

Read some extracts from “The Humming Grizzly Bear Cubs”

EXTRACT FROM CHAPTER 1

‘ARE YOU COMFORTABLY SETTLED, JEACs?’ said Janet Larkin, starting the ten passenger van.

‘Yes, thanks!’ chorused the JEACs. The van left Calgary airport, heading west to Banff, from where they would carry on to Manipau Wildlife Conservation Trust.

‘It’s marvellous to be together again,’ said Anu, who was seated behind Janet. ‘It’s the seventh of July, and I can’t believe we’re actually in *Canada*, and on the way to Manipau!’

‘We’ve been so ecstatic that we couldn’t concentrate on anything,’ said Amy, hugging Anu and Rohan who were seated on either side of her. ‘When we heard the announcement that your flight had landed, Mich gave such a shriek that the boy in front of her fell off his chair.’

Michelle, known as Mich to family and friends, chuckled. ‘It was hilarious! I had to apologize, and get his grandmother another bottle of water since she dropped hers when I yelled.’

‘Gina only gave a small yelp when we landed,’ chuckled Nimal. ‘But the shrieks she and Mich let out when they met must have been heard all the way to Manipau.’

‘You wait...’ began Gina, but Umedh laughingly interrupted.

‘Peace, kiddo. Nimal, put a sock in it – you know they’ll get their revenge.’

‘It’s Nimal who...’ said Mich.

‘Calm down, JEACs,’ laughed Janet, as everyone joined in the fun.

‘Okay, Aunty Janet. Please tell us how Hunter’s doing,’ said Rohan.

‘He’s fine, and has made friends with Sam and Codey, dogs belonging to two staff members who are currently on vacation. Hunter’s at our place today, eagerly awaiting your arrival.’

‘He *knows* you’re coming and kept going to the door, his tail wagging nineteen to the dozen,’ added Mich. ‘We couldn’t bring him since he was scheduled for one last injection this morning,’ said Amy. ‘Everyone loves him.’

‘He’s a lovable dog! Are any of you hungry?’ asked Janet.

‘Nimal’s simply STARVING!’ yelled Gina and Mich, promptly.

‘Cheeky brats,’ muttered Nimal sotto voce. ‘Aunty Janet, I’m a tad peckish, but will valiantly staunch the hunger pangs until we arrive at a watering place, which I assume will be soon.’

‘Poor lad,’ said Janet, as the others laughed mockingly. ‘Mich, pull out the cookies. Nimal, you’ll have a good meal in an hour’s time at the Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel.’

‘Thank you, Aunty Janet,’ said Nimal. ‘The way these kids bully me is simply one of the...’

‘... saddest stories of his life,’ chanted everyone.

Teasing one another, catching up on news, and admiring the beauty of the Rocky Mountains they were driving through made time fly, and they were soon entering the parking lot of the hotel.

‘It looks like a castle,’ said Gina.

‘It was originally built in the nineteenth century, constructed in the Scottish baronial style, and opened to the public in 1888,’ said Amy. ‘Over the years it underwent several renovations and is now quite different from the original structure.’

Inside the elegant hotel, seated at a table with a gorgeous view of the Rockies, the group had a delicious brunch at 10:15 a.m.

‘What time will we reach Manipau, Aunty?’ asked Anu.

‘When we leave here we go north-west past Jasper on the Yellowhead Highway; then we take Highway 40 north-west from Hinton and branch off on Manipau Trail. We’ll be home around six this evening.’

‘That’s quite a drive,’ said Rohan. ‘Would you like us to share the driving, Aunty?’

‘Once we’re in quieter areas that would be great, thanks – you, Amy and Umedh can take turns.’

‘What time does Chris-J arrive, Mum?’ asked Mich. ‘We call my cousin Chris-J for “junior” to avoid confusion since our dad’s name is also Chris,’ she explained. ‘When Dad’s not around, we just say Chris.’

‘Chris will get to *Tranquillity* between three and four this afternoon,’ said Janet. ‘As you know, that is the name of our home.’

‘Yes, and it’s a lovely name!’ said Anu. ‘I’m glad Chris-J’s joining us. He sounds like a fun chap from what you’ve said. Will anyone else from Manipau join us?’

‘Corazon, for sure,’ said Amy. ‘She’s fanatical over animals, and longing to meet all of you – especially Nimal.’

‘What an unusual name,’ said Umedh.

