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Opening extract from **The Snow Bear**

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She was dreaming. She had to be. But it was strange to be in a dream, and *know* that it was a dream. Tugging her coat more tightly round her shoulders, Sara stepped out into the snow, shivering a little. It was the coldest dream she had ever been in, too.

She looked around, wondering if there was anyone to talk to, to tell her where she was, and called, "Hello..." She didn't call very loudly. She felt shy, somehow, shouting into all that whiteness. And only the wind answered her.

Sara took a few steps round the side of the igloo. She had some odd idea that on the other side of the snow house she might find the way home, that there might be a sort of door back to Grandad's garden. But she forgot all about that when she

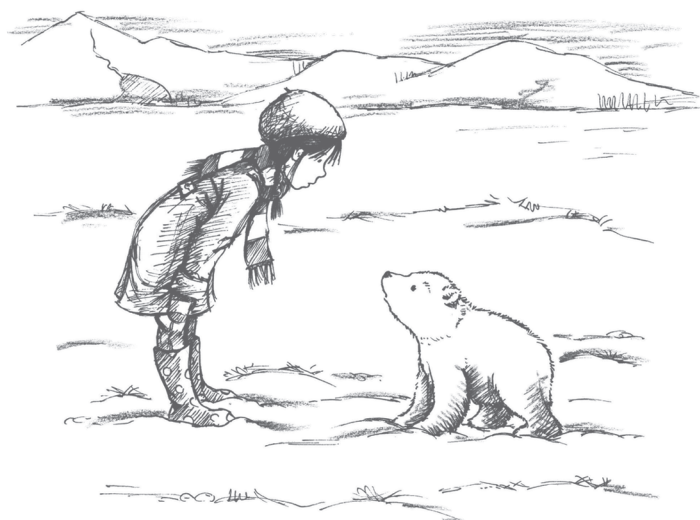
came round the back of the igloo and found her snow bear.

He was standing now, on all four paws, but he still only came halfway up Sara's legs. He stared at her uncertainly, with round dark eyes – not green glass any more – and Sara stared back. His eyes had changed, but it was her bear. She knew it. She knew *him*.

He was *real* – soft and furry. She wanted desperately to stroke him, he looked so like her cuddly polar bears back home. But this was a real bear now, a wild bear. Sara shook her head, wondering how this could possibly have happened. Then she smiled to herself. She didn't understand it at all, but she'd heard so many of Grandad's stories, and wished and wished she could see the places he talked about. And now she was in the Arctic!

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The cub was looking at her, as though he didn't know what she was, Sara thought. He might never have seen a human before. She looked round anxiously. The bear cub was only small – she wasn't really sure how old – but she guessed he was probably only a few months. So he shouldn't be on his own. Somewhere close by, there would be an enormous mother polar bear, looking for her baby.



Even though Sara thought polar bears were lovely, she knew how fierce they could be. She watched nature programmes about bears, and she had books about them, and Grandad had told her loads of stories. They lived mostly by hunting seals, but polar bears could hurt people, too, when they found hunters on their own, or if they thought humans were attacking their cubs. Her little igloo wouldn't be much protection against an angry polar bear.

Sara started to back away slowly, wondering where the mother bear was. She thought it was probably better not to run – polar bears were much faster than people, she was sure. But the polar bear cub gazed after her anxiously, and then took a couple of little steps towards her.

Sara stopped, biting her lip. Was he lost? She was sure that a cub wouldn't usually be away from his mother like this.

The cub ventured closer and gave a whine, a tiny noise that sounded more like a puppy than anything Sara had expected from a bear. She couldn't leave him, she realized. He was too little, and he was scared. She had to help him, somehow. Which was silly, because she thought he probably knew a lot more about surviving in the Arctic than she did.

"Do you need me to help you find your mother?" she said gently, coming a bit closer.

The bear looked up at her hopefully, and she sighed. "I don't know where she is. I don't even know where I am, actually. But that must be why I'm here, in this

dream, if that's what it is. To take you home."

Sara walked slowly and carefully back to the igloo. The little bear looked hungry, she thought, and she had her sandwiches. She had a feeling he was too young to be eating mostly seal-meat, like an adult bear. He was still supposed to be feeding from his mother. But in the Arctic cold, he needed to be fed, even if that meant eating prawn sandwiches. Otherwise he wouldn't have the strength to go far.

"Bet you've never had anything like this," Sara muttered, undoing the foil Grandad had wrapped round the sandwiches. "I suppose it's lucky they're prawn. I shouldn't think you'd like cheese and ketchup – that's my other favourite."

Even though the bear surely hadn't

heard the crinkle of silver foil before, he seemed to know at once that it meant food. He padded over the snow towards Sara, and stopped just a step away, looking hopefully from Sara to the foil packet and back again.

Sara laughed, and then felt guilty as he skittered away. "Sorry! I didn't mean to scare you," she whispered. "Yes, they're for you, that's why I opened them. Come on, come and try. You'll like it. Prawns are yummy."

The bear sniffed hopefully, and looked around, as though he thought he probably shouldn't be doing this, and his mum might suddenly turn up and tell him off. But when Sara tore off a little piece of sandwich and held it out, he couldn't resist. He snatched it out of her fingers,

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and gulped it down greedily. Then he came closer, looking for more.

“I told you you’d like it,” Sara murmured, feeling pleased. “You’d better not have too much, you’re not used to this kind of food. Oh...”

The bear didn’t agree. He barged close in to Sara, nudging eagerly at the packet, and rootling around in the foil.

