

Chapter Five

Winter on the Ice-Locked Ship

Mrs. Peary and Captain Sam were worried about surviving the winter. For Marie, though, they were in the midst of an adventure. She looked forward to frequent visits on shore to see Koodlooktoo, Billy Bah, and Achatingwah. The sailors banked the ship with snow blocks and stretched a canvas tarpaulin over the deck. Marie found the space beneath a good shelter for running and playing games.

Mrs. Peary arranged for Inuit women to make winter clothes for herself and Marie. Each outfit featured a thick, hooded fox skin coat, or *kapetah*; warm sealskin boots, *kamiks*; and rabbit skin stockings. Marie loved dressing like her Inuit friends, although she wore heavy woolen underwear instead of a bird skin shirt, as they did. She couldn't get used to feathers next to her skin.

In September, Marie celebrated her seventh birthday. Her mother somehow found ingredients in the ship's supplies to bake a chocolate cake, and top it with seven candles. Mrs. Peary even produced a special birthday doll, one with long golden hair like Marie's.

As the days passed, Captain Sam recruited



In Inuit clothes, Marie, age seven, holds a narwhal tusk.

Inuit men to hunt for game in exchange for guns and ammunition. Mrs. Peary sent other parties of Inuit to look for her husband; they returned after two or three days, with Mrs. Peary's undelivered letters in hand. Meanwhile, the Etah Inuit families began work on their igloos, completing them just before the great Arctic night descended in October.

Marie helped Achatingwah's family build

their igloo. Later, in the dim light of the strong-smelling seal-blubber lamps, Marie and Achat-ingwah sat on piles of furs, making up stories and enacting adventures with small ivory figures. As the weeks passed, Marie taught Achat-ingwah English, while Achatingwah taught Marie to speak the Inuit language.

Every morning from ten o'clock to noon on board ship, Mrs. Peary tutored Marie. Part of Marie's lesson was to write an entry in her journal each day. She usually recorded the day's temperature, which could be as cold as forty degrees below zero Fahrenheit. Old Charlie prepared two daily meals: a breakfast of hot cereal with canned meat; and a midday dinner, often musk ox steak along with canned vegetables, bread and butter, dessert, and tea.

Many afternoons, Marie and her mother walked together in the moonlight. On the ship, they played Parcheesi or checkers and sometimes made taffy in the ship's galley. Before Marie went to bed, her mother sang her popular songs of the time, such as "The Old Folks at Home."

Sometimes when her mother sang, tears rolled down her cheeks. Marie assumed it was because the songs were sad. It didn't occur to her that her mother feared that her father could be ill or even dead. Many years later, Marie would learn of another of her mother's private griefs. Allakasingwah "Ally," the same young woman who sewed Marie's fur *kapetah*, was intimately involved with Peary. Allakasingwah's son,

Anaukaq, "Sammy," born the previous May, was Peary's son. Marie played with baby Sammy every day while her coat was being made, never knowing he was her own half brother.

That winter, Mrs. Peary reluctantly agreed to let Marie have a puppy. Cinnamon, or Cin for short, came from a litter of one of Achatingwah's father's dogs. Mrs. Peary joked that he should be named Sin instead because he chewed through mittens, ropes, boots, and anything else he got hold of on the *Windward*. At night, Cin joined in the howling of dogs on shore—a mournful sound to Marie.

Marie became a part of Inuit life. The Inuit loved stories and practical jokes. To Marie's

Marie in sunglasses with Mrs. Martha Percy



amusement, her friends frightened the gullible sailors with tales of ferocious polar bears. One day, after a heavy snowstorm, Marie came up with an idea to scare the sailors. Her sealskin boots made perfectly round footprints. With her fingers, Marie drew claw marks around each round footprint. Polar bear tracks! Enlisting the help of Koodlooktoo, Achatingwah, and other friends, Marie made “bear tracks” on the deck of the *Windward*, leading up to Old Charlie’s galley. Sure enough, Old Charlie saw the tracks and bel-lowed: “[By] the Holy St. Denis! ’Tis a bear!”

The next day, the sailors refused to come out of their quarters. Finally Marie confessed the prank to her mother, who turned her over to stern Captain Sam. The captain brought her to the sailors’ quarters, where Marie, trembling, told her story. Everyone was silent. Marie feared a terrible punishment. Then the men broke into laughter and gave her three cheers for keeping the ship lively.

It wasn’t long before December came, and Mrs. Peary told Marie that there would be no exchange of Christmas gifts this year—there simply wasn’t a way to have presents or a colorful tree and tasty baked goods as in past years. Marie pretended that she didn’t mind.

Then, with several weeks left before Christmas, Marie and Koodlooktoo were sliding down a slope of ice. In the shadowy moonlight, Marie stepped off a shelf of the ice hill and fell ten feet. One of the crew members carried her, limp and

moaning, back to the ship. Marie lay semiconscious on her berth all night, crying over and over, “No Christmas! No Christmas!” In the morning, she announced to her mother that she was quite herself again, but ravenously hungry. As Marie ate, her mother said that perhaps there was a way they could celebrate Christmas, after all.

