

## Chapter Twelve: Becoming Polar Bear

As our talks progressed, I noticed myself becoming more accepting, opening more wholeheartedly to the fluid, circular manner Bering Strait and the Polar Bear Council directed their requests and handled their responses.

I had asked Bering how he saw the Meeting Place from his perspective, and he answered by sharing memories of his birth and the influence of dreaming from an early age. It wasn't a reply that made perfect human sense, yet the experience of deepening and participating in Bering's world seemed more and more an essential part of Polar Bear teaching.

*We feel you touch our heart, commented the Polar Bear Council. Our perceptions are more readily available to you for seeing and feeling inside your being. You, too, are a polar bear person, a polar bear dreamer, and you are opening deeper to our message, understanding the importance of telling our story to others. For this we are happy and grateful and honored to share.*

The last time I saw my version of the Meeting Place, I awoke in the dream world a short distance from the igloo-bar:

Bering Strait stands upright, casually leaning one shoulder against the door, front paws crossed, as if waiting for me. He wears a jaunty navy blue cap. As I approach, he asks if

I am ready for an adventure. I laugh. Does he really think I'd have any other answer than *Yes!?*

Together, we head toward the lake. There is no snow or ice but, as usual, it is late at night. Moonlight shimmers in silvery ripples upon the water. A gathering of bears mingles on the shore. Like Bering, they stand and walk upright. They are smaller than normal bears, their features and gestures human-like. Some wear clothes — bright, sky blue pants, ornate vests of deep red and gold. White paper globes, lit from within, hang from tree branches and sway in the breeze, glowing like bright, happy moons. The colors, movements, and jovial way the bears interact with each other make the setting festive and welcoming.

With a tilt of his nose, Bering directs my vision to a cord strung between two trees. Spaced evenly along the cord are hangars, holding what look to be bulky garments. As I move closer, I see they are bear costumes of different shapes, sizes and colors. A young, female polar bear-human, perhaps a teenager — small and slight in build, with long, silky white hair, a furry, human face, and a distinct polar bear nose — holds out a costume for me. I shake my head, no thanks, and take a step back, but Polar Bear Girl is insistent, pushing the outfit my way.

I look to Bering and he nods, *try it on.*

Holding the garment, I feel my resistance to this game. The fuzzy white outfit seems silly, like a child's costume. "Probably made in China," I think dismissively. Polar Bear Girl snorts and taps one brightly polished claw on a label at the collar: "*Hand-Crafted in Germany.*"

Reassured by the label, encouraged by Bering and the young female bear, I step into the suit. It fits loosely but now that I have it on, I note some impressive details: the paws are thickly padded, covered with toughened skin and sharp claws that feel remarkably real; the coarse fur varies in length, texture, and color (clear, white, ivory, yellow) on different parts of the body. Once I have both legs and arms tucked within the suit, Polar Bear Girl reveals the head of the costume: a big bobble contraption with two small rounded ears, a large muzzle, and circular holes for eyes.

She sets the head atop my neck. It's bulky and top-heavy, and I balk at once. There is no way I can comfortably move with this balanced on my shoulders. I start to protest, but then a strange thing happens.

I feel the suit shrinking, contracting closer to my skin, as if being vacuum sealed against my body. At the same time, I feel my body expanding, my muscles becoming denser and thicker, bulking up and out, filling the suit. I can feel the bobble head conforming to my head, which is simultaneously reshaping itself, elongating and thickening. The sensation of my body inflating and the costume skin shrinking, the two layers meeting

and fusing together, is strangely pleasant, not at all uncomfortable. I glance at Bering, who is carefully watching my transformation.

My body tips forward to a more natural all-fours position. I am suddenly aware of exquisite sensitivity in my front paws — a kind of springiness, as if I can feel *into* the ground, at least several inches down. I take a few tentative steps, testing the spongy feeling of polar bears paws sinking into the earth. It's an odd sensation, for I can feel the paw pads physically touching the ground as well as energetically touching beneath the surface — an unexpected extension of feeling.

Suddenly, Bering charges forward — amazingly fast! — racing to the shore, splashing exuberantly into the water. Without a thought, I follow, my body shooting forward from my hind legs — such power! And I bolt, chasing the big white bear.

As soon as my body hits the water I am again surprised with sensation — this time, a feeling of pressure and buoyancy. My senses are attuned in a new and different way, and I am aware of a layer of tiny bubbles all around me, in the spaces between the hairs of my fur. I am conscious of the dense, cushiony layer of fat supporting my body as it bobs in the water. I wonder if this is what it is like for all polar bears, or just the way I feel, as a human inside a polar bear body, inside a dream.

How easy my front legs paddle forward, and how strong my back legs and open paws propel me through the water! It is a satisfying sensation — much easier than human

swimming! — and I understand why polar bears feel at home in the water. Ahead of me, the rounded shape of Bering's back and shoulders gleam pearly white against the dark moonlit water. Then — he plunges. I wait for him to reappear but already I know: I, too, must plunge. With a quick breath, I lower my head and arch my body. A few strong, clean kicks and — how amazingly streamlined I feel in the water! — I'm diving down

All is dark, nothing to see, but further down we go. Down, down, until at last — we are coming up! It's not that we have changed directions; rather, down has suddenly become up. The water has changed as well. It feels dense and silky. Popping my head upward, surfacing above the waterline, I see we are in a different place. The same bright black sky, brilliant moon and stars loom overhead, but the smooth dark water is punctuated with white chunks of jagged ice. In front of us: a long, sloping, snowy shore.