‘She’s a First Nations kid and her name means *heart*,’ explained Amy. ‘Her father’s one of our new rangers, while her mom, Ahnah, assists with fundraising. Her brother, Nanook, is four.’

‘You have a cosmopolitan group at Manipau, right?’ said Rohan.

‘Absolutely – a veritable United Nations,’ said Amy. ‘Greek, First Nations, Italian, Indian, Jamaican, Spanish, Irish, Chinese, Arabian, African, British, Russian, Korean, South American and American – those are the main ones.’

‘That sounds great,’ said Nimal. ‘Are there lots of kids?’

‘Yes, but most of the kids in our age range, other than Corazon, are currently either on vacation or at various summer camps,’ said Amy. ‘They’ll be back by the twenty-third of July, and we’ll all work together for the fundraiser on the sixteenth of August.’

‘The youngsters were reluctant to leave Manipau,’ laughed Janet, ‘because you JEACs are famous. We assured them that you were here till the twenty-fourth of August, and they’d have plenty of time with you.’

‘So I don’t get to sign autographs? No queues of adoring fans?’ sighed Nimal dramatically.

‘Dumbo!’ said Amy, pulling his hair affectionately. ‘But I *can* call up my girlfriends who want to meet you: Kioni, Haley, Lianne, Alexa, Mo Li, Kaitlyn, Queisha, Susan, Cara, Meg, Nancy...’ She trailed off as Nimal groaned and the others laughed.

‘Golly gumboots! Don’t you dare, Amy,’ protested Nimal, looking horrified.

‘Scared?’ challenged Amy.

‘Petrified! Now, tell us more about Manipau.’

Janet’s cell phone rang, and she moved away to answer it.

‘I know Manipau’s humongous, Amy, and you mentioned that you’ve added an animal shelter,’ said Anu. ‘How’s that going?’

‘Extremely well. People bring animals to us, or tell us about them, and we go on rescue missions. We have over 60 animals.’

‘What news of the Conservation Community...’ began Umedh. He stopped, as Janet returned to the table, looking upset. ‘What’s happened, Aunty Janet?’

‘Hassan, one of our rangers, called to check when we’d be home. We’re facing a serious problem at Manipau but I didn’t want to spoil your reunion. If you’ve finished eating, let’s go, and I’ll update you in the van.’

‘Sure, Aunty,’ said Anu.

The JEACs bustled around, and within fifteen minutes they were on their way.

‘What’s up, Mom?’ begged Amy.

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EXTRACT FROM CHAPTER 2

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Hurit was rolled onto a sled attached to a motorized ATV, and wheeled into a lab.

Nimal stayed with Lisa, Chris, Tulok and Hassan, in order to lend a hand, while the young folk introduced themselves.

‘That was *awesome*,’ said Chris-J. He hugged his cousins, Amy and Mich, and shook hands with Rohan, Anu, Umedh and Gina. ‘My cousins told me about Nimal, but to actually see a completely wild animal react to anyone like that – it’s incredible.’

‘It’s amazing,’ said Corazon. ‘I want to see him with the cubs, too.’

Aunty Rani’s waiting for him at the animal nursery.’

‘Yeah,’ said Ricky, bemusedly. ‘It was *totally* – er –...’ He broke off, clearly at a loss for words.

‘Are the three of you going to join us at GW?’ asked Amy.

‘That’s if you don’t mind a loony bin!’ chuckled Anu. ‘With seven crazy JEACs, the three of you, plus Hunter and whatever other animals attach themselves to Nimal, it’s likely to be slightly insane.’

‘Sounds like fun – I’m in!’ said Chris-J.

‘And I,’ said Corazon.

‘Me, too!’ said Ricky.

‘Goodo,’ said Amy.

‘What do you mean by *JEACs*?’ asked Ricky.

‘We’ll tell you about it tomorrow at GW,’ said Umedh, hearing voices in the passage.

Nimal and the adults put the still dozing grizzly back in the enclosure, close to the mesh, and Nimal knelt outside, waiting for her to wake up.

Five minutes later Nimal said softly, ‘The reversal agent’s working – her eyelids flickered.’ He began to speak to Hurit as she opened her eyes, and she listened to him calmly, before falling asleep again.

‘Let’s leave her alone,’ said Lisa. As everyone left the area, Lisa gave Nimal a hug. ‘Thank you. That was awesome. I wish I could see you with the cubs; but I need to stay here.’

‘Will she be okay?’ said Nimal anxiously.

