

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

Mary Winter

Polar Heat

ELLORA'S CAVE

Quickies
Wild Winter

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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Polar Heat

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Chapter One

All Aud Myrhe needed to do was return to camp, analyze her findings and turn the article over to her editor at *Nature*. With the promised payment for the latest on her team's polar bear research, she would secure additional funding for the team. The money was the reason why she and Svein had agreed to stay at camp instead of returning home over the holidays.

Aud fingered the strap on her backpack and took an exploratory step from the mouth of the cave—directly into a cloud of blowing snow. Driving wind howled and ice crystals formed against what little skin she'd left exposed. Overhead, the dark sky—it was always dark near the Arctic Circle in December—promised no hope of light or direction.

So much for heading back to their base camp. They should have tried to beat the storm. But the risk of not returning had been worth it to get the prepartum readings they needed from the hibernating, pregnant polar bear. She ducked back into the cave and turned to give the bad news to her partner, Svein Edie.

Svein puzzled her. Six years older than she, he possessed the qualifications that would have made him the easy choice to lead this mission. But he didn't usurp her authority. Instead, he followed her scientific lead unless he felt strongly about something. Then he stood his ground until he won the point, a stubborn and skillful negotiator. She admired his tenacity when it came to his beliefs. She might want to slug him at times, but she respected him as well.

Aud reassured herself that she had been chosen to lead the mission on the merit of her qualifications, not because Svein let her. She knew polar bears like the back of her hand. She'd been the one researching them since her childhood. At thirty-two, she also knew her way around the frozen north. Her scientist father had often taken Aud and her two sisters into the Arctic on his research missions. Sure, her father might have been studying orcas, but her gaze had always roamed the shore looking for polar bears.

She knew she was qualified to lead the team, and she prided herself on her professionalism. Still... sexy, intellectual men were her kryptonite—Svein more so than most. All six-foot five-inches of him frustrated her on a sexual level. Just one look at his short-cropped, white-blond hair and icy blue eyes had her pussy weeping. His hard, muscled body looked as if it should be in a body-building magazine. She often heard the clank of weights in the base camp fitness room.

Something about discussing theories with a smart, sexy man soaked her panties. Sitting with Svein back at camp, analyzing the latest scientific news over cups of mediocre coffee, she had often wished she could push her professional barriers aside and fuck him senseless. And from the way she'd caught him looking at her lately, she thought he wanted the same. His gaze reminded her of a polar bear looking at a plump, juicy seal.

Damn! Being stuck in a cave with him would torment her. They'd ranged farther than they'd planned, but at least they'd found some shelter and weren't out in the open. Svein had an uncanny knowledge of the caves around here. This particular one hadn't shown up on any topography maps Aud possessed. She hadn't even known it existed until he had pointed it out to her.

She rounded the corner to find Svein bent over, packing their tools and equipment. Even in head to toe snow gear, the man had a nice ass. Tight, muscled, just the perfect thing for a girl to hang on to—

Wait a minute! She reined in her thoughts. She'd gone twelve months without sex. Her attention had

been focused on her mission, her research, her work to help the dying polar bears. Just thinking about the bears reminded her why she'd been living like a monk. Whatever sacrifices she made, if it brought polar bears back from the brink, it was worth it. If she had to rough it in a cave with Svein and his dangerous good looks, so be it.

"We're stuck here until the wind lets up. I'd hoped to get back and start typing up our notes, but I guess not yet." She shrugged. "Could be worse. We have shelter and rations for another day or so."

Svein looked over his shoulder at the leader of their scientific team. He resisted the urge to grin at their predicament. He suspected that although he had no problems being stuck in a cave, especially with someone as smart and beautiful as Aud, she felt differently. He doubted she'd consider it a Christmas present to be trapped here with him, not when academia and a chance to publish their findings sang a siren song luring them back to their base camp. However, if it gave them a chance to pad their research, he doubted she'd be too upset about the delay. It just might take her a while to come around.

He held out his hands in what he hoped was an endearing gesture. "I think we'll manage. I can behave myself."

"I hope so," she said as she slipped off her backpack and set it down. Her smile softened her clipped words.

She straightened, and though she was taller than the average woman, he towered over her. He felt acutely aware of her slim frame. A lock of golden blonde hair tumbled free of her parka hood and his fingers itched to reach out and rub that silken strand, so much so that he nearly pulled off his glove and touched her. He caught a whiff of her natural fragrance, a light floral scent like the warm spring days that came too few and too late in the north. Heat filled his groin and made him hard. He'd watched her, worked with her, and although at times he struggled to keep professional distance between them, his admiration for her grew. God, she was beautiful.

Sure, when the mission had been assembled he'd begrudged her the fact she'd been picked as the leader. He'd counted her youth against her. Yet the more he worked with her, the more he admired her—as a woman *and* a scientist. Glancing back the way she had come, he wondered how long the storm would last.

He focused on the chore of unpacking the bag he'd so carefully packed moments before and pulled out a tripod and a can of Sterno. They'd brought field rations and sleeping bags with them from base camp. Not a lot, but enough to last a couple days in case something happened. Bringing survival equipment for what should have been a day's exploration might have seemed silly to anyone else, but out here a storm could blow up at any time. They lacked driftwood to burn for heat. They'd have to rely on their bodies for that. It wouldn't be a five-star hotel, but they could wait out the storm.

He felt her gaze on him, watching him as he set up camp. "You can come over here, if you want. I won't bite. Not unless you ask me to anyway." He flashed a teasing grin and noticed a flush creeping over her cheeks. He could have attributed the rosy color to windburn, but hoped he was the cause.

If the storm worsened, he *could* shift into his other form and keep them both warm...

No. As much as he wanted to get closer to Aud, he knew he simply couldn't blurt out his special ability.

He listened to the rustle of her snow pants as she sat on the floor of the cave. She held herself distant from him, almost as if she didn't trust him...or herself. He hid a smile as he unrolled his sleeping bag.

"Why don't you join yours to mine?" he suggested. "We can stay warmer that way."

And he could spend time with her curves pressed up against his body, albeit cushioned by several layers. An exercise in torture, but one he'd gladly accept.

She frowned but must have realized the wisdom in his words for she unrolled her bag and moments later they were zipped together. She sat on top of the bags and wrapped her arms around herself.

"So we just sit here and wait." She sounded resigned to the fact, frustrated, and the researcher in him echoed her sentiments. "I need to get back and type up our findings. We need to get them published."

"It'll happen. We just have to wait Mother Nature out for a while, but I think we're more stubborn than this storm," Svein said, offering what support he could. Aud was pretty when she pouted, her lower lip full and ripe, ready for sucking. The need to reassure her, to let her know no matter what happened he'd take care of her, rolled through him. "We'll be just fine, don't worry. And besides, it could be worse."

Aud arched an eyebrow. "You're saying we could be dead?"

"See, we're not." He chuckled in response to her teasing voice and sat next to her. "Seriously, we planned for storms. We're far enough from base that, with the weather, we couldn't possibly reach it today, but as soon as things die down we will."

She shook her head, and then laughed. "I guess you have a point, though we could be back at camp, warm and toasty, and not worrying about what will happen if this storm doesn't let up enough for us to return. I'm anxious to secure that additional funding."

Again he wished he could tell her if things got worse, he'd shift and take her back to headquarters. But of course he couldn't tell her that. Not when there was a very good chance the storm would blow itself out and they'd return safely to camp on their own. He reached across the space separating them and curled his gloved hand around her arm. "We'll get out of here. I promise."

The relieved smile that crossed her lips could have melted a thousand feet of snow, and he'd gladly give his life to make her smile like that again. It lit up her eyes, brought out the rosy tint in her cheeks. Warmth radiated from her body—and suddenly he had to taste her. Professional distance be damned. Staying in the cave gave him an opportunity that might not come around again. If he wanted more than a professional relationship with Aud, and he did, he had to make the first move. Leaning across the space separating them, he kissed her.

