

Polar

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The scientist woke up in the night.

The night had lasted for days now, there was no sunrise, no sunset, just a heavy immutable suffocation of darkness scattered with twinkling shards of stars. The moon hung conspicuously; solemnly winking at the isolated research station – a smudge against the white snow, shielded by dark shadows. In the distance, the sheet of ice split into floating chunks, like a broken, half-melted slab of white chocolate. It was silent, except for the penetrating lament of a leopard seal.

It was funny how they called it the polar night. It made you think that it was the opposite of night when it was just that. Like a night in every way, without the knowledge the sun would rise in the morning.

The researchers had been living entirely inside the station for the past days, waiting out the night. Daybreak was slow in coming. They ached for the sun.

The scientist groggily rubbed his eyes. A dilapidated radio was ironically playing 'Here Comes the Sun' in the background. He hummed along mindlessly to the Beatles.

Here comes the sun, doo-doo-doo-doo.

He looked around his cabin. His fleece-lined sleeping bag sadly supporting itself in a corner of his bed, drooping and spiritless. A UV lamp, a heater. His defective satellite phone – he'd been relying on a colleague for essential calls – crumpling his field notebook. He picked it up hurriedly, smoothing the squashed pages of rough diagrams.

It's been a long, cold, lonely winter.

He scanned his walls, surfaces cracking and shrinking with the cold. Rifts running across them like tectonic plates. One wall was covered with photos. His former self beamed from a grainy laminated frame, a roguish grin spread from ear to ear, surrounded by family. He breathed out deeply. He had no news of them.

He viewed the faded, splintered door to his right. A map of fissures was painted on it. The raging winds pummelled it, and he shuddered to hear the battering. He reached into his pocket and brought out a key, slowly gazing at its surface. Eyes darting from key to door and back again, he felt an uncanny and inexplicable urge to rush out daringly. There would be nothing to stop him. The others were asleep, almost hibernating in a nest of darkness.

I feel that ice is slowly melting.

He gazed outside, blue eyes taking in the desolate pitch-colour landscape. Their research station was a miniscule island, surrounded by the ocean on all sides. Terrified, he looked north. A stranded polar bear made plaintive cries. He heard its hushed breath, felt its impossible presence.

Here comes the sun, and I say, it's all right.

The sun peeked over the horizon. He locked eyes with the polar bear. There was a frozen scene: man, bear, a tiny solidarity of seclusion. The radio was droning louder than ever.

It's all right.