‘We don’t know, son,’ said Chris. ‘Grizzlies can make amazing recoveries, although this one’s in bad shape; she’ll miss her cubs which might send her into depression.’

‘I see,’ said Nimal, looking upset. Chris patted his shoulder.

‘I’ll keep you posted on her situation,’ said Lisa. ‘If she survives the next two days...’ She trailed off, said goodbye, and returned to the room from where she could monitor Hurit’s enclosure.

‘We have to find out who did this and *stop* them,’ said Nimal fiercely.

‘You will – I have confidence in you *JEACs*,’ said Chris. ‘Let’s take you to see the babies. They’ve got to feed, or we’ll lose them.’

‘Sure,’ said Nimal, squaring his shoulders.

As the group left the Sanctuary, Chris-J, Corazon and Ricky shook hands with Nimal, speechlessly, mounted their ATVs, and led the way to the animal nursery.

‘You must be the *JEACs*,’ said a motherly lady who had a little dog in her arms. ‘I’m Rani, and this is my dog, Lulu; it’s lovely to meet you. The cubs are distraught – they’re refusing the milk and scream with fear if any of us try to hold them. Which one of you is Nimal?’

‘I am – Mrs. – er?’ said Nimal stepping forward.

‘Call me Rani,’ she smiled, as the *JEACs* quickly made friends with Lulu. ‘Let’s go to the kitchen.’

In the kitchen, huddled fearfully in a corner of the cage, were two tiny cubs weighing around four kilograms each.

‘Poor little mites,’ whispered Anu.

‘Hello, kiddies,’ said Nimal softly, sitting on the floor beside the open door of the cage, and reaching out his hands slowly towards the scared creatures. ‘Come and have some milk. You’re hungry, tired and haven’t eaten in a while.’

He spoke soothingly, not making any quick movements which might frighten them, and they listened. The cubs sniffed at Nimal’s hands, crept slowly towards him, and two minutes later they were in his arms, cuddling up to him.

Rani handed Nimal bottles of milk, and he gently inserted the nipples into the tiny mouths, holding a cub in each arm. The onlookers watched in amazement as the cubs drank their milk. Then, satiated and comforted, they fell asleep in Nimal’s lap. He placed them gently in the cage, covering them with a furry blanket, and closed the door.

A deep sigh of delight went around the room. ‘What shall we do with them, Uncle Chris?’ said Nimal. ‘They’ll need to be fed again.’

‘We’ll take them with us, son,’ said Chris, lifting the cage carefully. ‘Will you be mama grizzly for tonight?’

‘No problemo,’ grinned Nimal. ‘I could look after them at GW, too, as long as required.’

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EXTRACT FROM CHAPTER 5

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‘Let’s eat in a meeting room where there’s a projector,’ suggested Tulok, ‘so that we can refer to a map of Manipau.’

‘Excellent,’ said Shawn. ‘We’ll use the room right off the kitchen.’

Ten minutes later everyone was served and the meeting began, with a large map of the Centre projected on an overhead screen. Rohan took notes.

‘In the north and east, Manipau’s boundaries are created by the Akie River, which flows from the low mountain ranges in the north-west, across the northern boundary, and curves south along our eastern boundary,’ said Shawn. ‘It flows past our Centre and branches off eastwards. There are many tributaries of the Akie, several of which flow

through Manipau. The new CC is on the east side of the Akie, and will stretch from the north to the south, along the river.

‘The lake practically divides the Centre, the northern section of Manipau being much denser and larger than the southern area. The Muskok, a large tributary of the Akie in the east, flows into Manipau in the north-east, runs through the Centre, joins the lake, and exits through the south boundary of Manipau – it runs parallel to the Akie which is *outside* Manipau, and joins it further south-east.’

‘Since poaching’s on the rise, worldwide, Manipau decided to put up a solid wall around the entire conservation, as a deterrent to poachers. Our walls are 6.10 metres high and 0.76 metres deep,’ said Tulok.

‘There’s a 1,000-metre gap between the boundary wall and the Akie in the north, where the second bridge is being built,’ he continued. ‘We’ll construct a narrow road so that folks from the CC can cross the bridge and go west to the north entrance.’

‘The main area inhabited by grizzlies is north of the lake,’ continued Hassan, ‘which is excellent territory for them. GBH stands for *Grizzly Bear Haven*, and there’s enough room for all our bears. Here’s GW, far up in the north-east section.’

‘Does this map give you a good picture of the Centre?’ asked Shawn.