Warmth spread from the soft touch of Svein's lips. For so long she'd imagined what it'd be like to kiss this smart and sexy man. Reality made her fantasies pale in comparison. His soft lips sent sparks shooting from her lips to her pussy and all the points in between. He drank from her, coaxed and tasted, until she thought only of her throbbing cunt and how well he'd ease her delicious torment.

She had to remember he was a scientific colleague. She stiffened as she struggled not to succumb further to the pleasure of his kiss. They had to remain professional to work together. Nights spent discussing the latest scientific theories blurred in her memory. The way he seemed to know exactly where to find polar bears, or the way his eyes lit up when they brought down a large male for tagging and samples, filled her thoughts. She struggled to keep the concept of their working relationship firmly in her mind. Then his gloved fingers curled against her cheek, his tongue traced the seal of her lips and her lingering traces of professionalism dissipated.

A tiny whimper of need emerged from her throat. If she'd known it would be this good, she wouldn't have waited so long. In fact, with his tongue making a cautionary dip into her mouth, Aud wondered why she'd even waited at all. She offered no resistance, inviting him to explore deeper. The taste of him exploded in her mouth, rich and decadent like the stash of *Bamsemums* she kept in her desk. The

chocolate-covered marshmallow candy was a rare indulgence. Just like Svein's kisses.

She curled her fingers around his broad shoulders as her world spun out of control. If the touch of his lips could arouse her so quickly, then what would full-on body contact do? She shuddered just thinking about it and moaned into his mouth.

The cave fell away. Their current predicament, the storm raging outside, all thoughts of it fled as Svein stroked her arm. He flattened his hand against the front of her parka. Through the layers, he curled his fingers around her breast and she arched into his touch. As if his hand held electricity, its touch zapped through her veins all the way to her aching pussy. Her nipples hardened. Her juices soaked her panties and she wanted more.

The need for air parted them. She stared at him, not quite believing she'd done something so completely uncharacteristic as kiss him. Her breath rasped in her chest and slowly she became aware of his hand still on her breast. Reluctantly, he pulled it away.

"Something tells me neither one of us noticed the cold just then." She pressed her lips together, uncertain how to put some distance between them. She was the leader of this team. She had to remain professional. A line had been crossed and she scrambled to regain control. Except, after feeling Svein's lips against hers, she wasn't so sure control was what she wanted.

"I've been thinking about keeping you warm for quite some time," he said, throwing her a boyish grin. He glanced around the cave. "And it seems like Mother Nature has given me the perfect opportunity to show you how hot I can make you."

Aud's breath caught in her throat. His words enflamed her, because god help her, she wanted to see how hot he could make her too.

She bolted to her feet and backed away. Distance. She needed distance. Right now, with Svein staring at her as if she were the last whole chocolate cookie on a plate of crumbs, and with the memory of his lips against hers too fresh in her mind, she wanted to fuck him until she could concentrate on nothing but his cock pounding deep inside her.

Heat suffused her cheeks. Was it hot in here? Maybe they were finally warming up the cave, though the knowledge of how that happened made her blush deepen. "That's not a good idea," she finally replied, unhappy to hear the wobble in her voice.

"Why not?" Svein rose and followed her. His long strides stalked her across the cave until she stood with her back pressed against the icy wall, the hot bulk of his body in front of her. Even through the parka, heat radiated from him in waves. He braced a hand on the cave beside her head. "Why isn't it a good idea? You know we'd be good together. Hell, I think we'd be explosive."

Aud sucked in a breath at the mental image his words conjured of the two of them, snuggled in their combined sleeping bags, his cock hard and hot and deep inside her. Her voice would echo inside the cave as she came. Her pussy clenched. "No!" she said, sharper than she'd intended. "I don't think this is a good idea."

"I think it's the best damn idea I've had since joining the team." He leaned closer and sniffed. "And I think you agree."

An embarrassed flush crept over her cheeks at his audible inhalation. Her cheeks flamed to think that he could smell her soaked pussy and that he knew he caused it. Aud raised her hands with the intention of pushing him away. Instead, she curled her fingers into the front of his parka. "This isn't—"

"Shh. Don't think. Just feel, Aud. Let your rational mind go, and just feel."

His husky voice permeated her skin, seeped into her pores and flowed through her veins. Behind her

sports bra her nipples hardened again, and she curled her fingers tighter into the ripstop nylon of his parka.

Svein covered her lips with his. He pressed her against the wall of the cave, the heat from his body enveloping her. Thrusting his tongue deep into her mouth, he rubbed his hips against hers, letting her know exactly what he wanted.

Aud wrapped her arm around his shoulders, feeling his strength, his bulk. She rubbed against him, each brush against his body growing the ache in her pussy. She sucked on his tongue and drew it deep into her mouth. Svein was a damn good kisser.

His free hand slid over her side to cup her hip and haul her against him. Through the layers she felt the ridge of his cock, and her hand on his chest found the zipper of his parka. She pulled it down, the rasp loud in the cave. Beneath it, he wore a thick woolen sweater. She inhaled deeply, his musky scent filling her nostrils. She nearly pulled off her glove so she could touch him.

Svein released her. For a moment she mourned the loss as she watched him unfasten his bibbed snow pants and drop his gloves to the floor of the cave with a soft swish. He unzipped her parka, his big hands curling into her wool sweater, pulling it up to caress the thin cotton shirt covering her skin. His hands were cold, almost too cold. He curled his fingers against her ribs, his right hand sliding up to cup her breast. Through the thin layers of cloth, his chilly touch puckered her nipple and made it ache.

He unhooked her own bibbed snow pants then pushed them down, along with her pants and underwear. She should have been freezing, but the low-hanging parka shielded her bottom from the cave wall—and with Svein's hand sliding across her drenched folds, she felt anything but cold. The chill of his fingers quickly warmed as he rubbed her clit.

Her hips bucked and she cried out. Heavy breathing echoed in the cave and she reached beneath his clothing, wanting to touch him. Aud spread her legs as wide as she could amid the tangle of her pants as she removed her gloves. She shoved his sweater and the shirt beneath it up and flattened her palms against his chest. Svein pulled away long enough to slide his arms out of the sleeves of his parka, letting it fall to the cave floor. He shoved his pants and long underwear down, revealing his cock encased in formfitting black briefs.

Aud curled her fingers against his turgid length, cupping him through the cloth. Svein growled, the feral sound raising the hair on her arms. And then he moved forward. He stroked his fingers along her labia again and pulled up her shirt with his other hand, just enough to reveal her breasts, and fastened his lips around one nipple, sucking on it through her bra.

Her head fell back. A breathy cry emerged from her throat and her pussy tightened. First one finger, then a second slid into her cunt, stretching her, preparing her. With his thumb brushing across her clit, tiny sparks shot through her veins. The cold now utterly forgotten, she thrust her hips and invited him deeper.

Fingers clenching against his cock, she stroked it through the soft cotton fabric. "Please," she whimpered, and a distant part of her mind realized she was begging Svein to fuck her. It didn't matter, not now. Being trapped in this cave isolated them in their own world. There wasn't a mission, a team or a leader. Just the two of them generating enough heat to melt the Arctic down around them.

He released her nipple. "You want me inside you?"

"Yes! God, yes." She pulled down his briefs, freeing his cock. Aud wrapped her fingers around it and they barely touched. One stroke, two, and then he curled his fingers around her wrist and stilled her hand.

“Much more of that and I’m going to come.” He reached behind her, cupping her buttocks and lifting her. Muscles bulged in his arms and for one moment the head of his cock brushed her slick opening. “Last chance,” he said, offering her an opportunity to change her mind.

Aud shook her head. “Fuck me, Svein.” She pressed her lips to his, telling him with tongue and teeth exactly what she wanted—to be taken, and taken hard.

Chapter Two

From the moment he’d seen Aud he’d wanted her. A single thrust of his hips buried him balls-deep inside her. For a moment he waited, suspending her between his hard body and the wall of the cave. His sides should have been cold. They weren’t. Not when his inner beast hovered so close to the surface. He wanted to roar, to bellow his joy. Instead, he pulled back so slowly she whimpered with need, before thrusting forward again.

