

# PEARLY AND PIG

## AND THE ISLAND OF SECRETS



# FOR SALLY AND CLAIRE

*Pearly and Pig and the Island of Secrets*

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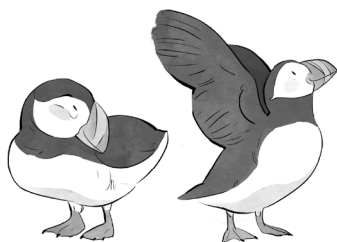
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# CHAPTER 1



It was the constant *thwump, thwump, thwump* of the helicopter rotor blades that made Pearly Woe's heart race and her insides slosh about like a stormy sea. She clutched her stomach and reminded herself that at least the *thwumping* meant the blades were turning, and if the blades were turning, the helicopter was less likely to crash into the icy Arctic waters below, which had to be a good thing. Pearly was working hard on trying to find the good things; the positives in situations. Like how it was unlikely that she would be eaten by a grizzly bear or attacked by a Bengal tiger or a rampaging rhinoceros. These things couldn't happen on a tiny, deserted island off the coast of Iceland. But she *could* fall off one of the soaring cliffs onto the craggy rocks below or her nose *could* snap clear off with frostbite.

Beside her, Pig snorted, waving his snout in the air with disapproval. Pearly rolled her eyes. Sometimes, she felt as if Pig could read her mind.

Pig was strapped into the other back seat, earmuffed and polar-jacketed. Her mother, Angel Woe, was seated in front, right beside Amma, Pearly's grandmother, who was pulling the joystick back and whooping as the helicopter rose sharply. Pearly's stomach pitched. She clamped her mouth shut to avoid wearing vomited-up porridge.

There were times when Amma was just a little too much for Pearly – just a little too daredevil-ly and not quite enough typical grandma-y for Pearly's liking. Surely, a grandma should be at least slightly anxious about dropping her granddaughter onto an uninhabited island in the middle of the Greenland Sea for a five-day survival challenge – just Pearly and Pig and their supplies. Alone for five whole days. But Amma wasn't your typical grandma. Typical grandmas were unlikely to say things like, *You haven't lived until you've nearly died a few times*. Or *Come on, lean into the challenge, even if it's uncomfortable, it makes life interesting*. Pearly's grandmother was one of the few to have completed the Big Three Polar Feats – skiing to the North Pole, the South Pole and across Greenland, the world's second largest ice cap.

Pearly held tight as Amma made the helicopter dip and then skim close to the surface of the choppy seas and Pearly reasoned that famous polar explorers probably weren't typical grandma material.

A loud beep sounded in Pearly's headset, followed by the crackly voice of Ricky Woe, Pearly's father, back at Amma's farm. "Are you there, Pearly? Over."

Angel and Amma shared knowing looks and shook their heads. Pearly had been gone for less than thirty minutes and already her father was checking on her.

"Yes, Dad, I'm here," Pearly replied into her headset microphone.

"Wonderful! Have you arrived yet?"

"ETA is ten minutes," answered Amma.

"Good! Now, Pearly, remember to wear your emergency beacon at all times. One press and we'll be there in a flash."

"Yes, Dad. It's strapped to my belt."

"And the 7 pm message. Every day. Don't forget, or we will—"

"Enough, Ricky," interrupted her mother. "Stop fussing."

"I'm not fussing, I'm just ..."

"FUSSING!" said her mother and Amma together.

"The island is perfectly safe," said Amma. "I spent most of my childhood on it. Pearly will be fine. She has all the supplies she needs. What could go wrong? Over and out."

Amma ended the call and turned the helicopter sharply to the left, soaring right over the top of a small

rocky island that rose out of the sea, its peak pointing skyward.

“That looks like a volcano!” Pearly said into her mic.

“It is,” replied Amma. “Black Rock Volcano. But don’t worry; it’s a sleeping baby. Has barely even belched in decades. Just the occasional hiccup.”

Pearly peered down into the rocky cone of the volcano and hoped that it wasn’t planning on hiccupping, or worse still, belching any time soon.

“There it is!” Amma shrieked, and Pearly watched as the wrinkles on her grandmother’s face bunched in deep semicircles. “Mammút Island! My childhood paradise.”

Angel winked at Pearly, excitement in her eyes.

The distant green speck of Mammút Island was coming closer and closer, getting bigger and bigger and revealing itself to be the shape of a wide fat fish with two pointy bridges of land fanning out at one end creating the fish’s tail. The island was so green it looked as if it was covered in smashed green peas and the steep basalt cliffs and black sand beaches that formed the coastline looked as though someone had outlined the island with black crayon. Thousands of small birds wheeled around the cliffs in the salty sea mist. There wasn’t a single tree in sight.

Amma and her family had lived on Mammút Island during the summer, collecting eiderdown from the

wild eider ducks that nested on the island. But when Amma was about eight there was a huge fire in the barn followed by a run of bad luck. The family left the island to settle year-round on their farm near Akureyri in northern Iceland. Pearly's mother had told Pearly many stories about her grandmother's life on the island and also the great ice age tales about when the island was connected to Greenland by sea ice. Pearly loved those stories.

