grabbed her hand. “We’re gonna slide if we have to, to get down. You understand?” The ground began to rumble. She nodded.

The icy tentacles that had held the water frozen above the dam were now spreading, and the rocks around us began appearing. The small icy pools no longer listless but rising, streaming forward and past us to the awakening Missouri.

A mass of ice cleaved off the base of the dam and sliced toward us. I wrapped my arms around Sheila and pushed her toward shore—we slid tearing our faces on ice and rock, first one plateau then another (a drop of six-eight feet crushing my right side), until we landed at Kaplan’s boots. “Shit.”

“Jesus!” Sheila rubbed her back, tried to stand. “Damn it!”

“We gotta go,” I said reaching for Sheila.

“Just wait a goddamn minute, okay. Give me a chance.”

“I’m sorry.” I grabbed her arm, I lifted her up.

“Jesus, fuck, lady.”

“Go, please!” I yelled. “Please!” The Missouri now turbulent.

She looked at me and saw that I was freaked. She glowered. She jumped to a boulder, hit her head, and slid back down. A swath of skin scraped away from the right side of her face. Crimson trickled to her eye. I pushed her from behind.

“Sonovabitch.” She slapped at my hand.

“I’m so sorry, I’m so sorry,” I said. “Don’t stop.”

I lunged behind her, up the embankment to Len’s camera perch. Chunks of remaining glacier thundered down the cascades to the pool, disappearing beneath the surface like drunken trucks, only to reemerge several yards downstream, dangerous to anything or anyone in their path; then continued their journey bobbing away, along the swiftly rising Missouri. I was shit sure out of my new job.

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“Let’s see.” Sheila held an ice pack against her grated cheek and forehead. She took coffee from Kaplan. She wouldn’t look at me. We gathered around the small monitor in Len’s room. At first, Len had been so cold and stunned by the first boom he’d done nothing. But being a pro and having already framed the shot, he’d begun to roll camera about the time I’d reached Sheila. He had pulled back, framing wide to see the hot wind ripping slabs of ice off the falls’ cornice, as the heat severed the crust along a jagged fracture line, and as we stumbled and slid down the slope narrowly ahead of the supernatural torrent.

“Holy shit,” said Sheila, “this footage is fucking awesome!”

Kaplan slapped Len on the back. “I buy dinner tonight.”

Len smiled. “Already per diem. You think Charlie will be pleased?”

Kaplan hugged Len. “Ya think! Geez, you gotta upload this to the station immediately.”

Then the three of them looked at me.

“What?” I asked, ready for my pink slip.

Sheila pulled the ice pack from her cheek, put down the coffee and felt the

ridges along her face. “What happened out there?” she said. “I’ve been doing this a long time and I’ve never seen anything like it. Beginner’s luck?”

I shrugged. “Warm Chinook wind.”

“No shit,” she said. “But no warning, nothing in the weather models? And so spontaneously?”

Kaplan slid open the door to the small balcony and retrieved the thermometer he’d placed there and held it in his palm. “It’s fifty-freakin’-degrees; an enormous swing. In the opposite direction. In minutes. Historical.”

“So?” Sheila eyed me, as much anticipation as demand. “How’d you know?”

“I didn’t. I wouldn’t have let any of us go out there if I had,” I said.

Kaplan closed the balcony door. “But you knew instantly that the wind was heating up—even before any of us felt it.”

“Not exactly.” They weren’t buying it. “Okay.” I stepped over to Len’s bed and knelt by his open laptop.

“Hey!” Len intercepted me as his screen came awake. A naked man and woman in eager exploration flashed by. Len looked at me, eyes pleading. When I made no mention to the others, he thanked me with those same eyes.

I hesitated above his keyboard. I typed in the GFS (Global Forecast System): the purple, pink, green and yellow isobars replacing the porn. “Here,” I said. Len stepped away, relieved. Sheila took front row and Kaplan perched over her.

“Jet streams,” she said staring at the screen, “so what? I know what weather forecasts look like.”

Why did I think this job would be different? I couldn't tell them the truth, so I told them what they *could* believe. "You remember that I was a geneticist."

"Okay," she said. *So what?*

"So just like certain DNA patterns indicate genetic switches, these isobars tell you things to expect, like when they get closer together you can expect greater winds, colder temperatures. Or as they spread out, warmer temperatures."

"Like hell I need *you* of all people to tell me how to read weather patterns," Sheila said.

*Please don't sack me.* "But the bars . . ."

