

# THE LONG WAY SOUTH

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*Genre: Adventure, Animation, Comedy, Family*

*Logline: When a polar bear cub is separated from his mother, he embarks on a dangerous journey south with a grumpy loner bear and a self-conscious tern, discovering that home isn't a place, but who you choose.*

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OPEN ON: **EARTH IN SPACE**

Our BLUE DOT spins silently among the stars.

**NANUK (V.O.)**

When you're very small... the world  
feels very big. And very cold.

As time ticks, the Arctic ice caps SHRINK. We plummet  
through the clouds into--

**EXT. ARCTIC PLAINS - DAWN**

--HOWLING WINDS and endless WHITE.

Two FIGURES battle through the storm - **MOTHERBEAR**, a thin,  
elderly female polar bear, and **NANUK**, her young cub, glued  
to her flank. The ice CREAKS underfoot.

**NANUK (V.O.) (CONT'D)**

The cold? That's not the scary  
part. The scary part is how big  
everything is... and how easy it is  
to end up on the wrong side of the  
ice.

Nanuk slips - scrambles on the thin ice. Panic flashes in  
his eyes.

Motherbear braces, spreads her weight, and pulls him close.  
Nanuk clings harder now.

Without hesitation, Motherbear presses on. *There's no  
stopping here.*

**NANUK (V.O.) (CONT'D)**

When you're small, the only safe  
place is right here... beside  
someone else.

Nanuk presses close as they move deeper into the whiteout.

**EXT. SHORELINE, THE ARCTIC - LATER**

Motherbear crouches low, slow and precise towards fish  
LAPPING at the surface.

Nanuk's eyes *w i d e n*. Noisily he LEAPS, and belly-flops in  
the water, scattering the school.

Clambering ashore, he dries himself with snow and grins  
expectantly at his mother -

**NANUK**

I helped... right?

Motherbear exhales, frown-smiling at her overzealous child.

**EXT. ARCTIC ICE - LATER**

Motherbear plonks Nanuk on a rock. Taps his chest -

**MOTHERBEAR**

Stay. Watch. Only.

Nanuk nods earnestly.

He fiddles with something strapped to his side - a worn SLINGSHOT crafted from waste material.

Motherbear stalks a seal hole. Silent. Deadly.

A plump SEAL POPS out of the hole onto its belly, taking in what little rays of the sun is left.

From nowhere, Nanuk whips a small stone from his slingshot which ricochets off the ice near the seal.

The seal jerks - spots Motherbear - and dives back into the hole with a SPLASH!

Motherbear freezes in disappointment. Nanuk shrinks.

**NANUK**

I just thought...

Motherbear finally stares at him... More tired than anything.

**EXT. ARCTIC PLAINS - LATER**

In silence, the bears trudge ahead. Nanuk freezes.

**NANUK**

Momma! Look!

A tiny PINK FLOWER pokes out of the snow - delicate. Impossible even.

Mesmerized, Nanuk leans close - closer until the flower tickles his nose. ACHOO!

**MOTHERBEAR**

It's a flower, baby bear. Means change.-- The snow doesn't last long these days, there'll be many more of them very soon.

She nudges him forward. Nanuk follows out of frame.

HOLD on the flower a beat. Then Nanuk darts back and plucks it, tucking it into the fur on his chest.

**EXT. ARCTIC PLAINS - SUNSET**

The sun bleeds a bruised orange hue over the endless white.

Motherbear sniffs the air, finding nothing.

**MOTHERBEAR**

Nothing more we can do today.

Nanuk trots up, puzzled.

**NANUK**

Why not wait?

Motherbear searches for the right words-

**MOTHERBEAR**

Waiting doesn't keep you alive, baby bear. Some days waiting is the wrong thing to do. And some days... leaving is.

Nanuk blinks. He gets it... kinda.

Motherbear walks off. Each step adding to the mile long trail of footprints in the snow behind them.

A SHADOW passes over Nanuk - a flock of TERNS cut across the sky overhead. Graceful. Purposeful.

**NANUK**

Where they going, momma?

Motherbear glances -

**MOTHERBEAR**

Not everyone stays, baby bear.

Nanuk considers this...