Marie spent the next two weeks helping her mother prepare for the holiday. Gathering treats from the gift baskets they’d received from friends before the voyage, they filled stockings for the sailors. Each stocking, made from white mosquito netting and tied with red cloth, contained chocolates, peanuts, dates, mixed candy, prunes, an orange, and a silver dollar. Marie and her mother popped corn, and Marie strung popcorn into garlands to decorate the main cabin. Out of canned milk and a powdered egg substitute, Mrs. Peary baked a whole stack of raisin cakes.

On Christmas Eve, Marie and Old Charlie served cake and hot chocolate to the crew. The next day, Marie awoke to find her own stocking filled with pink hair ribbons, a box of chocolates, watercolors, and a paper doll with paper dresses. That afternoon, another surprise awaited Marie in the main cabin: a small Christmas tree decked with candles twinkling gaily in the darkness. Mrs. Peary and the ship’s taxidermist had made the tree from a broomstick and heavy wire. They’d covered the wire branches with softened wax and sprinkled it with coffee grains. For

My Dear Grossy and Tante and Uncle.

I think you will be worried not to hear from me so I write this letter to you. I will come to see you soon I hope, I want to see you very much. I play on the ice every day and have a fine time with Billy and the husky children. My Dear Grossy we have been in the ice for ever so many days. We have had a good time but I want to be with you. I can read a little bit. Mother has school. I can do my sums. I read out of a big book too. I can write you see with ink. I will tell you how I spent Xmas. A week before Xmas we began to get ready for the holidays. Mother baked stollen and cut 15 stockings out of some canvas and I worked them round with red wadded. These we filled with dates, peanuts, chocolates, homemade toffys, mixed candy, a "silver dollar", popcorn, prunes and oranges. At 8 o'clock on Xmas eve I went down into the fore-castle with Charlie and gave each man half a loaf of stollen, and a big pot of

A letter Marie wrote from the ice-locked Windward on February 21, 1901. However far Marie traveled, her thoughts remained with her family.

needles, they'd brought hay from old packing boxes. Marie wrote, "The result was so realistic that I imagined I could smell the balsam."

At the first full moon following Christmas, Marie and Koodlooktoo took a day trip together to Cape Sabine across the frozen bay, about four miles to the north of the ship. Captain Sam told them they were serving an important mission. He wanted a report on the condition of the ice at

the Cape. It would help him judge, he said, how soon the ice in the bay would start to break up, so that he could make plans to sail.

Marie and Koodlooktoo trekked across the ice in the glittering moonlight and reached Cape Sabine without incident. As they ate their lunch seated atop a rocky hill, they scanned the view. To the north stretched unbroken ice fields. But when they turned to the south, in the direction

they'd just come from, the ice had cracked into a channel of water, black and wide.

The roundabout route they had to travel back to the ship proved to be long and rough, up and down hills of ice and shadowy snowdrifts. At times they sank into snow up to their waists. Marie urged Koodlooktoo to stop for a rest. Koodlooktoo wisely insisted they press on. He knew that if they fell asleep they might freeze.

At last, from a hilltop, Marie saw the glowing lights of the *Windward*. Before her, or so it seemed, the hill stretched down into a smooth slope. Marie sat down on her bottom, preparing to slide. Koodlooktoo tried to stop her. He said the snowy slope was actually a glacier that could have a dangerous cliff. They should retrace their steps and approach the ship from the flat land.

Too tired to think clearly, Marie began to slide and soon picked up speed. The snow around her slid, too, and created an avalanche. Marie flung herself backward and stretched out her arms, trying to stop before the slope ended in an abrupt cliff that dropped down to the icy water below. But she kept sliding. Then, looking like a black bundle of fur, Koodlooktoo whizzed by her. Kicking and flailing his arms, he rolled almost to the edge of the cliff. He stopped and found footing. As Marie careened toward him, he shot out his arm and dragged her away from the edge.

Inch by inch, Marie and Koodlooktoo worked their way back up the hill and down the other side. Exhausted, they finally reached the ship.

There Old Charlie met them with steamy mugs of hot chocolate.

The rest of the winter passed less eventfully. To keep up their morale, Mrs. Peary and Marie celebrated every possible holiday or occasion—Valentine's Day, Lincoln's Birthday, Washington's Birthday, and Easter. Then, in March, the sunlight finally emerged.

By April the ice around the ship had mostly melted, and Marie needed a rowboat to visit her friends on shore. On May 5, Marie baked a cake for her father's birthday; Peary would turn forty-five on May 6. She supposed she and her mother would have to eat the cake without him.

Very early in the morning, however, Marie was awakened by a thud over her head, followed by the stamping of feet. Someone had jumped over the ship's rail and onto the deck. Mrs. Peary sat bolt upright in bed. Marie later wrote that her mother's eyes shone like two stars as she said, "It is your father!" The door burst open and Peary staggered in. He headed right for his wife. "I'm here, too, Dad!" Marie called excitedly. At last he took her into his arms. Peary joked that he'd smelled Marie's birthday cake and that's why he'd returned. In reality, he'd met a hunting party of Inuit from the *Windward* who let him know the ship was in the harbor. Sweaty and grimy, Peary excused himself to take a bath in the boiler room. Then, at five in the morning, Marie and her parents sat down to breakfast together for the first time in almost three years.



*Marie eating dinner on the Windward with her parents (on the far right) and members of the crew
(photo by Louis Bement)*