‘Absolutely,’ said the youngsters in unison.

Hassan continued. ‘When Shawn and I began our annual census of the grizzlies, we searched the entire northern section of Manipau. It was easy enough to track the bears, since they mark their territory clearly. When we discovered that five bears were missing, we commenced an extensive search.

‘We discovered two sets of tracks for male bears, beginning in the mountain range. They went south for a few clicks, east over the Nakina, another tributary of the Akie, passed the trail to the gates, and then turned north again. We could tell they were speeding for short distances – you know they can run at nearly 60 kilometres per hour over short distances, right?’

The youngsters nodded, intent on the tale.

‘The tracks were close for a short distance, and then separated, continuing north towards the boundary wall, approximately fifteen metres apart at the widest distance. I followed one set of tracks while Shawn followed the other. About 450 metres south of the boundary wall, I discovered blood in the paw prints, and it was apparent the bear was limping. I was nearing the boundary wall – about 300 metres away – when I began to see copious amounts of dried blood, but it was another ten metres before I found two huge patches of blood in a small clearing, and no more tracks. A few minutes later Shawn joined me, following the tracks of the second male to the other patch of blood.’

‘That’s horrible!’ wept Gina, and Anu put an arm around her as she brushed away her own tears.

‘I know, hon,’ whispered Amy, handing out tissues to Mich and Corazon.

The boys were furious, and Rohan muttered, ‘We’ll catch the crooks! How far west from GW, measuring along the boundary wall, were these blood patches?’

‘About a kilometre west, would you figure?’ said Shawn, looking at Hassan and Tulok.

‘That’s right,’ said Tulok.

‘What happened next?’ asked Anu.

‘Shawn and I searched, unsuccessfully, for the bodies in case the bears had fought each other,’ said Hassan. ‘Then Shawn discovered a couple of bullet holes in a large tree which was behind the patches of blood. Shawn?’

‘We called in the police and asked for Chief Inspector Geraldine Montgomery – she’s a brilliant officer and crazy about animals. They dug out the bullets, examined them and said they were from a heavy-duty rifle which could kill large animals.

‘We also checked with our gatekeepers, but they hadn’t heard a thing. They would have reported gunshots or other unusual activities.’

‘A silencer on the rifles, obviously,’ commented Rohan.

‘Yes. Geraldine’s team searched the area for human blood, and found a few drops near another tree, where there must have been a scuffle of some sort,’ said Hassan.

‘Accompanied by the police we searched diligently for several days, but couldn’t find anything else. We didn’t have sufficient staff to continue the search on a daily basis, and we were still looking for three more bears,’ said Hassan.

‘Then Tulok joined our search – he’s brilliant at tracking. Within a day he found tracks of the other three bears,’ said Shawn. ‘You take over, Tulok.’

‘I began my search from the last known den of the grizzlies,’ said Tulok. ‘From earlier records, we knew that these three were siblings – a rare case of a mother having three male cubs. They were orphaned early, around the age of two, a couple of years ago. For some reason they stayed together and, my colleagues inform me, hibernated

together, too. I was able to track them and found old tracks in April which ranged north to the boundary wall, went around GW, across the Muskok, and then back west.

‘So I crossed the Muskok and found relatively fresh tracks – going east towards the boundary wall. I followed the tracks, and discovered blood in them and bullets in trees. Finally, in a small clearing 350 metres east of the Muskok and a few metres away from the eastern wall, I found large patches of dried blood.’

‘Was the clearing near the northern wall?’ asked Umedh.

‘A couple of hundred metres south of it,’ said Tulok. ‘Although the police came again, and Shawn, Hassan and I spent half a day searching the area, we found nothing more. It was frustrating, but our consolation was that you JEACs were arriving soon, and we hoped we could leave it with you. Anything more, Hassan, Shawn?’

‘One point,’ said Shawn. ‘I’ve been turning this over in my mind, and one thing stands out – the bears were being *driven to the boundary walls* – eastwards; and my question is, why?’

‘Good point. Thanks for sharing this information with us,’ said Rohan. ‘May we contact you later with any questions, once we’ve assimilated this info?’

‘Certainly,’ said Hassan. ‘We *must* stop whoever’s doing this.’

‘Absolutely!’

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EXTRACT FROM CHAPTER 8

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‘Let’s get closer to the treeline and then Hunter and Nimal can scout ahead.’

‘Okay,’ said Corazon, and the group proceeded cautiously.

