

CHAPTER 13--THE LAST NIGHTMARE

They were laughing at her. She was in a fetal position on the floor as the shadowy figures loomed tall above her. They were joking about poor little Amanda. The little girl who fell off the ladder and was now poor, destitute, and still unmarried. They laughed until she could see the pain of delight on their faces.

She gazed up and looked at the tall figures, they looked familiar, they were her co-workers. They looked different though, for they did not blink and they did not look human. Were they mindless zombies? It felt like a real-life Invasion of the Body Snatchers. Their hands reached down toward her and ripped a piece of her out. They turned around and walked away and left her behind to rot. They weren't body snatchers, they were soul snatchers.

A buzzer sounded.

It was the alarm clock. She was having a nightmare. First night travel jitters she guessed. She freshened up and made her way back out to the terminal area.

A familiar face was already waiting at the gate, it was Nathan.

“You look like you’ve seen a ghost.”

“It was just a bad dream.”

They exchanged further pleasantries as she tore into her morning pastry. She was desperate to take her mind off the previous night’s bad dream.

“Will I be able to see the different layers of snow?”

“If you look at a slice of snow under the right light you will see a brilliant blue in the layers. It is quite beautiful.”

“That’s good to know. I was wondering, if you have already learned about our past from previous trips here and from Antarctica, why are you going there again?”

“You want the real reason or the official reason?”

“Both.”

“A few years ago a potential new location for ice coring was found. Several of my colleagues from the University of Copenhagen are already there waiting for me. We’re part of an advance team going to our office in Kangerlussuaq. We’ll collaborate there for a little while before flying out to the center to begin drilling.”

“What do you hope to find?”

“We think this location might give us a high resolution core that goes back to 150,000 years, an improvement of 25,000 years.”

“That’s all?”

“That’s it. But, the detailed information it could provide us would be very valuable.”

“My memory might be a little foggy, but didn’t you say there are cores in Antarctica that

go back even further?”

“Yes, but the cores in Greenland are more detailed. Greenland is also where ice coring as a science was first developed. It is good to measure change in different parts of world to verify the global nature of any findings. There are ice coring efforts going on all over the world, not just Antarctica and Greenland. They happen on glaciers that are melting, whether in the tropics like Kilimanjaro, which is melting fast, or in the Andes, Himalayas, or Alaska.”

“I didn’t realize the effort was so extensive.”

“Lots of good people working on it. But that’s just the official reason I’m going back.”

A voice crackled over the intercom interrupting their conversation.

Air Greenland Flight GL781 is ready to board. Any passengers needing special assistance or those with small children may board first. Nanoq class passengers please board at your leisure.

“What’s the real reason?”

“As much as I love ice coring, it does get repetitive after awhile. I guess I’ve kind of fallen in love with the land. The stark and raw beauty. I enjoy spending a few weeks there. My wife appreciates it too. She’s going to Hawaii with a girlfriend while I’m gone. Besides, it’s cool to say you’re going to Greenland. Who thinks about it? Although, I’ve been there enough times, so that isn’t the reason why anymore.”

“That’s funny. Your wife is going to Hawaii and you’re going to Greenland!”

“Quite an extreme difference.”

We would like to welcome passengers in rows twenty and higher.

They both checked their tickets.

“It’s my turn to board,” Nathan alerted.

“I’m glad we had the time so you could explain everything more in detail to me.”

“My pleasure.”

“Wish me luck as I open another time machine.”

“Good luck!” Amanda announced enthusiastically.

Nathan walked through the doors and down the jet bridge.

Amanda waved. Then in a voice just a little louder than a whisper, she said to Polar Bear.

”I guess in a way we’re traveling back in time too.” Powerful childhood emotions connected to her Polar Bear were about to come full circle.

The intercom sounded again.

We would like to invite all remaining passengers to now board.

Amanda walked down the jet bridge and boarded the Air Greenland jet. It would be a 4 hour and 4 minute flight to Kangerlussuaq, the gateway to Greenland. There were quite a few empty seats. She remembered that most tourists don’t arrive until later in the summer, she was one of the crazy, early few.

A feeling of both happiness and sadness came over her as the country of Denmark became smaller and smaller in the window. She was happy to learn about such a place, but sad to be leaving it so soon. Maybe she would have a chance to visit again on the return trip home. Amanda would later realize, that it was a country – where few have too much, and even fewer did without. Perhaps, a modern day utopia.

As the plane approached the eastern coast of Greenland, the pilot's voice crackled over the intercom. First in Danish, then in English.

Ladies and gentleman, we are cruising at about 35,000 feet and will begin our decent in about 40 minutes. I'd like to call your attention to look out either side of the aircraft as we are now passing over the east coast of Greenland. Lucky for us, it is a very clear day. You should be able to see the pack ice that has formed on the water near the coast. In a few months a lot of the pack ice will melt.

The larger pieces are icebergs calved from glaciers. The rocky patches you will see are the tops of mountains. You only see the top due to the thickness of the ice sheet.