Exquisite pleasure rippled along the length of his cock. It should have been awkward fucking her this way. But with his shifter strength he held her easily, and their cramped position only made her hotter, tighter. If he thrust any farther inside she would taste him in her throat. Her sheath gripping him, so slick, so wet, made him never want to leave her warmth. Aud wrapped her arms around him and buried her face in the crook of his shoulder.

He tried to savor the feel of her hot pussy clenching his cock. He wanted to make it last. Yet, it’d been so long, and he’d fantasized about Aud for months. The tiny flutters of her pussy eroded the edge of his control.

He pulled out slowly, wanting to watch the raw pleasure dance across her face. Then her fingers clenched against his shoulders.

“Svein!” she cried out as he thrust forward again.

As his name echoed in the cave, his control snapped. He thrust with long, hard strokes deep inside her, over and over again. Pressing her against the wall of the cave, one hand still clutching her ass to hold her in place, he reached between their bodies and flicked his fingers over her clit.

Aud screamed. Her pussy contracted around him as she came, her nails digging deep enough into his shoulders to feel them beneath his sweater.

He dipped his head to her breast, suckling her and thrusting through her orgasm. Rolling her nipple between his teeth, he realized he couldn’t get enough of this woman. Her taste. Her smell. He wanted to be between her thighs, lapping at her juices and making her come with just his lips and tongue.

He lifted his head and claimed her mouth in a bruising kiss. *Mine!* His animal instincts cried out with the need to claim her and mark her as his own. *Mine.* So close, his balls drawn tight against his body, yet he refused to come. Not yet.

Her cries degenerated into sobbing moans as she reached orgasm once more. She milked his cock, bringing him along with her. He thrust again. His balls ached with the need to come and when he stiffened inside her, he let the pleasure wash through him.

His orgasm slammed into him so hard it felt like the top of his head was going to explode. Jet after jet of his warm seed filled her, rushing from his cock. His harsh breaths mingled with hers, and only then did he feel the sweat drying on his skin and the chill of the Arctic cave.

He knew he should shift to ease the pain of the cold. But not here, not with this woman in his arms.

“Mmm,” she murmured against him, offering a tiny snuggle that had his cock hardening once more.

The quickie against the wall wouldn't be enough now that he'd tasted her charms. Outside, he sensed the storm still raged.

"Can you stand?" he asked.

She managed to nod.

His cock slid from her and he lowered her to the ground. As soon as he could, he reached behind him and shrugged into his parka. "Let's get tucked into the sleeping bags. It'll be easier to keep each other warm that way," he said, sliding his ungloved hand along her thigh.

Looking at Svein, Aud wondered where her earlier reservations had gone. Her pussy still tingled and she hated to bend down and pull up her pants, but the air grew frigid without his warm body against hers. She watched him quickly arrange his clothing, only zipping up his parka partway, and then turn toward the sleeping bags. She followed as soon as she'd straightened her own clothes and zipped her parka.

"You did say you would keep me warm," she teased as she sat down on the bags, pulled off her boots and slid inside, snow gear and all.

"I did, didn't I?" He followed suit, and soon had her tucked against his broad chest, his arm wrapped around her.

She snuggled against his warm, male body. She flattened her palm against his stubbled cheek and brushed her lips across his. Trailing her fingers down his arm, she longed for them to be back at the base camp, where she could explore him fully naked and they didn't have to worry about the cold or generating body heat. She opened her mouth to speak and a yawn emerged. Snuggling against him, she intended to rest just for a moment.

Svein watched the woman in his arms sleep. Compared to the no-nonsense team leader he knew, in sleep Aud revealed a softer, more feminine side. Her lips parted slightly, and watching her, his cock hardened. Easily he imagined her pink lips surrounding his cock, sucking, licking, drawing up and down his shaft.

She shivered with cold. Even with both of them in layers of snow gear and inside the sleeping bags, the chilly air pulled the warmth from their bodies. He tucked a corner of the sleeping bag next to her face. Behind them sat their packs and he thought about pulling out the scarf she should have been wearing, except then he couldn't have kissed her pink rosebud mouth.

The need to shift to protect his body from the cold filled him. Maybe a half-shift, just enough to ensure he stayed warm, and in his other form he could keep her warm as well. He lay there and listened to the storm howl until the reason for their being here pushed him into action. He slid his arm from beneath her, gingerly working his way out of the sleeping bag.

Aud didn't stir. Taking a deep breath, he inhaled the searing cold air. Before he could change his mind, or she woke up, he stripped off his clothing. Then, he moved a distance away and concentrated.

In an instant his form shifted. Bulk he didn't have filled out his body, arms and legs changing, until there he stood—nine hundred pounds of polar bear. His white fur and dark skin insulated his body, and he boasted feet with widespread toes that helped him walk on the snow. He padded over to Aud. Careful not to disturb her, he pulled the sleeping bag over her chin and face, trying to keep her shielded from the cold as much as possible. She whimpered, her eyelids fluttering, and for a moment he feared he'd wakened her. Moments later, she settled back to sleep.

He had a Christmas present to deliver. If he could confirm their calculations of the hibernating bear's impending pregnancy and add the information to their previous findings, it'd be a far better present for Aud than the box of chocolates he had back at the base camp. It had been his bear senses that had found the she-bear. In his heart, he thought of her as his gift to Aud. He'd peek at their sleeping mama bear and then return to keep Aud warm until she woke. With any luck, he could help her capture pictures of the newborn cubs. It'd be the perfect ending to their prenatal polar bear research. With a toss of his great head, he strode toward the opening of the cave and the storm beyond.

In that half-aware place between dreams and wakefulness, Aud reached for Svein. Her gloved fingers curled around empty air. She mewed her disappointment then drifted back to her dreams...

The massive male nuzzled at her face and shoulders before grasping a blanket and pulling it over her. She snuggled into it, smelled the hot breath of a predator, and the shiver that darted down her spine was from excitement, not cold. A part of her said she should be scared, yet she wasn't. The beast looked at her, his eyes filled with an intelligence she couldn't deny. Almost like he knew her and wanted to communicate with her. She knew he wouldn't hurt her, and she couldn't be scared of him—not even when she'd witnessed firsthand the power of these large creatures.

Unafraid, she slid from the confines of the sleeping bags. She looked around the cave, wondering where Svein might have gone and how he'd feel when he found out he'd missed this spectacle. Polar bears had been known to eat humans. She offered a meal, if only a small one, for a creature his size, and yet she stood there watching him, and feeling no fear. Only an intense curiosity gripped her. She reached for the bear, her gloved hands sliding through thick, plush fur. Curling her fingers, she gripped a generous handful of the creature's ruff, and had he been a cat he might have purred. Big eyes closed and a heavy, contented sigh issued from the bear's chest.

The rush of warm air against her cheek forced her to release the bear as the reality of what she was doing sank in. The creature looked at her, tossed his head and strode away.

"Don't go," she begged. The bear shook his head again and continued toward the entrance of the cave, into the storm.

Her dream faded, and in her sleep, Aud reached for the beast.

The long walk meant little to him in bear form. His father called it his soul shape. Svein focused on the practical applications of being a polar bear, like his ability to study these majestic creatures on their own terms.

Where other creatures waited out the storm, he forged a path into it, not caring about the sting of wind or snow. His feet acted like snowshoes as he crunched his way toward the other cave where he knew the female polar bear lay deep in hibernation. The need to return to the cave and curl up next to Aud, to keep her safe and warm, nearly had him retracing his steps. Instead, he thought of how she'd feel when he presented the final pieces of their research. The wind howled a little less fiercely as he rounded a massive boulder and the snow caressed more than stung. The storm was starting to blow itself out.

He found the cave, darting in long enough to make sure the mother bear still lay in slumber, her precious cubs yet unborn, though close to emerging into the world. Thankfully, with her hibernating, she wouldn't smell his presence.

