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The Division of Bears – An Inuit Myth

Long before humans walked this land, the polar bear was the only animal for miles around. The polar bear back then wasn’t like it was today; it was much darker and not as furry. The polar bears all lived together in one tribe, and they shared all the responsibilities of the tribe. The women bears took care of the babies, and the men bears made sure everyone had food to eat. The head of the tribe was known as the Chief of the Polar Bears.

As the sky grew darker in the colder months, the chief’s favorite female bear became pregnant. He was so happy and proud that he would be a father, and he made sure the female bear had the best luxuries while she was pregnant with child. He made a den of snow and ice and sent her inside to rest until she gave birth. Each day, he ordered other members of the tribe to bring her fresh fish to eat so she and her baby would be healthy.

In the spring, when it was time to give birth, the female polar bear left her lodge so the whole tribe could watch her baby be born. All the polar bears gathered around with excitement to watch as she had not one, but TWO, cubs. The chief was so proud that he now had two sons to carry on his name.

As the sons grew, they fought about who should be the next leader. First Son wanted to expand the tribe; Second Son wanted to make the tribe a safer place to live. The tribe was very divided. Half wanted to expand beyond the tribal lands, but the other half were just worried about safety from enemies. The young bears’ aging father could not resolve his sons’ differences, and he gave up trying to make peace.

First Son’s followers joined him in exploring vast new lands. They set off on a trek, but after four days, the land broke off from the rest of the tribe and they were stranded in the water. They were unable to start a fire on the small piece of ice, but First Son had an idea.

“Follow me into the water,” he told his followers. “There is land below this water, and we will make it ours.”

His followers jumped in the water behind him. They never found land, but due to so many fish in the water, they rapidly grew and learned how to breathe under water.

Second Son had a different idea. He wanted to hide his followers so their enemies could not find them. He build homes out of snow and ice and hid his followers behind the walls.

The Chief was approaching death and knew he could not reconcile the dispute between his sons before his passing, but he had to step in. He did not want to make either son more powerful than the other, and he also wanted to make sure the tribe was safe. His solution was to give First Son’s followers sleeker bodies and fins instead of legs, so they could survive in the water. For Second Son’s followers, he lightened and thickened their fur, so they could be warm in their lodges and still be able to disguise themselves when they left for hunting.

These tribes became the first whales and the first white polar bears.