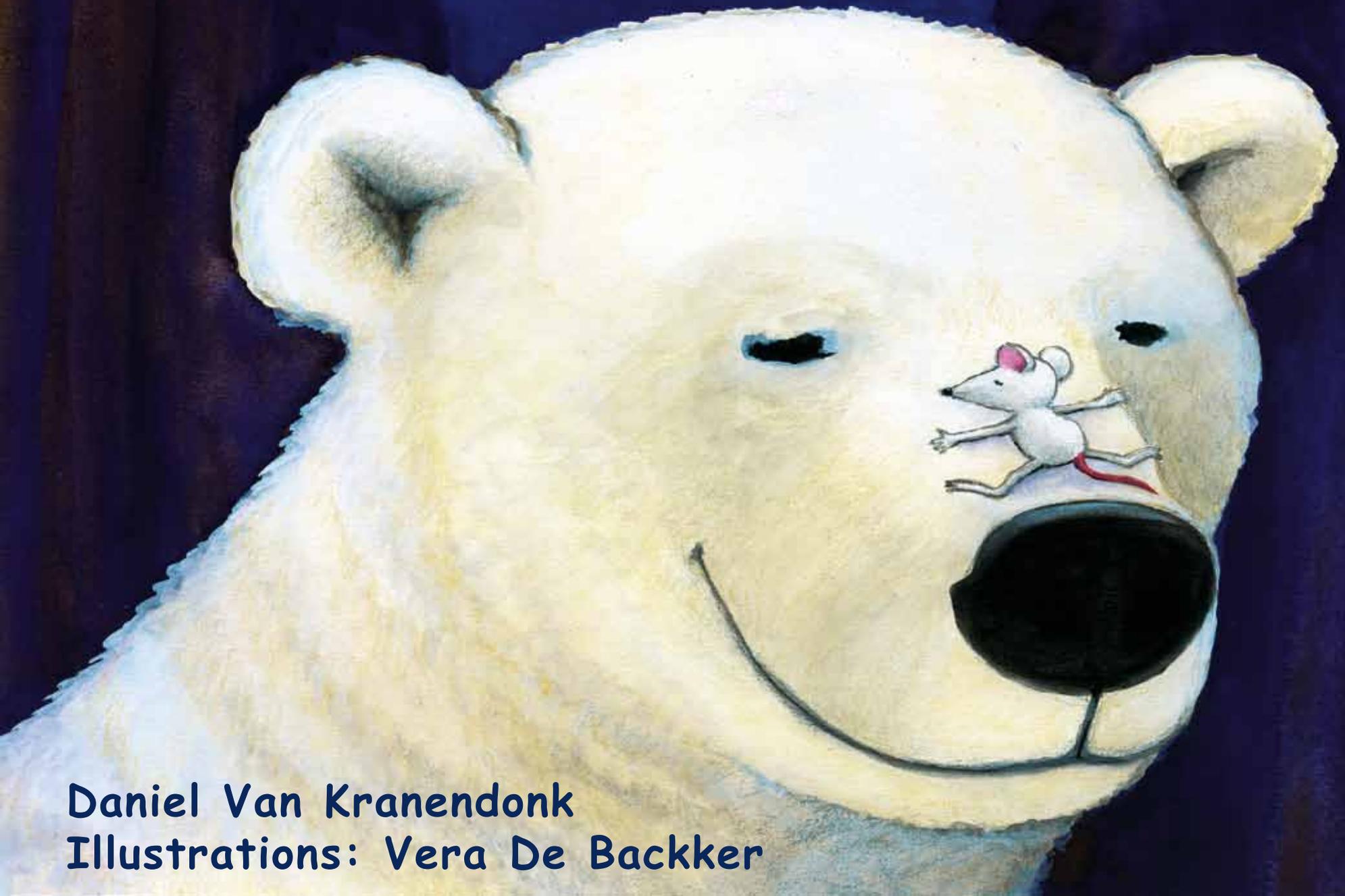


THE TRUE STORY OF CANADA'S MYSTERIOUS CAVE



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Illustrations: Vera De Backer

Have you ever heard about the strange sounding cave in Canada?

