



A colossal blizzard swept over the tundra, painting the region white. The only thing more monstrous than the flurry of snow was the biting wind that blew almost all of the inhabitants away. Flocks of birds escaped to the south, followed by herds of caribou. The tracks and trails that speckled the landscape were buried in the snow. The torrent ended on a cloudless night and the Aurora Borealis adorned the sky with curtains of vivid, red light.

In the early morning, the only visible sign of life was a plume of smoke rising from a curious mound of snow. From a distance, it appeared to be an oversized igloo. But underneath a thick layer of snow and ice lay a spacious cabin. With the snowdrift covering the windows, the dwelling was dark as a cave, and the two residents were fast asleep until Hona woke up and struck a match with her teeth. She lit a candle, and stepped out of bed. Living in the Arctic, the Inuit woman wore a walrus-skin hat over her jet-black, braided hair.

Hans, a Scandinavian fellow with blond locks protruding under his seal-skin hat, slid open one of the windows that had been enveloped in the snowstorm. He clenched one mitten and punched a hole through the snow. Daylight and cold air beamed through the cabin. Hans reached out the window and grabbed a slab of ice from outside, brought it in and dropped it in an iron pot that was already hot on the stove.

While Hans collected his fishing gear, Hona brewed some coffee and filled up a thermos for Hans that was hot enough to burn a hole through the floor. Hans put on an extra set of mittens in order to hold it. He put on his parka and opened the door, designed to swing inward on its hinge to prevent it from being blockaded by snow. Again, he punched the half-frozen wall in the doorway and snow flew. He tossed a fishing rod and tackle box outside, both of which sunk out of sight in the snow. Then he nudged noses with Hona and crawled out of the house with the thermos in hand.

Knee-high snow made it an arduous trek, and every step crunched through a frost-encrusted surface and down through a layer of powder, stopping on the packed ice beneath him. The royal blue sky reflected bluely off the snow in the monochromatic setting that was laid out before him. With no apparent landmarks in sight, Hans wandered on a seemingly aimless path, holding tightly to the warm flask of coffee.

After an hour of hiking, with snot rockets frozen in his beard, Hans arrived at his destination. It looked the same as the rest of the land, but underneath the snow and ice was a fishing hole that Hans frequented. He looked over his shoulder and followed his winding tracks all the way to the cabin, only 100 yards away, where he could see Hona chopping snowy firewood with a one-handed swing of the ax. After shattering the wood, she looked up and noticed Hans. She waved at him and then resumed the log cutting.

Hans stamped a circle in the snow wide enough to make it a comfortable seat for ice fishing. The heavy clomping worked up a perspiration so fierce that sweat beads froze to his forehead. So, before he hammered down on the ice with his mittens, he twisted open the thermos cap for a hot drink of coffee. The steamy aroma that wafted from the open lid was so strong that it caused the hairs on Hans' chin to stand on

end. His face bore a mighty grin. He slowly tilted the thermos back for a sip and scorched his tongue, growling, "Oooo!" He kept the lid off to allow the coffee to cool. He readied himself for a tremendous thump to the ice.

Meanwhile, a nearby polar bear, that had been up all night due to the northern lights, caught the coffee scent. The bear, with its nose in the air, followed the fragrance, walking feverishly. In no time, the bear saw Hans, who was distracted with his arm stuck in the hold he had punched through the ice. The bear tiptoed around the fisherman and dipped its tongue into the open thermos. The bear cowered after burning its tongue, snarling, "Rrrr!" Hans was instantly on the bear's back with his arm around its neck. The polar bear staggered to its hind legs, bumping the thermos and spilling coffee, lifting Hans ten feet high in the air.

Starkly contrasting the otherwise white snow, the dark, brown coffee sank intriguingly deep, incredibly deep, incessantly deep into the packed snow. Hans, the bear-hugging coffee fiend noticed the half-empty thermos and hopped down from the bear's back to recover his beloved beverage. He and the polar bear dove for the thermos simultaneously, and the great magnitude of weight that hit the ground all at once rattled the ice. Just then, the piping hot coffee that had been spilled moments earlier penetrated the ice, melting into the mouth of an even bigger monster: the lake, which growled, "Mmmm!"

The rumbling continued until the ice split, creating a smile-shaped fissure large enough to swallow both Hans and the bear. The two of them gripped the thermos, each with one mitten/paw, in a precarious tug-of-war match. The crack in the ice grew larger still, expanding toward the two fanatical coffee aficionados, and then the ice finally collapsed beneath them. The thermos went in first, with the polar bear still attached. Hans would have been the next to go down, but fortunately for him, Hona's grip was stronger than his. She held onto Hans even tighter than he held his coffee cup. Hona pulled Hans up to safety.