A little later Corazon stopped; Nimal and Hunter moved ahead. A few whispered commands from Nimal, and Hunter knew exactly what to do. At the edge of the forest the dog stopped – he sniffed the air and whined softly.

‘Okay, boy,’ whispered Nimal. There was a fair-sized clearing in front of the wall. Ten metres west, deer and rabbits were drinking at a small waterhole which was half in the forest and half in the clearing.

‘Clever Hunter,’ said Nimal softly, and the dog gave him a quick lick. ‘I know they’ll run away the minute we go out, boy, but we need to check the area. Come on.’

The boy and dog moved into the clearing, and the animals immediately disappeared into the forest. There were no other creatures around; Nimal gave the ‘all clear’ over the WTs, and the others joined them quickly.

‘There’s more rock than sand here, and the tracks have disappeared,’ said Rohan. ‘Spread out, JEACs, and look for clues.’

But no more tracks were discovered.

‘Come over here,’ called Rohan. He and Corazon were checking branches and rocks piled up against the wall, towards the eastern side of the clearing.

‘We wondered if there was a tunnel under these branches and rocks,’ said Corazon, pulling away branches.

‘I doubt it,’ said Umedh, examining the rocks. ‘They’re too big to move manually and look quite solid.’

They got to work, and as they moved the last branch, they gasped in surprise.

‘A hidden firepit – interesting,’ said Rohan. ‘It looks like people have camped and cooked meals here. Is that a common occurrence, Amy?’

‘Absolutely not – there’s always a risk of forest fires, and we discourage people from building campfires anywhere they please. We have designated areas, and you’ve seen the barbeque set-ups we have in the camping grounds.’

‘This was possibly used for nefarious purposes,’ said Anu. ‘Let’s cover it and search for cans of food which might be buried in the soil – it’s very rocky here, so look around the edges of the forest.’

‘How do you come up with these ideas?’ asked Corazon in amazement, as they quickly replaced the branches.

‘We’ve had a bit of experience looking for clues during some of our adventures,’ smiled Amy. ‘Look for soil which looks as if it’s been dug up recently.’

They split up again, and within a few minutes, Nimal and Hunter found a large hole in the ground where empty food cans and beer bottles were buried.

‘They’ve either eaten many meals here, or there were lots of people – I’m sure there are at least two dozen cans, and a dozen or more beer bottles,’ said Anu.

‘We’ve got the pictures as evidence. Now, if they wanted to kill grizzlies, they’d go deeper into the forest – around BSC-1, for instance. What do you others think?’

‘Agreed – and they’d probably climb trees for safety,’ said Nimal. ‘Let’s return to BSC-1,’ said Rohan.

‘BSC-1? Blood Spot Clearing number one?’ grinned Corazon.

‘Absolutely, kiddo,’ smiled Rohan, as they made their way back to the clearing. ‘This is the first one and BSC-2 is where your dad found the other blood spots.’

‘It’s possible,’ said Umedh, ‘that the crooks split up: one group chasing the grizzlies to BSC-1 and killing them there. Then they loaded them on sleds and brought them along the trail to the firepit clearing. The second group may have been there, preparing a meal, and assisting the first group to take the bears away, but we don’t know where they went.’

‘All excellent points,’ said Rohan. ‘Let’s split up and check the trees, then head back to GW to discuss everything. Hold all reports on search results for that meeting. It’s nearly noon; if we search for an hour, we should be back by 1:30 p.m. Stay alert, watch out for grizzlies, and if necessary use the WTs to contact each other. Agreed?’

‘Sure...’ began Anu, and stopped abruptly as shots rang out. The JEACs froze.

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EXTRACT FROM CHAPTER 10

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‘If crooks can enter Manipau freely, will they try to kill more grizzlies?’ asked Mich.

‘It’s possible, hon,’ said Amy. She rose and continued, ‘But we’re going to stop them. I’m going to make a quick call to Maddison and her brother, Kyle.’

‘What about my friends Sorena and Corben who started a JEACs group a while ago?’ said Mich. ‘And Brinn, Corben’s older sister, started a group, too. They were fundraising for World Wildlife Fund, Canada and the Calgary Zoo, and also creating awareness about polar bears in the North West Territories since a conservation lost fifteen bears to poachers.’

‘I’ll call them, hon,’ said Amy. She went to the study.

‘We must check the eastbound camouflaged trail Nimal found,’ said Umedh. ‘We may find the tunnel somewhere in that direction.’