He hurried back to where he'd left Aud. Back inside the cave, he shook his fur, drying it, and then returned to the sleeping bags. Mindful that he'd have to change before she woke, he lay down beside

Aud, letting his bulk and his fur warm her. She snuggled closer to him, her breath a sigh against his fur, and contented, he rested his muzzle between his front paws.

Let her be warm, let her be safe...and with any luck, for Christmas they'd get to see newborn cubs. Although Aud couldn't know about his secret, he could give her this glimpse into his world. Feeling the steady rise and fall of her breathing next to him, the man inside the bear sighed with relief. When she woke it would be Christmas, a day of giving. He'd give what he was able.

He inched a paw closer to her. *Mine!*

Aud woke feeling warm and toasty in spite of being the only person in the sleeping bags. Opening her eyes, she searched for Svein in the cave. He monitored a pouch of food over a Sterno flame.

"Good morning, sleepyhead," he called.

One glance and Aud decided he awoke far too handsome and cheerful in the mornings. Images of his naked body and his cock buried deep inside her filled her mind. She rolled into a seated position, trying to banish her sexual thoughts.

"What are you cooking?" The aroma of the freeze-dried, prepackaged food made her mouth water with the promise of warm sustenance. She reached for the pocket of her parka and realized she'd slept on her energy bar. Now all she had was an unappetizing squished blob. She pulled her hand away.

"Theoretically it's beef stew, or at least that's what the package said. It's almost ready."

Aud crawled from the sleeping bags then began to unzip them and roll them up. She paused and glanced toward the cave opening, though she couldn't see it. "Has the storm cleared enough to break camp?"

"I think so. We might not have a lot of time with the prospective mama though." He continued to stir breakfast.

Automatically Aud glanced at her watch. Christmas Day. She never expected to spend Christmas in such close quarters with Svein. At least not in a cave. Get out, finish their research and photograph the bear, then get back. That had been the plan, and once back at the base, she would have disappeared into her room and composed the paper they planned to submit. Discreetly watching him, she tidied her ponytail. She finished packing up camp while he cooked. As soon as the food pouch was heated, he handed it to her and opened a second one.

"Eat. You're going to need your strength." He turned his attention back to cooking his own breakfast.

Aud ate straight from the pouch. Although a bit tepid, the food filled her and sent warmth radiating through her limbs. "Thank you," she said between bites.

Svein nodded and stirred his own stew.

No awkward morning-after jitters filled her. Instead, they acted companionable, professional...friendly even. She wondered if they could continue their relationship or if they'd retreat back to being coworkers and nothing more. A heated flush crept over her cheeks and behind her layers of clothing, her nipples pebbled.

"So you really think we should check on the bear before heading back? We probably shouldn't take any more chances," she said, trying unsuccessfully to create a distraction from her lusty—and dangerous—thoughts.

"The storm's died down a lot. We should be fine, and I know how much you want those pictures."

By the time Svein finished his food, Aud had sealed her pouch in a plastic bag to dispose of back at camp and washed her fork. Moments later they were ready to go.

He fastened a rope from his pack to the belt around her waist, securing them together, and led the way out of the cave. His larger size would help create a trail for her to follow.

They moved in silence, hunched over against the biting wind and the flakes of ice in the air. The lantern he held provided enough illumination to make out a trail of bear tracks. All bears should be hibernating this time of year, and she made a mental note to add this to her findings. If bears were coming out of their winter sleep early, a study into this change in their behavioral patterns might provide answers to saving them from extinction. Before she could ponder it further, Svein stopped at the opening to the cave.

Aud nodded, anxious to be out of the elements. Svein strode a little way into the cave and stopped, leaving her just enough room to slip inside. There, pressed against the back wall, barely a foot separating her from where Aud and Svein stood, was a huge female polar bear. Although hibernating, the creature twitched, one mighty paw coming close to them. She hadn't found a cave as deep as theirs, nor as spacious, and her bulk dominated the chamber. A low rumble worked its way from her throat.

Did bears dream during hibernation? Aud always imagining it as a months-long sleep, and suspected they did. From the way this female thrashed and growled, she appeared deep in the throes of a mighty dream.

The female raised her head. Her muzzle swiveled, appeared to be pointing right at them, and the great maw opened and closed with an audible clack of teeth. Shivers darted down Aud's spine. "Svein," she whispered, not quite sure this bear was comfortably in dreamland.

"Look." He pointed to the hindquarters, where a cub struggled to emerge into the world.

The mother slashed the air with her hind paw, so close a breeze washed over them.

Aud stepped back. "That was close—"

Thump! The paw hit the wall, raining ice and pebbles down on them.

"Think you can stay?" Svein glanced uneasily toward the birthing bear.

Aud nodded. "This is what we came for. Start tagging."

She dug the camera out of her bag. There was no way in hell she was going to miss this, and Svein knew it. She raised the camera, checked the angle and started filming.

Chapter Three

Svein grabbed their tags and instruments, his admiration for Aud growing even more. He moved closer to the bear, quickly drawing a blood sample and marking her. She twitched, her front leg slamming into his. He barely managed to keep his balance, but he did. And then the first cub tumbled free of the womb. It lay there scrambling in its sac until it broke, and then a second cub began to appear.

Svein stood transfixed. Bear or not, male or not, watching the miracle of birth coupled with the knowledge that something so small grew up into a hulking creature like him reminded him how insignificant he really was in the world. He glanced at Aud, not surprised to see frozen tears, like diamonds, sparkling on her eyelashes in the light from her head lamp. And then the second cub tumbled free, and in less time than he would have expected, both made their way to the bear's teats, clamped on and began to nurse.

This is it. It's why we do this work. To keep these creatures alive and in the wild.

Time faded away. How long they remained in the cave, taking measurements, dictating notes into a tape recorder and videotaping the new family, he didn't know. Hours must have passed, and he suddenly realized they'd stayed far longer than they should have. He clicked off his tape recorder and stowed his supplies in his pack.

Aud focused on the bears and continued to run the camera. She shivered. Her body shook violently from the chill that must be seeping into her bones. He had to get her back to camp.

He tapped her shoulder and she steadied the camera in her shaking hands. Under her breath he heard her murmuring words, estimating weights, lengths, cursing that they didn't bring more tools and instruments with them.

"We should go," he whispered.

She nodded. He watched her move, noticing her lethargy and the stiffness in her joints. If she tried to walk back to base camp like this, she wouldn't make it. He feared taking her back to their cave, knowing in human form he couldn't generate enough heat to warm her. But in his bear form...

Decision made, he refastened the rope connecting them and they hurried back toward the cave.

He led the way, with Aud close by his side, huddled against him for warmth and protection against the once-more rising wind. He wrapped his arm around her and pulled her closer. He'd never met a more resilient woman. Out in the Arctic, knowing they couldn't make it back to base for a second night and stuck in a cave with rations and freezing her ass off, she never complained.

The cave loomed before them. He ducked inside, feeling Aud's steps quicken beside him. Once inside, she sank to her knees.

"I'm so cold," she said, her teeth chattering audibly. "We shouldn't have stayed with the polar bears for so long. We should have gone back to camp."

"But then we wouldn't have the footage or the information we needed." He unrolled the sleeping bags as he spoke and herded her inside. He followed her, unzipping his parka once he was inside the insulated bags and pulling her against him. Wrapping his arms and the edges of his coat around her, he held her tight and wished warmth back into her limbs.

Her eyelids fluttered closed.

"Stay with me, Aud," Svein ordered. "Damn it, don't go to sleep." The thought of hypothermia's silent death had him shaking her shoulders until she opened her eyes.

"Stop doing that...just want to sleep." She burrowed even closer to him.

"You can't. Not until you're warm." Even as he said the words, she drifted into a cold-induced sleep.

He had no choice. He needed to warm her, fast. He slid from the sleeping bags. Aud whimpered and reached for him.

