



CHAPTER TWENTY

Trapped

'WHO DO YOU report the temperatures to?' April asked at breakfast the next day.

'The temperatures?' Dad looked up, startled, a cup of tea poised in his hand.

It had been a while since April had actively engaged in conversation with her father. Weeks, maybe months.

Not properly since the day she'd helped out in the weather cabin and he'd shouted at her. Since then she had got lost in her friendship with Bear. Not *bad* lost. *Happily* lost. The kind of lost you get in an enchanted forest where everything around you is edible – even the sky. But today she looked up as if waking from a coma to realise her father was still there. She wondered, briefly, if this was how he saw her most of the time, before pulling herself back to the present.

She had made a promise, after all.

'Yes. The ones you're taking,' she said. 'Who do you report them back to?'

He placed the cup carefully back in its saucer and looked pleased at her interest. 'To the Norwegian government.'

'Right.' She chewed her oat biscuit, deep in thought.

'But what do *they* do with them?'

'It's for research, April,' Dad replied. 'We measure the temperatures to gauge any difference year on year.'

'Yes,' she said, flapping her hand. 'I know *that*. But what do they actually *do* with them? Once they've got them.'

'Do?' Dad said.

'Yes,' April replied. 'What are they actually doing about them? It's not just the polar bears and all the other Arctic animals it's affecting, is it? The weather in the Arctic affects *everyone* all over the planet.'

'That is true.' Dad looked mildly concerned, but that was about it. Then again, that was how all grown-ups looked when they talked about global warming. A spot of mild concern but nothing to worry about. The fact that the world was in crisis just didn't seem to bother them like it did April.

She bunched her fists and tried to steady her voice as she attempted to remember some of the statistics she'd read. 'Ice reflects about sixty per cent of the sunlight that pours down on it?'

'Eighty per cent,' Dad corrected.

'Eighty per cent then.' She looked up at him. 'So what happens when all the ice is gone?'

'When you remove all of the ice that means the sunlight can shine straight into the ocean,' Dad replied.

'When that happens, the sea temperatures will rise, which in turn means the sea levels rise.'

'And the ice caps?' April asked, digging her nails into her palm to stay composed. 'How much have they melted already? I know they've melted a lot . . . but how much exactly?'

Dad cleared his throat. 'According to NASA, the area covered by the Arctic sea ice in summer has shrunk by over thirteen per cent each decade since the 1980s. Which basically equates to the loss of over one million square miles of sea ice.'

'One million?' April felt shocked, as if the floor had opened up and swallowed her whole. 'So it's true? I knew they were melting, but I didn't know they were melting so fast.'

'Ah,' Dad said in his best teacher voice. 'The polar ice caps have, in fact, melted more in the past twenty years than they have in the past ten thousand years.'

'Then we have to do something!' April cried, abandoning all efforts to stay calm. 'We need to reverse

this somehow! Give them back their ice. Why aren't people *doing* something about it? Why aren't you doing more?'

Dad frowned. It was obvious he had never asked himself this question and his bushy eyebrows knitted together like a confused caterpillar. 'I don't know.'

April put her oat biscuit down and brushed the crumbs off her fingers. She needed to get this conversation back on track. It wasn't Dad's fault humans had got the planet into this mess. It was everyone's.

'You said that the ice caps have melted round Bear Island,' she asked, wanting to verify Bear's story. 'How fast? Is it a slow melt or can it happen quickly?'

'Well...,' he said. 'Normally, it's quite slow, but there was one year where there was a spike in temperatures.'

'When?'

'Off the top of my head, I can't remember.'

'Please try!' April leaned forward and grabbed his arm. 'It's really important.'

Dad looked at her hand on his arm and seemed

surprised to see it there. 'I can check the logbooks if you are really interested.'

'Can you get them now?' April urged. 'Please?'

He sighed, but put down his tea, disappeared to the weather cabin and returned with an armful of logbooks, which he placed on the counter. He opened one. 'Here's the column that shows the past ten years of the annual average sea temperatures on Bear Island. You can see that the rise in temperatures is mostly steady. But here,' He jabbed his finger against one column. 'The temperatures had a dramatic rise.'