You haven't? That is surprising. It is actually world famous for the strange sounds it makes.

Many stories are told to explain this weird cave. Each story I have heard is more ridiculous than the next. I come from Canada and I know truth about this cave.

Would you like to hear the story?



It all started with a little mouse called Horance. Horance was a city mouse. But Horance had gotten tired of all the noise, bad smells, fast cars, pollution and especially all the cats that lived in the big city. It was no longer the quiet, peaceful place it once had been.

Horance simply wanted to get away from it all. He had heard that no quieter or more beautiful spot could be found than the snowy wilderness in the far north of Canada. His friends said that if he really wanted to get away from it all ... then this was the place to go.

But as Horance stood there he was beginning to feel he had overdone it. This really was far away from it all ... and everything ... and everyone ...

This was a strange place where the animals were very different.

Horance was beginning to feel rather lonely.



One day whilst trekking through the snow and dreaming of being chased through the city streets by cats again, Horance came across a cave. He peeped in through the window, and saw Frank.

Frank was a very large Polar Bear with the most beautiful, thick, warm, white fur coat Horance had ever seen.

"Hum," thought Horance "that must be the best possible friend a small mouse like me could have ... what a fluffy warm blanket he must be."

To cuddle up in Frank's warm coat was the nicest way Horance could imagine spending the long cold nights in Canada's winter land.

But Horance worried about what Polar Bears liked to eat ... was it mice?

And Horance was scared to make contact with such a large animal ... which he knew nothing about. So Horance went home alone to his little hole in the snow.



FRANK
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But one very cold and very early morning Horance picked up his courage and rang the bell at Frank's cave. Frank was fast asleep since this was his hibernating time but Horance persisted until Frank woke up and opened the door.

"Good morning," said Horance cheerfully, "I know it is kind of early, but I really need a cup of warm tea ... well hot tea actually ... with honey please ... fresh clover honey... two spoons full."

Frank, not really being fully awake yet just mumbled, "Of course ... with fresh clover honey," and went to put the kettle on.

They drank their tea in silence since Frank was still kind of sleepy and Horance was still kind of nervous about what Polar Bears liked to eat.

Finally Frank broke the silence and said "Nice of you to drop in but I really have to get back to my hibernation now," and promptly went off to sleep.