"Shh, it'll be all right." Once out of the bags, he stripped out of his clothing. With just a thought, he changed. He lowered himself next to her, not liking it when she didn't respond. *Burrow into me. Use me for your warmth.* He projected the commands toward Aud, knowing he had no other means to communicate in this form. As if she understood, she curled against him and he felt the tremors racking her body.

Cold, so cold she felt like a block of ice against his body. He tightened around her, pulling her against his stomach and chest, one large paw gingerly against her back. She snuggled against him, the warm

sigh of her breath teasing strands of his fur. He smelled her scent, filled his nostrils with it, and knew that no matter how much he wanted to use other means to warm her, he offered only body heat for now. Sexual heat could, and would, come later.

How long he held her, Svein didn't know. Time passed differently in his bear form than as a man, but eventually, Aud woke.

Her swift gasp alerted him that she no longer slept. "Svein?" she whispered. "Svein, where are you?" Caught.

To her credit, she didn't scream, not when a male polar bear lay on the sleeping bags close enough to bite her should he wish. He changed quickly back to human form.

"Svein?! *What the fuck?*" Aud scrambled out of the sleeping bag. Wrapping her arms around herself, she stumbled backward. "*You're a polar bear?!*" She backed into the wall and then reached behind her to grab it. "Oh my god! I've been sleeping with a freaking polar bear!"

She sucked in shallow gulps of air and he feared she might hyperventilate.

"It's all right," he said. "Yes, I can change into a polar bear, but I won't hurt you." He knew hedging wouldn't help the situation.

"What do you mean it's all right? You're a polar bear! Oh my god. It's not all right. You're a man, a scientist, not a bear!" Her voice rose with her fear.

He knew this would happen. Frankly, he was surprised she didn't run into the icy darkness. "Aud, stay with me. Breathe," he coaxed, watching her gasp for breath. Slowly, he stepped forward, not wanting to startle her any more. "I can shift into a polar bear. It's how I originally found that den with the pregnant bear. As you can probably imagine, it helps me in my research immensely." He watched fear war with scientific curiosity in her eyes. That was the Aud he knew and loved.

Svein swallowed hard. Yeah...he loved her. He'd claimed her as his own even before they'd made love. He stopped nearly an arm's length from her. "I won't hurt you, Aud. I'd never do anything to harm you."

"I believe you," she breathed. "Dear god, you're a polar bear. One snap of your jaws could break an arm or a leg! But I...I believe you wouldn't hurt me." She exhaled. "I have to see. Please, can I watch you change again?" Aud stepped forward. "All this time and you never said anything." She shook her head, her face suddenly an unreadable mask.

"I couldn't. But you were succumbing to hypothermia. I didn't want to lose you." *I still don't.* He stood there, cautious, half afraid she'd turn from him like the last—and only—woman to whom he revealed his secret. At least she wasn't freaking out anymore.

"I can't believe you're a polar bear." Aud wanted to be mad at him, wanted to scream and yell over all the times they went out in search of bears when all along they had one in their midst. Screaming wouldn't help. Neither would running away. Her dream filled her mind and she wondered now if it had really been a dream at all. The way the bear looked at her with its eyes so full of intelligence, the gut-deep feeling that the bear wouldn't hurt her made her desire to watch Svein shift more acute. She'd always wanted an up-close look at a live and conscious polar bear, not just tranquilized ones. Well, now she could have it. Aud stared at Svein, seeing him in a new light. Looking at him with his pale blue eyes and his hair so blond it was nearly white, she envisioned him as the polar bear. Proud. Reclusive. Dangerous if crossed. "I want to see, please."

She held her breath, afraid he'd refuse to grant the request. She should have been scared. Waking up with a polar bear inches from her hadn't been the experience she'd expected when she and Svein had headed out here. Yet, knowing what he was now, suddenly certain things made so much sense. His uncanny ability to find polar bears or their dens, the way he seemed to think like a bear at times—little facts suddenly clicked together in her mind. And her dream, so vivid and real, hovered over all of it.

She'd wanted—no, *needed*—to spend time with Svein's polar bear form, and she wanted to watch him shift. She had to see it again.

"I'm relieved I can finally show you," he said. He closed his eyes and in an instant his form shimmered. Then he stood there, a very large, male polar bear.

For long moments, Aud simply stared. She'd never seen anything like Svein's transformation before. Then curiosity got the better of her. She walked slowly, hesitantly to him, stopping by his massive shoulder. Reaching out, she stroked him, all the while examining his face, his ears, even looking at his teeth. He withstood it all, standing as still as a statue. She buried her hands deep into his fur. She felt heat, nearly furnace-like in its intensity, and knew without it she probably would have died. She shuddered. "This is amazing. Truly amazing," she whispered, then leaned forward and inhaled his musky scent.

"You're going to have to tell me all about how you do this when we get back to base camp." Aud stepped back from him and met his gaze. "You can understand me, can't you?"

He nodded his head.

"I always thought bears looked keenly intelligent. Now I know why. To think there might be more of you out there. There *are* more, aren't there? And will you introduce me?" She barked short bursts of laughter. "I'm asking questions of a bear. You can't answer me, but you're in there. You hear me. And when you're a man again you're going to answer my questions. To think, I've had sex with a man who can change into a polar bear. No wonder you were so keen on this mission." She closed her mouth, aware she was babbling and that it probably didn't make a bit of difference to Svein. He stared at her as if he had the patience of a saint. Then, he stepped forward and brushed his head against her.

She struggled to remain upright, though she suspected he tried to be very gentle with her. Tamping down her fear, she decided it was her turn to be explored after the way she'd stroked and petted him. It was unnerving having a huge beast rub against her slender frame. If he wanted to, Svein could clamp his jaws around her and inflict considerable damage. Yet, something told her he wouldn't. It could've been the slow, deliberate way he moved, as if working around a skittish animal. Or it could simply be because she knew he was still inside the bear, and Svein the man would never hurt her. She endured his attention, her apprehension slowly melting away. She knew she was witnessing something special, something spectacular...and something she feared she might never see again.

From the touch of her fingers against his fur to the wonder shining in her eyes, Aud accepted his other form. He rubbed against her, half expecting her to flinch away in fear. She didn't. Instead, she stood her ground, reaching out to stroke his thick fur as he rubbed his scent all over her body.

His scent on her body. Just the thought of it had him fighting back a raging hard-on and contemplating switching back so he could fuck her until they both passed out.

When he smelled only himself on her he grunted and stepped back as the human inside the bear made his needs known. He shifted, one moment warm and furry, the next completely naked beside her. He extended a hand, and she followed him down to the sleeping bags.

Twined around him, she pressed her lips against his chest. Her snow pants rustled as she snaked a leg around his hip. His cock hardened with a swift rush of blood. She lay nestled against his body with her eyes closed and her lips parted against his skin. He slid his hand down her back, cupped her ass and pulled her against him.

“Aud,” he said, her name a husky plea on his lips.

“Svein.” She kissed him, her tiny tongue darting between her lips to swipe across his salty skin. “It’s really you.” She rained tiny kisses over his chest and his neck, working back up to his lips. She pressed her mouth against his and drank from him.

The need to be inside her hot, wet body drove him. The frigid rocks and ice beneath him screamed at him to move. He helped strip her of her clothing, then slid into the sleeping bags with her.

Cold flesh against warm, Aud shivered as Svein pulled her against his body. He brushed a strand of her blonde hair away from her face. “You don’t know what it means to me to have you accept both sides of my nature. I am a bear, yes, but first and foremost, I’m a man.” Leaning forward, he claimed her mouth in a deep, soul-stealing kiss as their bodies slid together.

Svein’s words sent shivers down Aud’s spine. Watching him shift from man to bear and back again aroused not only her scientific curiosity. His cock throbbed against her stomach, and she reached between them to curl her warm hand around it. She stroked him from base to tip, her thumb finding the bead of moisture at the end.

“Right now I need the man,” she said when the need for air parted their lips.