Amanda gazed in awe at her first glimpse, with her own eyes, of this mysterious and strange world.

The intercom crackled again.

We are now beginning our descent into the Kangerlussuaq area. You may notice some small blue colored lakes out there on the surface of the ice. These are surface ice melts where water has collected. They will get larger as the spring and summer progresses. If you look carefully you can see the outlines of streams also.

Amanda's eyes were hypnotized by the ice sheet of Greenland. No videos, no photographs, the real thing.

The view outside gave a whole new definition to the saying - A Winter Wonderland.

Blue melt pools among the glacier ridges stood out like backyard swimming pools over a city.

The plane continued to descend and she saw the open ocean and some pack ice along the west coast of Greenland as she looked out toward the horizon. Soon the ice cap ended and large mountains appeared.

The intercom crackled to life again. It was the flight attendant.

We are about to land. Please raise your seatbacks and tray tables. Please turn off and put away all personal electronics including any laptops. Please fasten your seatbelts. The local time is now 10:01AM. Kangerlussuaq is 4 hours behind Copenhagen time.

A few moments later, Air Greenland flight GL781 touched down. Amanda and Polar Bear had made it to Greenland.

Amanda walked down the jet stairs wearing her backpack while holding Polar Bear. She took her first footsteps on Greenland. Though it was only asphalted tarmac for the moment, it felt good. She felt the biting cold. The short trek to the terminal looked daunting in the cold weather. Amanda knew she would have to get used to this. She walked with purpose toward the terminal. Located at the base of a large hill, impressive mountains of granite rose up behind the building.

She crossed the edge of the tarmac, and approached a sign welcoming visitors to Greenland. Underneath the Danish and Greenlandic, it read in English - Welcome to Greenland! Kangerlussuaq's 589 residents welcome you. Below that was a digital readout. Negative 15°C. Amanda had arrived in Greenland toward the end of the two coldest months, February, and March. It felt that way. A closer look at the Greenland coat of arms revealed that it was a polar

bear. It brought a smile to her face.

Waving on a nearby pole was the Greenland flag. The red and white colors matched the flag colors of Denmark. White in the upper half, red on the bottom. Set to the left of center was a circle with the reverse colors of each half. A red half circle on the white background. Amanda wondered what it meant.

Without further delay, she walked up the short flight of stairs that led from the landing area to the terminal, a sea of faces greeted her. They were Inuit faces, waiting for the arrival of loved ones.

Among them, a small boy standing in front. “Nanoq!” the boy blurted out while pointing his finger at Amanda.

Amanda froze in surprise.

A woman who appeared to be the boy’s grandmother smiled at Amanda and spoke gently. “Utoqqatserpunga.”

Amanda smiled back, not knowing how to reply. Sensing other passengers wanting to walk past her she gave one last glance at the boy and headed down the terminal to find her next flight.

As she headed down the terminal, she spotted the entrance to what Nathan said was the best restaurant in the city – at the airport SAS hotel. Nathan said Greenland was a strange place, she could only wonder what other strange things lay ahead.

She grabbed a nearby luggage cart and placed Polar Bear and her backpack on it. She wandered around the small airport waiting for her next flight. A small photographic exhibit in

the hallway caught her eye. Amanda examined the black and white pictures.

It was a short history of Kangerlussuaq life as the site of one of the former bases mentioned in the in-flight video. The base was one of nine Western Greenland bases and five Eastern bases. As the Cold War continued, the base served as a re-supply point for radar stations that were part of the Distant Early Warning (DEW) system. The DEW system was designed to detect Soviet bombers flying over the North Pole. It was estimated that the US and Canadian forces would have four to six hours to prepare for an attack on the homeland, in addition to scrambling fighters to intercept. Installations were located on the inland ice, and at Sisimiut and Kulusuk.

The importance of the bases diminished as the threat from Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) gained importance. When the Cold War thawed, three of the four radar stations, Thule in far Northern Greenland being the remaining base, were closed. The airport area came under control of the Greenland Home Rule government and took on its present name of Kangerlussuaq in 1992.

Greenland's history wasn't so untouched and pristine after all.

Amanda finished reading and headed over to the gate where her flight to Ilulissat was about time to board. She sat down next to a middle aged woman.

"That is a nice polar bear you have there," the woman blurted out.

Amanda turned around and faced the woman. "Thank you."

"Going to Ilulissat?"

"Yes, I'm going to see the icebergs."

“They are very beautiful.”

“I’m looking forward to it. Do you live there?”

“Yes.”

A momentary silence interrupted the conversation. The kind of silence when two strangers aren’t sure what to say next.

“It is a good that you have a red bow on your stuffed polar bear.”

“Why is that?”

“A hunter might mistake it for the real thing and shoot it!”

“Oh,” Amanda replied in disbelief.

The woman let out a hearty laugh. Amanda did not laugh along.

A voice came over the loudspeaker.

Due to a passing storm up in Ilulissat flight GL512 will be delayed for one hour.

Amanda let out a big sigh. She looked over the at the woman.

“Immaqa,” she muttered. “Immaqa.”