"Yeah?" She still couldn't see the connection.

*Appeal to her scientific mind.* "Well, I have a scientific instinct with these models. Call it a kind of . . ." I bent the words carefully, still addicted to pleasing but scooching closer to the truth. ". . . intuition. They resonate with me."

"Resonate?"

Kaplan cleared his throat; I was, once again, approaching Sheila's edge.

"That's the only way I can explain it," I said. "I see things in the patterns that others don't."

Sheila closed one eye in resistance, but she thought about it. "Well," she said, "I guess; better than images of Jesus appearing in grapefruit, totemic shrouds materializing in toilet paper, and . . ." she said with a deep messianic voice, "He thunders, He brings the wind from His storehouses and measures out the waters."

The crew let free a nervous laugh.

“I’m still a scientist by training,” I reassured her, also seeing that, at least on some things, we were in agreement. I really needed that job.

“So, you’re saying that you saw the models and assimilating them you had some sense of how things could turn around?”

Kaplan wasn’t a believer. “Turn more than fifty degrees *warmer*, in less than ten minutes, in Montana, in Arctic January?”

“Like I said, it’s an instinct.” I closed out the website and pulled down the laptop cover. “Based on scientific parameters.” *Would they buy it?*

“Shit,” Len said in amazement.

At least I had one believer.

)))

That evening after dinner, I stepped out onto the small balcony overlooking the Missouri. The Montana night clear, the sky big, bigger than any sky I’d seen before, even in Minnesota. After a few minutes I came in and sat on the edge of my bed. I still had a job. Len *did* upload the footage and it went viral. I watched Anderson Cooper narrate the sequence. In it I caught a glimpse of the ice cavern in which, without warning, my ears had filled with sound and the frequencies around my heart had been altered. For the first time since I was a child, I began to consider that my freakish and unaccountable intuition in highly charged spaces might, in fact, be a gift. Or as Roddy had put it, ‘Your lucky charm.’ Roddy was another story, a desire, for which I had no answers. But I’d quickly learned that to love—a human, a pet, a place—eventually brings sorrow.

Kaplan knocked on my door. “Deluxe, eh?” he said referring to our unassuming

but ostensibly hygienic motel rooms by the river. “Mind if I come in?” Kaplan could have been a wrestler or a butterball turkey, but I wouldn’t have expected him to be a Yale graduate. “Summa cum laude,” Sheila had said. “Very smart. Maybe you’ll learn something.”

“Sure.” I said to Kaplan. I sat on the end of the bed; he sat at the desk. I wondered how many people had sat on that same bedspread naked. I wondered how often the motel washed the bedspreads. I wondered what Roddy would say if he knew I was living in New York and hadn’t called him.

Kaplan’s eyes wandered across the river to the rambling railyard on the other side “That view’s a real cowcatcher, don’t ya think?” He slapped his thigh. As far from Yale as he could get.

Straight-faced, I replied, “Hard for me to keep track.”

“Good,” he bobbed. “I thought so. You follow my twisted mind.” He pulled two pint bottles from his jacket. “I stopped by the liquor store. You looked like you could use a drink; calm you down. Gin or tequila?” He held one in each hand.

I pointed to the tequila.

“Good,” he said, “I drink gin.” He pulled the paper covering off two plastic bathroom cups and poured us each a drink.

“Why’re we here?” I asked. Nobody bothered to tell me anything.

“You obviously noticed how windy it was when we landed.” He passed me the cup and lifted his. “Cheers.”

“Cheers.” The first swallow reassuring.

He winced at the first sting of gin then went on. “Great Falls is one of the windiest cities in the country. Average daily wind speed of almost thirteen miles per hour.”

“That was the story we came for?”

“Yup. But hey, we don’t have to think about anything else till morning. Everything we shoot in Great Falls from now on will just be fodder after what you gave us.”

“I didn’t do anything.” My involuntary attributes still best suited for a carnival sideshow.

“Maybe an Emmy,” he said.

“Cowcatcher stuff.”

“Yeah,” Kaplan said. “Sure. Accept the kudos.”

It had been over eight months since Roddy had held me, since I’d basically told him to go away, since anyone had touched me. I’d never understood much about my mother or her sinister narratives, and I’d never known who my father was. But one thing I was sure about—despite my mother’s so-called allegiance to The Bible—she and my dad were both hedonists. Maybe he still is. Which is probably how I was conceived. And in that way, I am their spawn. Anyway, I was skin hungry.

I slept with Kaplan.