“Honey, I’m all man.” He cupped her ass, pulling her against his hard length. “And I can’t wait until we’re back at camp and you can take me in your sweet, pink mouth.”

Aud grinned, thinking she’d like the exact same thing. The logistics of their sleeping bags frustrated her. If only they were back at base camp on her bed. Though only a twin, it had more room than these sleeping bags, but she’d make it work. She folded herself as small as possible, bending her legs against the seam at the bottom of their makeshift bedding. She kissed the arrow of hair leading down from his navel, laving the crease where his thigh met his body. The next time they did this, and she didn’t doubt there’d be a next time, she’d sprawl him on the bed where she could drink in the sight of his masculine form.

She wondered how much longer they could have worked together without combusting like this, how much longer she might have gone without knowing his secret. Too long. Looking at his cock, her fingers squeezing the base, she inhaled his musky aroma. She licked, just a taste to savor his piquant flavor. Juices flooded from her pussy. Her channel contracted on a cock that wasn’t there, and she drew him deeper into her mouth.

His groan echoed in her ears. Fingers speared through her hair, tugging it loose from its ponytail as he held her against his cock. Svein’s entire body was rigid, and Aud reached around him and clenched her fingers on his ass. Her only thoughts were of him as she continued to fuck him with her mouth.

He’d risked her possible rejection to save her life. Revealing his true nature probably hadn’t been an easy decision to make, and she wanted to pay him back with what she had at this moment—her body, her affection.

Her love?

Aud pulled her mind away from those thoughts. She’d longed for a partner who shared her love of the Arctic and of polar bears. She wanted a lover who understood the demands of her profession. With

Svein she might have found him, though a part of her feared their recent intimacy was due only to being caught out in the storm, and once they returned to camp, it would fade away like the northern lights with the approach of dawn.

The head of his cock bumped the back of her throat. She relaxed her muscles, allowing him to slip deeper. With tongue and teeth, she stroked and caressed, nibbled her way along his shaft, until his hips pumped against her mouth. Still she took him deeper. Hollowing her cheeks, she sucked hard. She longed to make him come.

If his groans were any indication, he was close. His balls drew up high and tight against his body. Aud fondled them, rolling each one in her hand before reaching behind them to stroke the sensitive skin.

Svein pleaded with her, his words barely registering. "Stop. I don't want to come without you." He cupped the back of her head, keeping her from going down on him again.

Aud pulled away. She released his cock from her mouth with a soft pop. As much as she wanted to taste him as he came, she wanted him inside her more. Her pussy ached. Her juices soaked her labia just thinking about Svein's cock inside her. She crawled back up the sleeping bag to press against his body, her nipples caressing his chest.

He cupped her breasts, pinching her nipples and palming her flesh until she squirmed against him.

She straddled him, looking down into his eyes. Her breath rasped from between parted lips. Reaching between their bodies, she stroked his cock, wet from her saliva, and positioned herself over it. "Take me. Please."

"Oh yeah," he replied, the husky timbre of his voice sending shivers down her spine. He grabbed her hips and thrust into her welcoming heat.

Exquisite pleasure sparked through her veins. He filled her, stretched her, and when their bodies were flush and his head brushed her cervix, she released a happy sigh.

Svein caressed the lengths of her arms. She shivered, her pussy clenching around him. Looking down at him, his hair nearly as white as the snow surrounding them, his eyes the icy blue of a frozen Nordic lake, she knew no matter what happened, she'd tumbled head over heels in love with him. It scared her. She feared she was putting her professional reputation on the line, yet here with him now, she knew she'd do it all again in a heartbeat. Svein had always been a valuable member of her team. Until now, she hadn't realized how valuable.

Tangling her fingers with his, she leaned into him and began to move. Each inch of him sliding from her was pure torture. She hovered there, wanting to make the moment last, trying to burn the image of him, his body, into her mind so that no matter what happened when the mission ended, she'd have something to keep her warm at night. She couldn't ask for any more.

She sank down on him, moaning as he filled her. Clenching her fingers tightly together with his, she rose and fell on his shaft. Her breasts bounced. In spite of the frigid temperatures, inside the sleeping bags sweat glistened on her skin.

Harder. Deeper. She leaned forward, wanting to take even more of him. Her knees pressed against the ground, the sleeping bags doing little to cushion them. "Please, please," she whimpered, needing release. Her pussy tightened.

Her breath came in shallow pants. A shift of her hips, a swivel on the way down had her moaning with pleasure. Nothing could ever compare to taking him like this in the cave, while the wind howled and raged outside.

And then she couldn't think at all, for a low, keening wail erupted from her throat. Head tilted back,

breasts thrust forward, she rode the waves of her release as they rushed through her body with the force of an avalanche. Ripples started at her pussy, milked his cock and then burst through her. Up her spine, down her arms, even to the top of her head, which she thought might come off, ecstasy filled her body. She forced her eyes open and saw Svein.

He smiled at her, his body rigid as she exploded around his cock. And then, with a slow thrust, he filled her.

For as long as she lived, Aud knew she'd never forget this moment.

Chapter Four

Aud amazed him. Right now, with her pussy still convulsing around his penis, he didn't want to think about anything at all except being buried inside her warm, sweet heaven.

He thrust upward, filling her, wrenching another cry of passion from her lips. He pulled her down toward him so she lay draped across his chest. Clasp ing her ass in his hands, he thrust into her welcoming heat. Over and over again he experienced the silken slide of his cock in her channel. God help him, he never wanted to let her go. He thrust deeper, joining them as intimately as two people could be.

Reaching between them, his fingers found her clit and her cries echoed in the cave as he strummed her to another orgasm. And then, only then, did he allow himself to thrust into her one last time. His cock erupted, shooting streams of come into her body. Her heat bathed him. Their juices mingled and the smell of their lovemaking filled this nostrils.

He listened to her breathing, sensed his own breaths matching hers. Sweat plastered strands of her hair to her forehead, and he knew he'd never seen anything as beautiful as the sight of her sprawled across his body. He rested one hand possessively at the small of her back. She sighed, grinned against his chest and wiggled even closer to him. Inside her, his cock twitched.

"Ready so soon?" she raised her head to stare at him. "I think you have the strength of a bear."

Pride filled him at her words. He slid his hand down the curve of her backside and patted her lightly on the ass. "When it comes to you, I'm always ready."

She looked as if she might say something, then didn't. Had he spoken too soon? Had he said too much? Damn it. After revealing his secret he imagined only good things for them, not a return to the professional relationship they'd had before getting caught in the storm. Except she made no move to leave, and he liked her weight pressing on top of him. He wanted to hold on to her. When they returned to the base camp and the rest of the team came back from their holiday vacations, he intended to make it clear that Aud belonged to him.

She rolled to the side and snuggled against him. "We should put our suits on. We're probably going to notice the cold soon."

Svein wrapped an arm around her. "I'll keep you warm."

"Yeah, you will." And in a few moments, he heard only her deep, even breathing as she drifted off to sleep, leaving him awake with his fears and his hopes.

* * * * *

The next morning brought the long trek back to base camp. In the endless dark of the Arctic winter, Aud struggled to make out landmarks. She saw nothing except a vast expanse of white dotted by boulders and footprints. The emptiness gave her time to think. She feared her abnegated attraction to

Svein, combined with their close quarters, sparked their sexual activities, and figured that back at camp they'd have to find a new routine between them. She wondered if it would be one that included an emotional relationship. She paused, allowing him to switch positions with her. They worked together, wasting little time or words.

She stared at the ass of his snow pants in the glare of her head lamp and struggled not to focus on his loose-hipped stride. The thought that warmth and real food lay only a few hours away had her pushing herself, and him.

Lights shone on the horizon. "We're almost there," Svein called. The wind tore his words away.

Shocked, she realized they'd walked the entire distance without talking. Neither mentioned the sex or his amazing shifting ability. She wasn't sure how to take the silence. "Great," she replied in a faux-cheerful voice.

