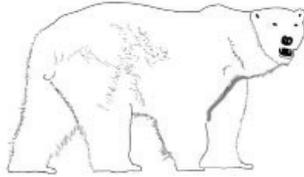


Chapter 14

Ursula's Dream



After Sharkface left the company of the Narwhals he continued his journey south. As he entered the Labrador Sea, ice had become scarce, but when he surfaced after an extremely long dive he was looking at a large low iceberg that had a beach just like the one back home and he saw that he could easily crawl onto the ice. With all the time he had spent in the frozen sea and among the floes and bergs of Baffin Bay, he had never actually been onto the ice and he decided to see what it was like.

Sharkface was built for swimming in the sea and not so much for walking on the land. Moving his huge bulk around the sandy beaches of Guadalupe Island was difficult but he found that moving on the ice was less so, in fact he moved incredibly fast. When he lifted his enormous body up on his front flippers and heaved out his chest he shot forward like a rocket and slid for an amazingly long distance. “This is so much fun,” he said to himself, “Maybe I’ll just stay here for a while and scoot around.” And that was just what he did.

One day he was rocketing down a steep ice slope with his eyes closed and his snorter stuck high in the air, without a care in the world when he hit something. He and this something rolled over and over down the steep incline. When they finally came to rest Sharkface found that he was lying next to a gigantic white bear.

“You stupid seal! You should have seen me! You were not looking where you were going,” the polar bear said in a very irritated tone of voice. Sharkface was shocked. He thought he was all-alone on the ice floe. Added to that, he had never seen a polar bear before, let alone heard one speak, but this one was talking to him in a seal dialect that he could easily understand. He apologized to the irritated bear, and then asked. “What is your name and how do you come to speak seal?”

The polar bear replied that her name was Ursula and she had lived among seals all her life and had always heard them talking to one another. She could understand them when they told stories about being chased and how they got away, and used this information in hunting them. She said that seals were just about the only thing she ever ate. Even though Sharkface was a bit put off by an animal that ate nothing but his relatives, he didn’t show it, and continued their conversation.

As it turned out, Ursula was having a bad day and her unexpected meeting with a huge seal flying over the ice had not made it any better. Here, she thought, was a seal just when she needed one for her dinner, but he was much too big to eat and he was not scared of her at all. This crazy high-speed seal only wanted

to talk. This was yet another a frustration on top of many others that day. He had disrupted her hunt, and, for the third time today, the seal she was stalking had slid into the water just as she was about to pounce. There was not much left for her to do but sit and talk with this weird but charming creature. After a couple of hours of swapping tales, she decided to tell Sharkface the story of her recent trip to the island of Newfoundland.

Ursula had been chasing a seal all over the ice flow for days. She always seemed to miss it by a small margin and she was becoming very angry. One time, she was slowly stalking a seal who was basking in the sunshine next to its breathing hole. She was just about to pounce when a cloud blew across the sun and the seal dove into the water. Another time she could smell a seal resting in its snow cave. She rose-up on her hind paws and slammed down on the snow but even with all her bulk, she could not collapse the roof and once again her dinner escaped her. She was becoming vexed that she had not been able to catch a seal; she was also getting very hungry.

One time last year, when she was sneaking up on another seal, it heard her footsteps through the ice and escaped. She was not going to make that mistake again, so she slid on her belly. She stalked it from downwind so it couldn't smell her; the sun was overcast, so there was no chance of a shadow. There seemed no way it could know she was there and she was getting ever more hopeful that soon she would have her seal dinner. She had spent all day slowly getting closer and closer and when she was

just about to jump the seal suddenly turned in her direction and slipped silently into the water. Ursula pounded her massive paws in frustration and slumped down on the ice. After wasting the whole day, she was now hungrier than ever and she decided to take a nap.

Ursula was awakened by a smell she had never smelled before. While some creatures can hear sounds from great distances and some can see even the smallest detail from far away, polar bears have neither extraordinary hearing nor eyesight, but they have an amazing sense of smell. They can detect a seal from many miles away and can even find them hidden under the snow using only their sensitive noses. As she lay on the ice, Ursula continued to sense a strange and delicious odor coming from far away to the south. She decided she would never catch the elusive seal and gave up her pursuit. She plunged into the water and began to swim in search of the source of this wonderful aroma.