‘Sound idea, yaar,’ said Rohan.

‘Shouldn’t we also search BSC-2, where the other three bears were killed?’ said Corazon. ‘We could look for a tunnel in that section, too.’

‘Absolutely,’ said Nimal. ‘We’ll do both searches tomorrow, but it’ll take most of the day and we can’t leave the cubs and Codey here all day – it’s too far.’

‘Is there some way we can take them with us?’ asked Ricky.

‘Carrying them could become a problem, yaar, since we need to keep our hands free as we trek through the forest, and we’ll be carrying equipment,’ said Rohan thoughtfully.

‘There’s also the risk of the cubs making a noise which could attract adult grizzlies to us – a bigger issue, I’d say,’ said Nimal.

‘BSC-2 is approximately 350 metres east of the Muskok, and we know we can’t drive right up to it,’ said Rohan, looking at a map of Manipau. ‘How close to it can we get by car?’

‘Approximately 25 metres west of the Muskok – a ten-minute drive from here,’ said Corazon. ‘There’s a large clearing where we can park. Five minutes along a narrow trail to the river, across it, and then twenty minutes through shrubbery, to BSC-2.’

Umedh who was examining a map said, ‘Is this the clearing, Corazon?’ She nodded. ‘And is this a little building near it?’

‘It is,’ said Corazon and Mich in unison.

‘It’s small, although fully equipped with kitchen, et cetera – we call it *Small Stop*. In your lingo it would be SS, right?’ said Corazon.

‘You catch on fast, kiddo,’ chuckled Nimal. ‘Can we use SS?’

‘Yes. Every ranger has a key to it, and there are extra keys, too.’

‘Great. We’ll take the cubs and Codey, with lots of food for them, and install them in SS. We can then check on them every few hours,’ said Umedh.

‘Brill, yaar,’ said Chris, who liked the word ‘yaar’ and had begun to use it frequently.

‘Corazon, do you mind bringing us a key – perhaps two?’ asked Rohan. The girl nodded and ran off.

Amy and Corazon both returned in a few minutes. Corazon handed over two keys to Rohan.

'Well, Amy?' asked Anu. 'You look big with news.'

Amy smiled and waved a piece of paper. 'First I spoke with Maddison and Kyle. Then I called Louise, Corben's mom, who said that she, Corben and Brinn were in the middle of a planning meeting with Sorena, her mom, Amaris, as well as the other members of their group. And she put everyone on speakerphone. By the way, all the others – Taite, Jette, Auslen, Kaplan, Ella, Bella, Aiden, Lucy and Tavin – said hi, and are eager to meet you. Do you want me to report now, Rohan?'

'Please,' smiled Rohan.

'Jump in with questions, JEACs,' said Amy. 'Maddison said Kanasu Reserve lost a total of nineteen grizzlies last year within a period of eight and a half months. The fencing surrounding the reserve was not secure, and they discovered large holes in the north and east sides of the fence.'

'Any construction going on there?' asked Rohan.

'Not on or next to the reserve,' said Amy, 'but a large mall was being built 50 kilometres south of the reserve, between two growing communities. There are good highways from the communities and mall to Kanasu, and a one-way trip would take less than half an hour – especially at night where there's hardly any traffic on the road. The mall was completed within a year, and the construction company dispersed.'

'Any more grizzlies killed after that?' said Nimal.

'No. And the reserve raised funds and put up high walls,' said Amy.

'What about the polar bears?' asked Gina.

'Corben, Sorena and Brinn said that Sheshawi Reserve in the NWT lost fifteen polar bears within three weeks in January of this year. This was only discovered because a man and woman were caught. They were moving three dead bears, via a chopper, in a sling. The chopper had problems and came down outside the northern wall of the reserve. A couple of rangers heard it and went out to help, but were shot at. They weren't hurt, but the shots made them suspicious, so they drove out of sight of the chopper, called the cops and then kept watch.'

'What did the crooks do?' said Nimal.

'One of them tried to fix the chopper, while the other kept guard. There was tons of snow, so the sling, which was also white, was not visible to the rangers. Two police choppers arrived just as the crooks' chopper rose into the air, and for the first time the rangers saw the sling. After a brief chase, the crooks were forced to land, and the rangers joined the cops. That's when they discovered the poor bears.'

'Construction companies in the area?' asked Umedh. 'One, 75 clicks away,' said Amy, 'building a road.'

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