Almost back—back in the warmth, back among lights, back where she could retreat to her own room. She needed time to think. In less than two weeks the rest of the team would be returning from their Christmas holidays and she needed to have the article written, submitted and the additions to their research ready to present. She thought briefly of the presents waiting for her, mostly gifts from her family. She wondered if Svein had any presents other than the small gifts the members of the team had gotten each other.

"So what's the first thing you're going to do?" Svein asked as they crossed the lit courtyard.

Aud strode alongside him. *Find out if you want to continue this relationship. And if not, try to find a way to mend my broken heart.* Out of the corner of her eye, she watched his profile as they stopped at the door and she punched in the security code.

Svein held the door open, looking as if he wanted to press for an answer to his question.

Thankfully, he didn't. She stepped inside then closed her eyes and inhaled. "Warmth. My God, I never thought I'd be warm again." She leaned against the wall and released a sigh. When she opened her eyes, she saw Svein staring her strangely. Then his expression cleared so quickly she thought she might have imagined it. "I mean...*you* kept me warm," she said, "but it's nice to not have to worry about frostbite or hypothermia." She shimmied out of her snow gear until she wore only sweater, pants and thick socks.

As Aud peeled off her layers of clothing, all Svein could think about was getting her naked. Here at base camp they had none of the concerns about warmth or survival. For the next couple of weeks it'd be just the two of them and one research paper. The paper could wait.

He stripped off his parka and snow pants, then tossed his sweater behind him and peeled his pants from his legs. He kicked them off and strode toward her. With everyone gone, they had the place to themselves—and he didn't want to waste a single moment.

"You didn't answer my question." Stopping behind her, he grabbed the hem of her sweater and pulled it over her head. Her undershirt and bra followed then he slid her pants down her long legs. She kicked them off but didn't turn around. She stood there dressed only in her heavy socks.

"If you touch me, then you'll know what I want." She backed into him and rubbed her buttocks against his groin.

"I want to hear you say it." The sweet curve of her ass tormented him. Ignoring it for even sweeter targets, he reached around and cupped her breast. "I think," he whispered against her hair, "that you want me inside you. That now that we don't have to worry about freezing our asses off, you want me to

fuck you.” He flicked his thumb over her nipple.

Aud bit back a moan. “You think a lot,” she whispered. “I want more action.” She wiggled her buttocks against him again.

His cock throbbed, balls full and heavy between his legs. His sensitive nose picked up the scent of her drenched folds, and he slid his hand around her hip to rest just above her mons.

“I think you like it when I think.” He dipped his fingers down to her honeyed warmth, smiling when he encountered her slick lips. “Spread your legs.”

She complied, her hiss of pleasure audible as he stroked her folds. If she thought she could return to being the standoffish leader of the team, she had better think again. He caressed her pussy, loving the way Aud bit back her moans and whimpers of pleasure. He toyed with her nipples, first one then the other. With his nose, he shoved her hair aside and licked a path up the side of her neck.

God, she had him so hot, so hard. And when she thrust her ass at him, legs spread wide, he nearly grabbed her hips and impaled himself in her channel.

“On your knees,” he ordered.

She knelt, thrusting that heart-shaped ass in the air and looking over her shoulder with a saucy grin. The pink lips of her pussy parted, giving him a view of her engorged clit.

Svein knelt behind her. He stroked her labia with his knuckles, pressing against her clit. First one finger, then a second slid into her tight channel, and he worked them back and forth. Her moans—husky, needy cries that had his balls tightening—echoed in the room, and when he leaned forward and cupped her breast, he imagined taking her like this, mounting her, fucking her like a bear took its mate.

Aud cried out. Her sheath rippled around his fingers, milking them as she came. “Please,” she begged.

Svein slid his fingers from her pussy, ready to give his woman exactly what she wanted.

On all fours, presenting her pussy to him like some animal in heat, Aud struggled to regain her breath after her quick, shattering orgasm. She hadn’t answered Svein’s question. In truth, she feared what her answer would be, but down here, on the floor, with Svein behind her, she wanted his cock, his body. She dared not hope for his love.

His broad head breached her entrance and she closed her eyes at the sublime pleasure. He seemed to know where to kiss, to caress, two fingers on her clit, his other hand on her breast. His lips blazed a trail down her spine and with a flex of his hips, he buried himself balls-deep inside her.

Her channel tightened around him. For a moment she held him there before he pulled back with exquisite slowness. Thrust and retreat. Thrust and retreat. His cock filled her, stretched her. The friction made her breath catch in her throat.

He palmed her breasts, moving between one and the other. Whispered Norwegian endearments filled the air. He made love to her as if she were something fragile, special, and she swallowed hard as he filled her once more. Curling her fingers against the floor, she wanted to turn around and touch him.

His thrusts quickened. Harder, faster, as if he couldn’t get enough of her, and she knew the feeling. He changed his angle, striking her G-spot with every thrust. Oh yeah...just like that until her whimpers degenerated into sobbing moans and then her world shattered apart.

More brilliant than the aurora borealis, her orgasm swept her up in never-ending waves. Higher and higher it tossed her, Svein’s pumping rhythm taking her closer to the stars than she’d ever been in her

life. Then he stiffened behind her. With a triumphant roar, he came. His hot seed bathed her channel. His fingers clamped on her hips and as she knelt there, head between her arms, she knew she belonged to him. Mated.

Her breath billowed out of her lungs. She struggled to regain her equilibrium as Svein's fingers slowly uncurled from around her hips and he sat back on his heels. He pulled her with him, and together they cuddled on the sprawl of parkas and snow pants on the floor.

"I was hoping for a hot bath," she whispered, when at last she could catch her breath, "but that was good too."

Svein brushed his lips against her temple. "Go, take your bath. I'll get started on putting our notes into the computer. I'll give you thirty minutes."

"If my legs will support me." She leaned against his chest. "Damn, that was good."

"I know."

His masculine chuckle propelled her to her feet, and wiggling her ass at him, she strode into the bathroom.

* * * * *

Svein padded down the hall in his dark navy sweater and matching woolen socks knit by his mother, and a pair of jeans. Not bothering to knock on the bathroom door, he opened it and leaned against the doorjamb.

He stared at her, the blood rushing south at an alarming rate. With her hair piled on her head in a mass of golden strands, buried to her neck in hot water, she looked like a sea goddess come to life. "Your thirty minutes are up."

Aud squeaked with surprise. "What are you doing in here? Surely you haven't input everything into the computer."

What was he doing here when there was plenty of work to be done? He wanted to say that his need for her burned in his veins. That he longed to sink his cock into her without worrying about the ice, the storm, nothing but the bed beneath them and the ways in which he could please her. A part of him wondered if Aud really wanted to hear it. She seemed to have accepted the physical side of their relationship, but the emotional...he didn't know.

"Your time's up. And there's room in the tub for two. Besides, the computer can wait."

Her breath caught in her throat as her gaze caressed him from head to toe, lingering on the bulge behind his fly. "You look tasty."

He burned like gasoline thrown on a Yule log. "I'm heating up," he said, his gaze deliberately resting on the mounds of her breasts. "You need someone to wash your back." He reached for the hem of his sweater and pulled it over his head. To hell with the subtle approach.

"I could be persuaded." She leaned forward, her golden hair coming loose and spilling over her shoulders.

Svein bit back a groan. He knelt beside the tub and slid his fingers through the warm water. "You better be willing to share." He drank in the sight of the vulnerable curve of her neck, down along the straight line of her back to where it disappeared below the water. Oh, to follow that curve down to her buttocks, to taste the dimples there at the base of her spine...

She turned to face him, her lips inches from his. "Is all this going to change when the team returns?"

Her soft voice wrapped tendrils around his heart. "I mean, our attraction has been simmering for a long time. It was inevitable we give in to it, but I want something more than a quick poke in a cave." A pained grin twisted the corner of her lips.

He sent a silent prayer of thanks that she thought the same way as he and resisted the urge to laugh aloud. "Ever since the moment I met you, I couldn't walk away," Svein replied. "I'm sure the other members of our team can adjust."