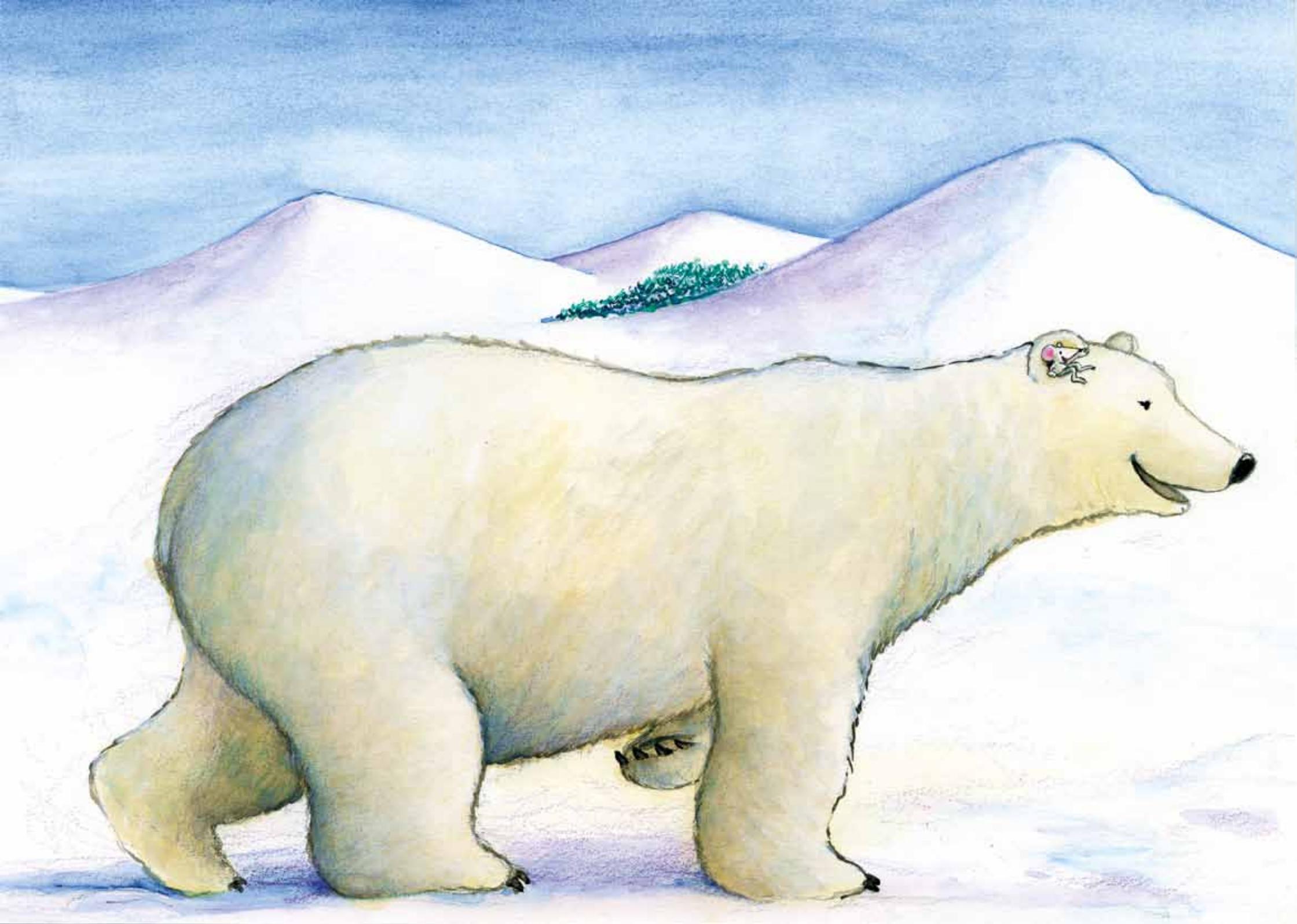
Horance thought that since he wasn't directly asked to leave then he might as well stay. So Horance moved in and without Frank realising it they became cave partners.

By the time Frank woke up from his hibernation, Horance had come to feel right at home and had lost all his nervousness about being around such a large bear.

Frank was a large, quiet kind of guy who loved to listen to stories and jokes and Horance was a little noisy kind of guy who loved to tell stories and jokes and he knew lots of them.

It turned out that they could learn a lot from each other ... even if sometimes they seemed pretty different from each other.

Frank and Horance got along so well that within a few weeks they had become the best of friends.



Since Frank was so large, it meant that he had to eat a lot. So every few days Frank had to go out and hunt for food.

To make these hunts more fun Frank would take Horance along. Horance would ride along, cuddled up in Frank's right ear and tell him all his stories.

One of Frank's favourite stories was the one about a handsome dark Black Bear and a beautiful pearl white Polar Bear, who fell in love, got married and had lots of kids ... and that was how the Brown Bears came to be created.



The only problem with this was that Horance's stories would make Frank laugh so hard that all the animals he was trying to hunt would hear them coming and would be long gone before they got anywhere near them.

"I wonder what has become of all the animals," Frank wondered to himself, "there used to be lots of them ... it is as if they're all off on vacation."

So Frank had to try and satisfy himself with various berries and grubs ... and lots of them at that.

"Well I guess it's Blueberries again," Frank grumbled.



One of Frank and Horance's favourite activities, while they were out berry hunting, was to find the longest and steepest and snowiest hill to slide down.

Frank would lie on his back with his paws up in the air and Horance would bury himself deep in Frank's ear and hang on for dear life as they vooshed down the hill.

"Go faster," Horance squeaked with glee, "but look out for the trees."

After a few hills they would be so tuckered out from all the excitement that they would quietly go home together.



One day however, half way down a hill, Horance fell out.

"Eeek," squeaked Horance, but Frank did not hear him.



Benjamin, an owl, had seen Horance fall out and Frank walk off.

Being a creature born to eat mice he swooped down and grabbed Horance.