'The year?'

'Seven years ago.'

'And you're absolutely sure this was when the last of the ice caps melted around the island?'

Dad nodded.

April sat back with a whoosh to her stomach. Bear had been here for seven years! All this time stuck on the island, unable to get home.

'But it's not fair!' she cried in frustration. 'It's not

their fault the world has ended up in this mess. It's ours!

'It's not *whose* fault?'

April stared blankly at him.

'You said it's not *their* fault.'

'The bears!' she said, exasperated. 'The polar bears.'

The island was named after them and they can't even come and spend their winters here any more!

'There is a cruel irony to that . . . And of course it is terribly sad,' he added hurriedly.

'And the ice caps?' she persisted. 'The ones closer to the North Pole. The ones around Svalbard. They're still there, aren't they?'

'Yes,' he said. 'For the time being.'

'So polar bears can still live there?' she asked.

He nodded.

Looking at Dad with marmalade caught on his chin, his thin, papery fingers and his crooked nose buried in those logbooks, he wasn't an obvious saviour. But he was the only one she had. She crossed her fingers for luck and then gave him her

best smile. It might have come out as a grimace but never mind.

'What if I told you there was a bear stuck on the island all this time?'

He didn't even look up.

'Dad!' April said more firmly. 'There's a polar bear on the island and I need your help.'

'Humm?' He glanced distractedly at her and she could tell he was only half listening.

'Listen to me, please?' She was struggling to contain her voice and it kept coming out wobbly. 'There is a polar bear here. And he's the kindest, bestest bear in the whole wide world. And I need your help, so please can you drop that logbook **RIGHT NOW**.'

Dad did indeed drop the logbook and it fell to the floor with a loud rustle. She had his full attention now. But not in the way she wanted. In fact, he was looking at her in a way that made her stomach squirm.

'April,' he said very slowly and carefully as if she was being foolish. 'What did you say?'

April gulped. 'There's a polar bear on the island.'

Dad stared at her a long time before answering. 'There. Are. No. Bears. Left. On. Bear. Island,' he said, shaking his head. 'It's simply impossible.'

'But there is one! And he's not at all dangerous,' she cried. 'I just want to help him, don't you see? This isn't where he should be!'

Dad continued to stare at her as if she had lost her mind and then, worst of all, seemed to think she was joking and began to pick up his logbook.

'You don't believe me, do you? Well, go and check the storeroom!' she said recklessly. 'You'll know I'm telling the truth then!'

'The storeroom? What has that got to do with anything?'

'You'll see. Just check it!'

He rose slowly to his feet and, clearing his throat a couple of times, he opened the storeroom door.

'APRIL!' He grabbed the door frame for support.

'The food! Where has it all gone?'



'I just told you! He was starving – all skin and bones. But because he's hunting again, and with all the food I've been feeding him, you should see him now. He looks—'

Dad swivelled round to face her. 'April, what have you done?'

It was a tone of voice she had never heard before and she swallowed hard.

'I gave it to Bear.'

'To Bear.'

She nodded.

'To a polar bear.' Dad said, sitting down on the sofa with a thump. The logbooks were scattered around his feet, and he had an odd, faraway expression on his face that made April feel hot and clammy. 'Granny Apples was right,' he said. 'It was a mistake to bring you here. The sailors said the island could do funny things to the mind. All this time alone and it's my fault. For working so hard and not spending as much time with you as I would have liked. Why, it's only natural you would

create an imaginary friend to keep you company.'

'He's not an imaginary friend!' she yelled. 'I'm like Mum. I'm just different. You even said it yourself!'

'Yes, but the difference is she didn't make up animals, April, and then throw all our food away.' His grey eyes narrowed with a kind of horrible, cloying pity that made her want to sob in frustration. 'My dear child, is this about you wanting attention?'

'No,' she said, turning her head so he wouldn't see her tears. 'I gave up on that a long time ago.'

Dad chose that exact moment to blow his nose loudly into his handkerchief. 'Right then,' he declared once he'd finished, utterly oblivious to what she'd just said. 'It's just as well we only have six weeks left on the island.'

'Six weeks?' April gasped. 'We only have six weeks left?'