He leaned forward and pressed his lips to hers. A gentle touch, one meant to soothe, but the instant his lips touched hers, an almost bestial hunger roared to life inside him. He slid his fingers into the mass of her hair and held her steady as he plundered her mouth. Sliding his tongue along the seam of her lips, he urged Aud to part them. She swayed toward him. His tongue swept inside the hot, moist cavern of her mouth.

Svein groaned. He reached down and unfastened his jeans, unable to take the steady pounding of his cock behind denim and cotton. Then he reached into the warm water to cup her breast. Her nipple pressed into his palm and he wanted to be buried deep inside her, right here, right now.

"Svein," she breathed, parting the kiss long enough to breathe. "You're serious aren't you?"

She struggled to contain the bubble of hope rising within her. She loved him. He might not have said the words, but then again, neither had she.

Svein nodded, rising to his feet and sliding jeans and briefs down before kicking them off, along with his socks. Her gaze roamed the length of his long, muscled legs, pausing at his thick erection. He straightened, and she noticed that it nearly touched his navel. Her mouth, and her pussy, watered. Her muscles clenched. She wanted him inside her, right now. She nearly rose to her knees so she could lean forward and suck his beautiful shaft into her mouth.

"I've never been more serious about anything in my life. I've told you my secret. You know the animal that lives just beneath my flesh." Water sloshed over the sides of the tub as Svein stepped in and then lowered himself behind her.

She waited, taut with anticipation.

"You're mine. I'm not going anywhere, so you better get used to sharing your bed with a polar bear." He stretched out his legs on either side of her then reached for the soap and washcloth that sat on the edge of the tub. He worked up a generous lather and started to wash her back.

Aud closed her eyes. His hands on her back felt heavenly, yet she still feared it wouldn't last. "Polar bears don't mate for life." She struggled to mask the pain in her voice.

The washcloth dropped into the tub with a soft splash. Reaching around her, he cupped the mounds of her breasts in his hands. His breath teased her ear. "You're my golden angel," he said. "I love you. I have for a long time. I admire your strength and your will. It might be too soon, but I hope you can find room in your heart for me." He brushed his thumb across the valley between her breasts.

"Oh, Svein! I already love you." She needed to see his face, needed to see the truth there. She rose on her knees, turning to face him before straddling his legs. She reached between them and circled her fingers around his shaft.

Hot and hard, silk over steel. She stroked him from base to tip. Her hand stilled against his flesh, and she leaned back on her heels to stare at him for a long moment. Love shone from his blue eyes.

Reaching up, he caressed her neck before rubbing strands of her hair between his fingers.

She gave a tiny moan of pleasure. She squeezed the cock in her hand gently. How long had she worked with him and never realized the depth of his feelings? She hated to even contemplate it. Had they not been caught in the storm, she doubted she'd have found out. They had lots of lost time to make up. She positioned her pussy over his cock. "I love you, Svein." With those words, she held his cock until the head slipped inside her, then released it and impaled herself on his shaft.

Spending Christmas with Svein in a cave, and then the second day of Christmas with him here, might not have been how she originally planned to spend her holidays, but it was certainly more fun than spending them hiding in her room working on papers and research. She grinned. "You know, this might be my best holiday ever."

"I know it's mine." Svein surged into her. "Polar bears might not mate for life, but this one does." He punctuated his sentence with another thrust.

Aud pressed her lips to his. With his cock in her body, his tongue plunging into her mouth, she never wanted to let him go. The long, slow slide of his cock into her slick channel filled her. She wound her arms around his neck, her breasts pressing against his chest. Aud clung to him.

Her eyelids fluttered closed. This was exactly what she wanted, what she needed. Svein loved her. And she loved him. A man to share her research, her bed, her passion for the bears and for the science. She never imagined she'd find someone who fit her so perfectly.

Svein palmed her ass. Water sloshed around them. The need for air parted them and she tilted her head back. Svein kissed a trail of fire along her jaw, her throat, his love nips sending heat straight to her pussy. The chill in the air beaded her nipples into diamond-hard points, and heat from Svein's hand seared her as he palmed her sensitive flesh.

Aud cupped the back of his head, watching as he kissed a path to her breast. His white hair against her skin, the heat from his mouth, the water around them, it swamped her senses. She watched transfixed as he pulled her nipple into his mouth and sucked.

"Oh yeah!" She tilted her hips to send his cock deeper inside her. Doubting him seemed foolish now, and as he pinched and sucked her nipples, simply *thinking* seemed foolish. His talented hands and cock drove rational thought from her mind.

Aud curled her fingers into his muscled shoulders. Solid, secure, the hand on her ass lifted her even as he used it for leverage as he fucked her. Fingers slid into the cleft of her buttocks, swirling around her puckered hole. Teasing. Tormenting.

Her breath came hard and fast as her pussy clenched down on his cock. With every thrust Svein demonstrated the depth of his need for her. And when he pulled his lips from her breast to tilt his head back against the tile wall, Aud watched, spellbound by the rapt pleasure on his face. His deep moans echoed off the walls.

Her pussy tightened around his shaft. One more thrust, two, and her orgasm burst through her. She cried out, fingers digging into his skin. Her breath caught in her throat as she rode the riptide of her release.

"Yeah, baby. Just like that!"

Distantly she registered Svein's voice urging her on. Her own cries drowned out his words as he surged into her once more. Before she had a chance to catch her breath, she spiraled toward another release.

Svein slid the finger at her anus past the tight ring of muscle, to the first knuckle.

Oh damn! She'd never felt anything as wanton as the slender penetration of his finger. With his cock stuffing her full and his finger in her ass, Aud wanted to ride him all day and all night long. She bet he

had the stamina of a bear, and she longed to give him a workout.

She leaned forward, her lips inches from his. “Fuck me, Svein.” She licked his lips then kissed him, turning into the aggressor. Her tongue dove into his mouth before pulling his own into her mouth to suck on it. In her mind, she imagined the thick penetration of his cock in her mouth, wrapping her lips around his girth and drawing him deep into her throat.

The finger in her ass slid a little deeper. Svein lowered himself in the water trying to get a deeper angle—and then he had it, his cock brushing against her G-spot with each thrust.

She couldn’t last much longer. Wrapping an arm around his shoulders, she pressed him to her. Stroke after stroke he took her, the desire inside her coiling tighter and tighter.

Svein swallowed her whimpers, his finger sliding in and out of her anus. Just like his cock, it filled her, stretched her just enough to be on the pleasurable side of pain. Her orgasm rose like a bubble, rising for the surface. Aud released his lips, her head titling back as she screamed. Her body convulsed around him, wave after wave of pleasure slamming into her body. Water sloshed violently over the edge of the tub.

Svein clenched her hip and thrust once more. His cock surged forward, growing even larger inside her, and then his hot seed filled her. Svein shouted his release, her name on his lips.

Aud sank into him. Her breath gasped in and out of her lungs. The water around them grew slightly tepid but she barely noticed. She focused on Svein, his cock still half hard inside her body, his forehead pressed against hers, their breaths mingling. Against her chest, his heart pounded. His finger slipped slowly out of her.

She leaned back and grinned at him. “I have an idea for our next paper,” she said between panting breaths.

“Oh?” Svein arched his eyebrow.

“The mating habits of polar bears.” She grinned at him, ready to step from the tub, lead him to the bedroom and begin round three. “We better get a head start before the team returns.”

She kissed him and knew they’d get to their other paper eventually. Right now, far more scientific work needed to be done. Svein slid his fingers along the crease of her ass, the gentle pressure driving coherent thoughts from her mind.

She had no doubt the mating habits of the polar bear would prove to be a fascinating study.

About the Author

Mary Winter began writing when she was 16, using it as an excuse to skip gym class. She currently lives in Iowa with her pets and dreams of writing full-time. Her advice to anyone is: “Persistence pays off. Don’t ever give up on your dreams!”

Mary welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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