Amma circled the island, pointing out the key features – the old burnt-out barn, the ruins of the farmhouse, the puffin colonies, the best beach for fishing. She manoeuvred the helicopter into the middle of the island and hovered above the mossy ground. "Throw open the door, Angel. Let's winch these guys down."

"Winch?" Pearly shrieked. "Aren't you even going to land and get me settled?"

Amma laughed out loud. "Bor-ing! It's perfect winching weather – not a breath of wind. You never know when you might need to be winched out in an emergency situation, so some experience could come in handy."

Pearly didn't like the sound of any of this.

Angel unbuckled her seatbelt and wormed through the gap between the front seats. She pulled up a harness and helped Pearly into it. She slid open the door

and reached out to retrieve the winch hook.

“Now just relax into the harness,” she said as she locked the winch carabiner onto Pearly’s harness, checking the straps and hooks were locked fast.

Pearly watched her mother wide-eyed. “What about Pig?” she wailed.

“Once you get to the ground, unlock this here, and then I’ll pull up the cable and send Pig down.”

Pig gave a nervous snort. *How?* he oinked.

“How?” Pearly translated for her mother, as Pearly was the only one in her family who could speak Pig.

“We have a special animal sling,” replied her mother.

Pig flung his snout upwards. AROO! AROO! AROO! he squealed. There was no direct English translation, but it was the sound Pig made when he was stressed. AROO! AROO! AROO! He was making quite a racket.

“Once Pig is down,” her mother continued calmly, ignoring Pig’s squeals, “send the cable back up and I’ll winch down your supplies. Got it?”

Angel didn’t give her a chance to reply. She guided Pearly to the open door, the engines roaring, the icy air stinging her cheeks.

“Enjoy!” her mother called, as she operated the winch and lowered a screaming Pearly through the open sky.

“Smoky bacon!” yelled Pearly, kicking her legs. “I’ve

changed my mind. I'm not ready for this challenge," she screamed in Italian, Italian being her go-to language when she was scared. And, boy, was she scared.

But it didn't matter what she said, or what language she used, because her words were stolen by the roar of the helicopter.

Down. Down. Down.

Pearly screaming. Kicking. Twirling.

Finally, her feet found solid ground. And like it or not, she was on Mammút Island.

For five whole days.

*Mamma mia!*

She gazed about her and took in the open expanse of land all around. She doubted her three years of training to be an Adventurologist had come close to preparing her for surviving alone in such a desolate place.

Pig was already strapped into his sling and was on his way down. The downdraft from the helicopter made Pig sway and twirl and difficult to catch. Pearly wrestled him to the ground. His heart hammered against her hands as she undid the sling. Being winched out of helicopters was definitely not Pig's idea of fun! Once freed, Pig leapt out and raced away, squealing.

Above her, the helicopter's rotors whirled, the engines growled, the red tail-light flashed, like a warning. Beneath her, the grass was being flattened.

Pearly put her hands to her ears to block the throaty helicopter rumble and frowned at Pig as he trotted around in agitated circles, moving further and further away, his snout to the ground, sniffing.

Pearly looked up as Angel attached their much-needed supply bag and Pearly's adventure pack to the winch hook. Her legs still felt weak and wobbly from her own descent. Being winched out of Amma's helicopter had been so scary and unexpected. It unnerved her.

*Expect the unexpected, it was Number 9 in the RAG – The Rules and Guidelines for Young Adventurologists – she should have known that her daredevil-y Amma wouldn't do anything that was expected, like helping her settle into her temporary island home. Pearly could almost hear Amma's raspy voice now: What Adventurologist-in-training wouldn't jump at the chance to be winched out of a hovering helicopter? Don't you feel energised Pearly? Adrenaline tingly?*

Pearly would never be as daring as her grandmother.

Pig raced to her side. He kicked and sniffed and pushed his snout into Pearly's legs. Pearly ignored him and focused on the large weatherproof bag that was spinning its way towards them.

The bag thumped to the ground. Pearly unhooked it from the winch hook and gave her mother a wave. Angel waved back and the helicopter zoomed off even before the cable was wound back in.

OINKY OINKY NO-NO!

Finally, Pearly could hear what Pig was saying.

OINKY OINKY NO-NO! Pig oinked again, which was Pig for, *Trouble. I smell trouble.*

This is not what Pearly wanted to hear. “We’ve only just arrived. How can there be trouble? What’s wrong with you?”

*What’s wrong with me?* squealed Pig. *Smoky bacon, Pearly! Why did you let them go?*

Pearly drew her eyebrows together and shoved her hands on her hips. “Why would I do that? We’ve just arrived. It is a five-day challenge, not a five-minute challenge!”

*HUMANS!* cried pig. *I can smell humans! We are not alone.*