**NANUK**

We do.

Motherbear doesn't respond, continues her course.

Nanuk steps into her prints. His eyes on the sky at the flock disappearing in the distance.

**EXT. ARCTIC SKY/ARCTIC - SAME TIME**

The same flock of terns squawk and swoop through the heavens. South.

PAN DOWN: a massive, gruff and scarred MALE POLAR BEAR watching them pass in quiet observation.

The wind whips across a barren stretch of ice. He trudges northward.

Ahead - a dark shape half buried in snow interrupts the white landscape.

He approaches and circles it - A BLEACHED POLAR BEAR SKELETON.

The snow around it is trampled - tiny scavenger tracks, leading South from the remains.

Bear lifts his gaze and notices more tracks cross the ice - hares, foxes, caribou. All moving the same direction. South.

Bear squints skyward - the terns are now distant specks in the sky.

A distant THUNDEROUS CRACK echoes. On the far horizon, an ICE SHELF CALVES into the sea.

The sound rolls across the frozen world.

Bear watches, expressionless.

His eyes drop back to the bones. Then to the southbound tracks.

Something passes through his eyes. Recognition.

However after a moment, he turns and deliberately continues walking north.

**EXT. ARCTIC PLAINS - NEXT DAY**

Motherbear waits patiently at the shore watching for the perfect moment to strike at a school of fish.

This time, Nanuk watches patiently - having learned his lesson.

**LATER**

One single FISH lies between them - a meagre reward for the day's labor.

Motherbear's head drops. Sighing deeply. Nanuk notices.

Nanuk removes the PINK FLOWER from his fur - still bright against the white world - and places it in front of her, nudging it closer.

She understands.

**MOTHERBEAR**

Thank you, baby bear. -- I will  
treasure it forever.

**THUNDER ROLLS AND LIGHTNING CRACKS**

She eyes the storm brooding, then the fish. Without hesitation offers it to Nanuk.

**LATER**

The BLIZZARD closes in. Sideways snow and wind.

Motherbear stumbles - just a little - and catches herself.

She guides Nanuk on towards a hole in the snow, and down into...

**INT. DEN - CONTINUOUS**

...the serenity of their den. The storm is cut off as Motherbear seals the opening.

Nanuk curls in the corner holding his grumbling belly. He shivers trying to get comfortable.

Motherbear stares at his thin and gaunt frame -

**MOTHERBEAR**

(*sotto*)  
So small... my baby bear.

Her stomach growls too, to the point of pain.

After a moment of playing something over in her mind, she stands up determined.

Nanuk perks up hearing the den being opened.

**NANUK**

Mom?! You're leaving?

**MOTHERBEAR**

Baby bear, I need to find something for us - for you - to eat.

**NANUK**

B-b-but, don't leave me alone.

Motherbear turns to him, placing her giant paws on his cheeks.

**MOTHERBEAR**

Baby bear, we polar bears live our whole lives alone. -- I know you never want to be, and this is why you're special, and so special to me.

*(touching noses)*

However... there are times when a bear does not have a choice.

Motherbear wipes away a tear from Nanuk's cheek.

**MOTHERBEAR (CONT'D)**

I'll teach you more of our ways when I return.

*(beat)*

For now, I'll only be gone a short time. -- I promise.

Nanuk, lip quivering and teary-eyed, looks on.

**NANUK**

*(to himself)*

Don't go...

As Motherbear exits the den, she doesn't notice the PINK FLOWER falling from her fur.

**NANUK (CONT'D)**

Mom!

Motherbear patches over the entrance.

Nanuk huddles up into a cold ball in the corner of the den, hugging the PINK FLOWER close to his chest.

**NANUK (CONT'D)**

Mom...

**EXT. ARCTIC PLAINS - CONTINUOUS**

The blizzard hits Motherbear mercilessly. Each impossible and exhausting step a battle in and of itself.

Ahead she notices an alcove in the ice.

Motherbear drags herself up to it and collapses underneath.

Her body language speaks of utter defeat. Her EYES slowly begin to close.

**TITLE CARD: THE LONG WAY SOUTH**

Heavy snowfall fills the frame burying the TITLE CARD and everything in WHITE.

FADE IN: