



Bär im Universum / The Bear and the Universe

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Prologue, chapters 1 & 2

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Prologue

On the raft

In the middle of the ocean, a raft is bobbing up and down. On it, Benny the polar bear is making up a song:

This is the polar bear song

Sing it loud

My name is Benny

I built a raft

I watch the clouds chasing by

In the sky

I hoist the sail and

The wind says YES

Where am I going

Who will I be

Will I find friends

Will someone love me

This is the polar bear song

Sing it loud

My name is Benny

I built this raft

He hums away to himself until he falls asleep, tired from the long journey. He has come all the way from the North Pole after all. From the land of ice and snow. The wind blows.

Chapter 1

Distant shores

The raft lands on a distant shore. When Benny wakes up, it is a bright sunny day. Birds are soaring in the sky and there's a gentle breeze. He rubs the sleep out of his eyes, yawns loudly and looks around in awe. He can see the sea along the shore and dunes and hills behind him.

This is so different from home, Benny thinks. Look at all the colours. Where am I, I wonder?

Benny notices something hopping and bouncing along the beach.

It is a very small, very white something, strutting along on two legs. Benny has never seen anything like it before.

“Hey, who are you?” he shouts, jumping to his feet. At last - he is not on his own any more!

The odd little figure marches right up to Benny’s nose, puts its arms on its hips and says, “Well now! Who are you-oo?”

Instead of answering, Benny says, “You’re white, just like me, but apart from that - you’re very different!”

“Well, that’s not surprising is it? I am a chicken after all! Don’t say you never saw a chicken before?”

“No,” Benny says. “I’m from the land of ice and snow. Or what’s left of it, that is. My block of ice melted away under my bum. So I built a raft and now I’m here.

“What’s your name?” the chicken wants to know.

“I’m Benny,” says the bear. “Benny with a Y.”

“Nice to meet you, Benny with a Y,” the chicken says. “I’m Polly. Polly with a double L.”

“It’s lovely to meet you, Polly with a double L,” Benny says, sounding excited. “Do you mind if I touch you?”

“I don’t mind, but be careful,” Polly warns him. She holds out the tip of her wing. Very carefully, Benny puts out his paw and strokes the chicken’s feathers as gently as he can.

“What a wonderful coat of fur you have, I’ve never felt anything like it!”

“It’s not a coat of fur! It’s a coat of feathers. Have you never seen feathers before?”

“No, I’m from the land of ice and snow. My block of ice melted away under my bum ...” He stops talking suddenly because there is a loud rumbling sound. “That’s my tummy rumbling. Have you got a little fishy for me?”

“A fishy?” Polly asks sounding confused. “Why on earth would I have a fishy? I’m not a sea eagle, you know!”

“Just one little fishy, fried or raw, any kind of fish will do. I’m starving!”

“Fish! Oh yuckity yuck!” Polly shudders from beak to claw. “I can show you where to find some lovely worms or beetles...”

“Will they fill my tummy?” Benny asks.

Polly looks at him. “Hmmm. You are quite big ...”

“I know,” Benny says. “I’m sorry.”

“Never mind,” Polly says, “I’ll make you some snaily chilli”

“What does snaily chilli taste like?” Benny wants to know.

“Snaily chilli is really really yummy. It’s my absolute favourite.”

“But will it fill me up?”

“I hope so. Let’s find out. Come on.” Polly points to a path leading through the dunes. “I live up there on the hill.”

Chapter 2

Polly’s place

When they have scraped the last drop of snaily chilli out of the saucepan and licked their plates clean, Benny burps for the third time in a row. “Excuse me,” he says and burps again. “I’m sorry! That was really tasty, but my tummy’s not used to snaily chilli.”

“Did you get enough to eat at least?” Polly asks.

“I’m stuffed,” Benny says, wriggling around on his chair. “But could I have a little fishy for dessert?”

Polly puts down her glass on the table with a bang. “We’ve just eaten all of my snails!” she clucks. No, I don’t have a little fishy for dessert.”

Benny jumps.

“I’m sorry,” Polly said. “It’s just, well, I don’t think I can find all the food you’re going to need every day. You’ll have to go fishing.”

“Polly, where am I? I’ve never been away from home before.”

“I’ll show you,” Polly says, beckoning Benny to follow her outside. “This is my land. Polynesia .The wild chicken country. It’s named after me.” Like a conqueror, Polly spreads her wings out wide and points this way and that as they walk around her house. “Polynesia reaches from the top of the mountain here in the north, where we’ll see the polar star rising in a minute, to the forests in the east and over there ... to the row of hills in the south and the sea shore in the west, where you landed.”

Polly looks very happy as her gaze rests on the horizon. “All mine!” she sighs. The two of them enjoy the view together and don’t say anything for a while.

“Are there polar bears in Polynesia?” Benny asks at last, sounding hopeful.

“Of course not. It’s far too warm.”

She’s right. They stare out to sea. Benny starts to feel sad.

“Oh dearie dearie me,” he sniffs.

“What is it, what’s the matter?”

“I need a friend,” Benny sobs. “Someone like me, a polar bear friend, a polar bear girlfriend in fact. If I don’t find a polar bear girlfriend, I’m going to die out! You see? I’m the last polar bear in the whole wide world.

Benny is sobbing lots now. It's almost impossible to understand what he's saying.

"Last ... *sob* ... b-b-bear ... *sob* ... last p-p-polar bear ... *sob* ... in the *hu-hu-hu* world ... *sob* ... no b-b-bears in ... *sob* ... Polly *hu-hu-hu* nesia ... *sob* ... no *hu-hu-hu*..."

Polly tries to hug Benny but it is difficult because polar bears are big and furry, and chicken wings are actually quite short.

"And when I'm gone, there'll be no more bear hugs either," Benny says more clearly. Then he bursts into tears again.

"Because ... *sniff*... b-b-because ... *sniff* ... I'm going to ... *sniff* ... d-d-die out ... *hu-hu-hu* ..."

At least Polly manages to wrap her wings around Benny's neck to comfort him.

"There must be something we can do. Let's see," Polly says quietly. Then, louder now, she says, "Come on, blow your nose. You can use my handkerchief if you like ..." But before Polly manages to unfold her handkerchief, Benny rubs his great bear's snout on her feathers and accidentally wipes his nose at the same time.

"Ah that's better," he says, "your coat is so soft and lovely. Thank you Polly."

"Oh dear," Polly says under her breath but decides to ignore the mess. She quietly preens her feathers without a fuss. *At least he's calmed down a bit*, she thinks.

The two of them sit quietly, side by side, leaning against each other.

"You know what, Polly?" Benny says after a while. "I like you. And I love your feathers. They are nearly as soft and fluffy as polar bear fur."

"I like my feathers too," Polly laughs.

"I like you very much, and your snailly chilli is great, and when we find a river or get back to the sea, I'll catch you a fishy and fry it for you. And if anyone annoys you, I'll bang them on the head. Will you marry me?"

Polly lets out a startled "No-oo!"

“Oh – “

Benny, we can’t get married,” Polly says.

“Why not,”

“We are too different.”

“Yes! It’s really exciting!”

“No, it’s impossible!”

But Benny doesn’t believe her. “Just think of all the lovely children we could have.”

Now Polly is lost for words. *This bear really is as nutty as a fruitcake* she thinks and then she says it aloud. “You’re as nutty as a fruitcake!”

“What does that mean?” Benny wants to know.

“Benny, don’t say you’re falling in love with a chicken!” Polly says.

“What does falling in love mean?”

“Well, if your heart is beating wildly – like it’s ... leaping about ... in your chest.”

Polly explains.

Benny thinks about that. “I don’t think so.”

“Thank goodness!” Polly says sounding relieved. “Forget it.”

“But there is a fluttery feeling in my tummy,” Benny says, “like being on the raft in the stormy sea. Or eating a live fish which wriggles inside me...”

“Oh dearie me!” Polly sighs.

“Is that what falling in love is? Are you falling in love too? With me?” Benny wants to know.

“You and me - ... er, no... it’s not going to work.”

Why not?”

“Because you are a polar bear and I’m a chicken!”

“Yes! It’s really exciting!”

“Benny, you’re not the brightest bear in the universe.”

“I’m not sure about the universe, but I’m bright enough! When I roll around in the snow, my fur turns into a glittering coat of crystals and on the polar night, it’s a lovely shimmering bluey-white. Sometimes even, when there’s a full moon, it shines on the ice like a star....” He starts feeling sad again. “On the ice... back home...”

Luckily, the two of them don’t mind sitting in silence when there is nothing to say. It’s very quiet.

Then Polly has an idea.

“I know! Why don’t I put a lonely hearts ad in the paper?”

“What’s a lonely hearts ad? It sounds good!”

Polly gets a pen and paper and starts to write:

*Funny, friendly polar bear
seeks fish-loving girlfriend.
Preferably with fur coat.*

“What do you think?” Polly asks.

“It’s brilliant!” says Benny. “But could you say I want a photo, too, please!”