Bering hauls up and out of the water and I paddle toward him, dodging the ice chunks, some of which are quite huge. Everything seems very sharp and clear. What I thought was the shore is actually a floe — a long floating sheet of snow-covered ice. Placing my front paws flat upon its surface, I kick my hind legs to push my body upward. But it's not as easy as it seems, and down I splash. I try again, this time reaching forward, pulling up and pushing out, my big wet body drizzling and dripping upon the snow.

The shake is automatic: a shiver that begins in the head and neck, unleashing a shimmy of energy down shoulders, legs and bum. It's an interesting sensation — the power of the shake causing the outer layers of skin and fur to jiggle loose and rotate

rapidly around the body, flinging water outward, ever faster at the extremes. *What a clever trick!* I think, now knowing exactly how it is done through the feelings of this body.

And now I'm dry. Bering makes a show of diving forward onto a fluffy mound, twisting and turning to rub his face, neck, belly, back and sides into the snow. *Dry cleaning*, he remarks as he deftly rights himself and shakes once again. I laugh and notice the jaunty blue cap tossed upon the ice — had it really survived that dive and swim?

*A memory marker*, Bering says.

“What?”

*You'll see.*

We climb a small rise and sit against a curved ridge of snow. Thin streaks of green and red sway in graceful arcs against the starry sky. Shiny chunks of ice glide in the dark water before us.

*Listen*, says Bering.

I hear our breath and the sounds our bodies make as they rest upon the snow. I hear tiny wavelets of water lapping against ice and the crinkling, static song of the aurora

above. I hear deep water moving below us, the distant groan of ice, the thin crackling of crusted snow as wind skitters across its surface.

Just as I once smelled layers of scent in the igloo-bar, I now hear layers of sound.

Everything has a unique tone that is also a feeling, a resonance that speaks to us, through us. I am aware of a larger range and depth of sound waves, as if my body has awakened to feel sound — not just inside my head but through vibrations playing upon the hairs of my body, through my paws and face and ears. All around, the Arctic world is *speaking* to me.

I know I am dreaming. But so also am I here, present in the dream in a new way. I feel my very being fusing into the landscape, connecting with sky and snow and water, a dreamer awake within the Arctic. I am filled, happy and content, but tired too. Sitting beside Bering Strait, I am aware of the immense energy polar bears must possess, not simply to survive, but to live and dream as they do.

### **The Presence of Now**

The dream of becoming a polar bear wrapped itself around me for several days. It was a wonderful dream, and I felt calm and centered — and changed. I noticed sounds and smells with deepened, renewed appreciation; I was aware of the way the soles of my feet pressed lightly into the ground.

A few days after the dream, while shopping in the grocery store, an elderly, white-haired gentleman stood beside me in the produce section. As I reached for an orange, he bumped me with his elbow. I turned to smile at him, to let him know it was okay, and he smiled back. It was one of those smiles that lights up a face. He had beautiful bright blue eyes and a jaunty, navy-blue cap upon his head. *The memory marker.*

“I like your hat!” I exclaimed, pointing to his head, laughing a little too loud and long. I hoped I wasn’t scaring him, but immediately he joined in, laughing graciously, exuberantly. And there we stood in front of the naval oranges, side by side, laughing, sharing a simple, deep-rooted joy.

*We will tell you a story about dreaming and our connection with humans,* the Polar Bear Council said later that day. I had asked them about the memory marker, explaining how a jaunty blue hat showed up both in the dream world and in waking life. I wondered if Bering’s hat had caused me to notice the one the elderly man wore in the grocery store, or perhaps the one I observed in the grocery store had inspired what appeared in the dream. It was an odd thought, I knew, but the idea of awakening to future thoughts and memories in the past suddenly seemed just as likely as recalling past thoughts and memories in the future. I likened it to the bear suit compressing against me as my body bulked up to meet it. The power of transformation was in the middle.

*This is the story you need to hear,* confirmed the Council. *It is a story of direction, a long-distance map of where we came from, where we are headed, and all points in-*

*between. Past and future — these constraints of time are human in many ways. Our dreaming leads both into the future and into the past, and pulls them round to each other, inside ourselves, in the presence of now. Let us begin:*

*There was once a woman who dreamed of polar bear people. She was awake to the ways of polar bears — not so much at first, but the polar bear people called to her spirit in her dreams as she wandered through Arctic lands, opening her eyes and heart to the larger, deeper ways of polar bears.*

*She learned to walk slowly, to stop and see and listen and feel — not just with her eyes and ears, but with her whole being. That in itself is a teaching for a lifetime! That is a return of wholeness to humanity, a gift from all animals, an opening to the fullness of planet earth and beyond.*

*This woman felt the heart song of the polar bear. By dreaming, she opened a door that had been closed. By waking up, she remembered that she too was a polar bear spirit. In this way she helped others find a dream track between human and polar bear dreamers.*

*Things are both more and less than what they seem upon this earth. A new vision is needed for planetary consciousness to awaken, and that vision begins inside, in calm darkness, such as might be found in a polar bear den. It begins with the dreaming of a mother bear to her cubs, a mother planet to her children. As the cubs adjust to the*

*dream in the den, within themselves, they bring new life to the world. And that is what this story is about: the coming alive of humanity, in a new way, with a new vision, and with new hope for the United Planet of Being.*