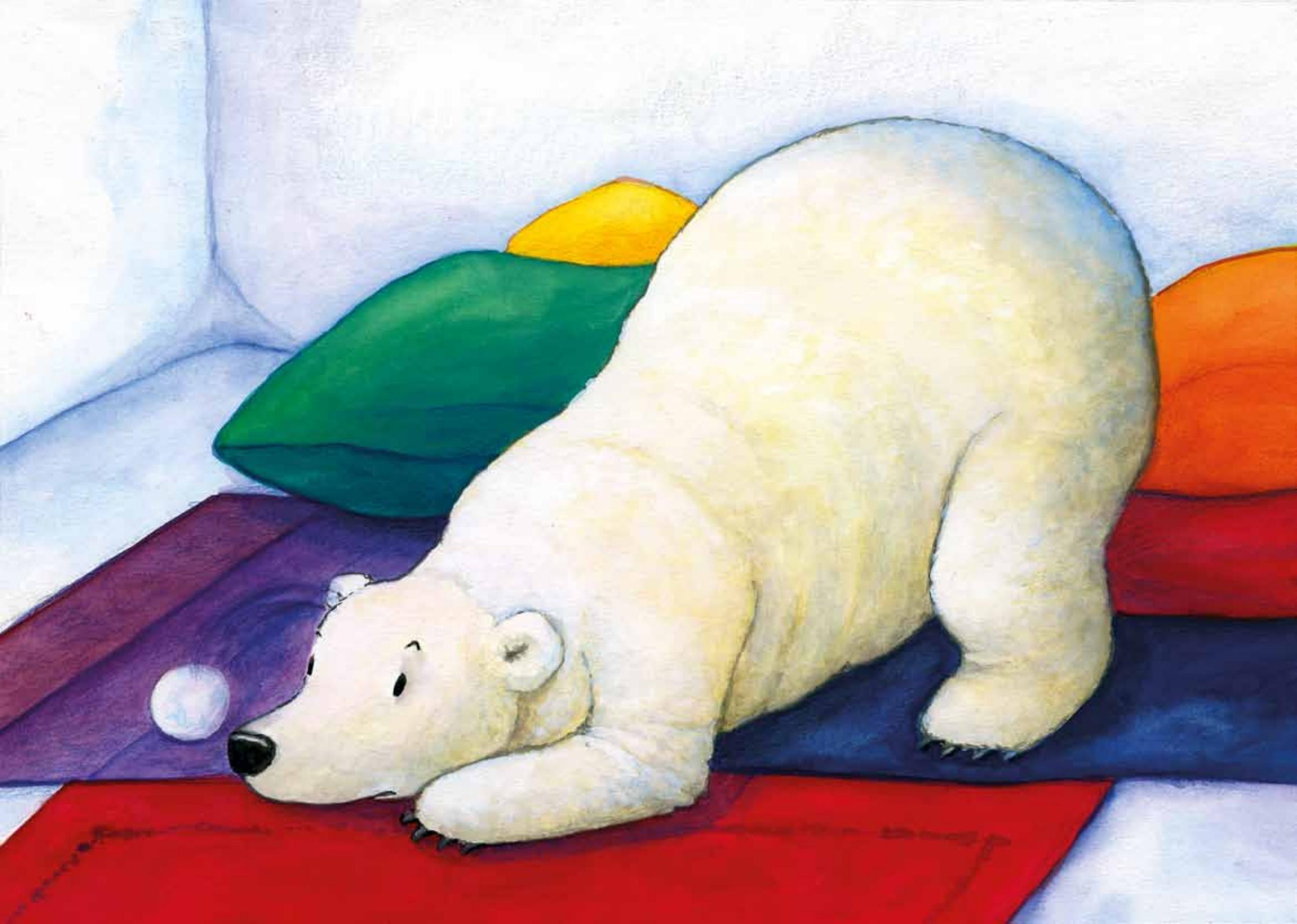
"Hello dinner," said Benjamin politely, "I hope you go well with mushroom sauce."



Back at his nest, Benjamin said, "If you don't mind waiting a bit I think I will save you until tomorrow. Please try and entertain yourself a bit," and he promptly went off to sleep to work up a good appetite.

As Benjamin slept, Horance looked out of his high-rise prison and realized that there was no hope of escape.