She first saw the flashing light from far out at sea and, although she was hesitant at first to swim towards it, it was where the smell was coming from and she was not about to stop now. As she got closer, she could make out the several odors that were making her mouth water. There was the fragrance of fat mixed with that of fish, but there were others as well that she did not recognize. Eventually she reached the shore and walked up on the beach just below the lighthouse. Her hunger and that delicious aroma had overcome whatever fear she had and she followed her nose into the Newfoundland town of Twillingate. Down the

main street she strode, oblivious to the stares of the people in the houses nearby. The scent was getting stronger and stronger and she was more determined than ever to get a meal from its source. She walked past the Masonic Hall and past St. Peter's Church, still following the tempting odor. Her mouth was watering with the anticipation of a wonderful feast when suddenly she turned the corner and she was there, in front of the place that had been calling her nose for the last four days. The sign read, "Polar Pizza Parlor". Ursula burst through the front door at the same time the patrons went out the back.

It is not a common thing in Twillingate for a polar bear to wander into a pizza parlor – in fact it had never happened before – but it was not unknown for one to prowl the streets of the town. Over the last few years, several polar bears have visited the northern shore of the island of Newfoundland; one even had the bad luck to come across a man with a big gun and no sense of humor and Titus now rests permanently in the local Twillingate museum.

Ursula had heard the story of the poor bear whose skin was now on display, but his fate did not stand in the way of her much-needed feast. As she ate her way from one pizza parlor to another, she would tear open the large cans of anchovies and wolf down huge chunks of cheese and bread. After a brief stop at Mary Brown's Fried Chicken and a quick snack at R & J's Restaurant she was finally feeling very full and headed back out of town. She only made it to the beach under the lighthouse when

she fell into a deep, food-induced sleep. After her whirlwind restaurant tour of Twillingate, Ursula had a strange dream.

She had arrived in Twillingate just in time for a parade. She was part of the procession and started out marching behind a red fire truck with a stuffed baby seal perched on top of the coiled hoses. She was hungry and wanted to catch and eat the seal but despite how she tried to run, she could only slowly march down the street behind the truck.

Next thing she knew she was chasing a group of girls in short skirts. They were jumping and waving their pom poms as they marched, but again, despite how much Ursula wanted to catch them, she could not get close to the young cheerleaders. Around the town square they would go, the polar bear chasing the girls but never catching them. Every two laps the cheerleaders would hand off a stuffed baby seal and the next group would leap and twirl just ahead of Ursula who was once again hungry and frustrated.

In the next part of Ursula's dream, she was chasing a fisherman carrying a stuffed baby seal. Just when she was about to pounce, the fisherman started chasing her. Through the streets of the town they went, Ursula chasing the fisherman and the fisherman chasing Ursula until he was distracted by a stuffed codfish and turned his attention to throwing a net over it, but each time he tried to catch it, it wiggled out from underneath. The baby seal had disappeared and at this point Ursula had all she wanted of the Twillingate parade and headed out of town.

She was awakened from her dream by a group of fishermen trying to throw a net over her. She stood up on her hind feet, raised her massive paws in the air and gave a mighty roar. The fishermen dropped their net and ran away and Ursula plunged back into the sea. She was now well fed, but also fed up with Twillingate.

Sharkface was amazed by Ursula's wonderful tale. He could not think of a story good enough to follow hers so he decided to be on his way.

Ursula did not argue and politely said good-bye while she was actually thinking, "Good riddance." He had been a distraction from her hunt, but because of him she was remembering the fine feast she had in Twillingate. Sharkface slowly scooted on the ice towards the sea. When he came to another small slope he careened down at breakneck speed, but this time with his eyes open. Finally, he reached the edge of the ice floe, plunged back into the sea and continued his journey to the south. As he came near Newfoundland, he could smell the tasty aroma wafting from the Polar Pizza Parlor in Twillingate.