"Oh no," thought Horance, "Where is Frank? He could be anywhere," and sat down and spent a terrible sleepless night worrying.



When Frank came home and put his head down for Horance to jump out all that jumped out was a ball of snow.

At first Frank thought it was his friend but as the snow started to melt he realized what had happened.

“Oh no,” thought Frank, “Where is Horance? He could be anywhere,” and sat down and spent a terrible sleepless night worrying.

The next day Frank decided the only thing to do was to go out and try to find his lost friend.



That evening Benjamin invited Horance to share a bottle of wine with him and to help set the table for his upcoming meal.

"Here," said Benjamin, "Salt, pepper, plate, fork and knife, and two glasses for wine ... one for you and one for me ... that should do it."

As Horance got into the spirit of things, he tried not to think so much of what Benjamin was planning to eat for his next meal.

In fact, Horance started to remember all the silly owl stories he knew.



"There was this owl, you see," began Horance, "well actually he couldn't see very well. That was the problem. In fact, he had really poor eye sight and he had to wear really fat glasses just so he wouldn't crash into trees while he was flying around.

Every time this owl flew around and looked down for some dinner mice, his glasses would fall off and then he could not see the mice he was after.

Finally, after weeks of not being able to catch a single mouse, he found a way to use his heavy glasses as a kind of stun bomb by dropping them on the mouse he wanted. This would knock the mouse out long enough for the poor owl to fly down close enough so that he could see the mouse again and catch it.

This worked very well until one day he broke his glasses when they hit a rock ... CRASH ... millions of pieces every where ... so he ended up eating over at friends a lot and looking at a fuzzy world."



"Ha ha ha !!!" laughed Benjamin, whose sense of humour was rather simple, "That's one of the funniest stories I've ever heard."

As the evening wore on the stories got sillier and sillier and Benjamin and Horance laughed louder and longer. Soon Benjamin forgot all about eating Horance and instead nibbled on some stale crackers he had left over in his cupboard and they ended up spending a wildly silly time together.

The more Benjamin got to know Horance the more he found out that it was a much better idea to have him as a friend instead of just using him for dinner.

There was much Benjamin could learn about the world from this little mouse who had travelled all the way to the snowy north.



That same evening, as Frank was on his way home after a hard and disappointing day spent searching for his friend, he came upon the strangest sounding tree.

Frank was sure he had never heard a tree laugh in such an unusual way. After a while, he realized he had never heard a tree laugh at all ... and in fact he thought he could recognize one of the laughs.

"Horance," he called loudly, "is that you?"

A little white nose appeared out of a hole at the top of the tree.

"Frank," called the little white nose, "is that you !?! "

Two happier friends could not be found in the whole wide world.



"How shall I ever come down to you?" asked Horance.

"Oh just jump out and land on me. I have the thickest and softest coat you can find ... you'll be OK," answered Frank.

So Horance jumped and hardly noticed his landing on top of Frank.

After giving each other big hello again hugs, they went off telling each other about the terribly, miserable sleepless night they had spent and how much they had missed each other.



Half way home Frank felt something rather strange land upon his head.

Looking up he saw a large grey owl who, looking down sternly at Frank, said, "I have come to rescue my friend Horance."

"YOUR friend," exclaimed Frank, "I just rescued him from you!"

After a little discussion, they realized that instead of fighting over each other's friendship, they could just as well all be good friends and the best solution was for them to live together in Franks cave.



No better solution could have been found.

Benjamin ate his dinner discreetly out of Horance's sight and Frank managed to catch some good food when Horance stayed at home with Benjamin.

Horance and Benjamin kept each other company when Frank needed his long winter hibernation (sleep).

And together they managed to make a fun and interesting new home.



And when they went sliding down hills, Benjamin stood on Frank's back right paw and kept an eye on Horance in case he fell out again.



The long, dark winter evenings were spent telling each other stories and even Frank learned how to tell some.

Horance laughed with his squeaky high voice, Benjamin with a rounded "WHO" "WHO" kind of voice and Frank with his big, deep, growly kind of voice.

To hear these three laughs come out of an echoy cave is one of the strangest sounds you can imagine and this is the true story behind Canada's famous cave.

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