

WANDERING POLES

a 10-minute play

by Brent Englar

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CHARACTERS

PIHO, a wild polar bear; female or male

THALA, a captive polar bear; female

URSU, a captive polar bear; male

Actors should stand on two legs, and their costumes should be simple and non-literal—suggestive rather than representative of polar bears.

TIME

The not-too-distant future

PLACE

A zoo; the polar bear enclosure

As with costumes, the set should be simple: the only necessary element is a barrier to separate the captive bears from the wild.

Scene 1

(Lights up on THALA and URSU lazing in the shade. Outside their enclosure, the midday sun beats down. Eventually PIHO wanders on, notices the captive bears, and stumbles to a halt)

PIHO

Hey! HEY! Excuse me ...?

(PIHO roars, suddenly ferocious. THALA blinks open her eyes; URSU remains asleep)

THALA

Hello ...?

PIHO

Are there seals?

THALA

I don't—

PIHO

—Do you have seals in there?

THALA

Whatever for?

PIHO

I'm starving!

THALA

It's too early for feeding.

(THALA yawns and closes her eyes. PIHO roars again and exits. After a moment, URSU opens his eyes)

URSU

What was that?

THALA

I didn't ask. Are we expecting another bear?

URSU

Another—what? Have you heard something?

THALA

Have you?

URSU

There's scarcely room here for us.

(URSU closes his eyes. He flops around, unable to fall back asleep.
Finally he rises)

URSU (Cont'd)

Damn interruptions.

(He roars several times. THALA sighs and rises)

THALA

What do you want to do?

URSU

Swim! It's hot!

(URSU ambles off. THALA peers through the barrier)

THALA

(to herself)

Maybe I was dreaming. Maybe we're both dreaming.

(She scratches herself vigorously. PIHO re-enters with bloody paws
and muzzle)

THALA (Cont'd)

What happened!

PIHO

I found the seals.

THALA

Where?

PIHO

All clumped together in a pit. It was incredible.

THALA

They were good?

PIHO

No.

THALA

They weren't good?

PIHO

I think it was too easy. I think I miss the ice.

THALA

You're so red. You're a mess.

PIHO

So what if I am?

THALA

You'll frighten people.

PIHO

There are humans here?

THALA

I think today's a holiday. Or a shutdown. I lose track. We're usually very popular.

PIHO

What happened to your friend?

THALA

(turning to look)

Did something happen?

PIHO

What?

THALA

(spotting URSU offstage)

Oh! He's fine.

PIHO

Where did he go, I mean?

THALA

For a swim. Aren't you hot out there?

PIHO

Of course I'm hot.

(peering through the barrier)

That's where you swim?

THALA

Where do you?

PIHO

It'll have to do, I guess.

(PIHO clambers over the barrier and exits to swim. THALA watches, astonished. She grips the barrier tentatively, testing its weight. Finally, with great effort, she hauls herself over the barrier and exits toward the seals.

Offstage, URSU roars, followed by PIHO. They tumble onstage—they are both wet, and PIHO is no longer bloody—swiping and wrestling, until PIHO manages to flip URSU onto his back and escape over the barrier. URSU staggers to his feet)

PIHO (Cont'd)

What's your problem, oaf?

URSU

Coward! Call me that to my—

PIHO

(shouting through the barrier)

—OOOOAAAFFFFF!!!!

(URSU roars and throws himself at the barrier. PIHO laughs. THALA races onstage)

THALA

What's the matter? Ursu!

URSU

Thala!

THALA

(to PIHO)

You made him angry!

PIHO

I did nothing! The oaf was sleeping, snoring like a walrus—

URSU

—I DO NOT SNORE—

PIHO

—I hopped into the water, and before I could even surface he attacked me.

THALA

Oh Ursu ...

URSU

Thala, that bear is trouble—stay back! I—

(He blinks, for the first time really seeing her)

How did you get there?

THALA

You can do it, Ursu—just pull yourself over!

PIHO

I really don't think—

URSU

—SHUT UP!

(He studies the barrier, pushes against it, and finally grasps the top)

I pull now?

THALA

Pull!

(URSU pulls himself over the barrier and leaps to the ground. PIHO tenses, ready to fight, but instead URSU whoops and hugs THALA. They laugh together)

THALA (Cont'd)

Ursu, you need to apologize.

URSU

For what?

THALA

For fighting with ...

(to PIHO)

I don't know your name.

PIHO

Piho.

URSU

I've never heard of any bears named Piho.

PIHO

What you’ve never heard of would fill the—

THALA

—Piho, you need to apologize too.

PIHO

I don’t need to do anything. I’m leaving.

THALA

Where?

PIHO

None of your business. Don’t tell the humans anything.

(PIHO snarls and exits)

URSU

I should teach that bear a lesson.

THALA

Ursu, we’re free!

URSU

Free?

THALA

Where should we go?

URSU

Let me think—

THALA

—Are you hungry? There’s seals! Piho says they’re disappointing, but—

URSU

—Don’t tell me what Piho says! Don’t mention that name!

THALA

But Ursu, if it weren’t for Piho, we’d still be on the other side.

(URSU scans the zoo. Finally, he points in the direction opposite
PIHO’s exit)

URSU

We’ll go this way.

THALA

Okay.

(They exit together. Blackout.)

Scene 2

(Lights up on THALA, URSU, and PIHO lying unconscious in the enclosure. A tranquilizer dart protrudes from each bear. The barrier is noticeably higher than in Scene 1.

In the distance, an elephant trumpets. PIHO twitches and finally, groggily, rises)

PIHO

Ow ...

(PIHO yanks out the dart, looks around, and suddenly realizes what has happened)

PIHO (Cont'd)

No! No no no no no no—

(shaking the others)

Wake up! WAKE UP! UUUUPP!

(PIHO yanks the darts out of THALA and URSU. They wince and awaken)

THALA

Piho?

URSU

Where are—

PIHO

—We're caught!

URSU

What?

(looking around)

We're home.

PIHO

This is not my home!

URSU

Agreed.

PIHO

Don't stand there agreeing, idiot—help me!

(URSU snarls)

PIHO (Cont'd)

Please.

(URSU bends and allows PIHO to straddle his shoulders. With URSU's help, PIHO manages to grasp the top of the barrier. PIHO then clambers across and drops carefully to the other side)

THALA

Where are you going?

PIHO

The ice.

THALA

Where is that?

PIHO

I'll find it.

(to URSU)

Thank you.

(PIHO hurries off)

URSU

Time to swim. It's hot!

(URSU begins to exit. THALA remains by the barrier)

URSU (Cont'd)

What's wrong?

THALA

I want to be free.

URSU

Free to what?

THALA

Free.

URSU

To starve? To be hunted? To end up back here tomorrow with another needle in your neck?

(He crosses to THALA. She embraces him)

URSU (Cont'd)

To leave me alone?

THALA

I'm sorry.

(URSU bends, and THALA climbs on his shoulders. They approach the barrier. THALA pulls herself across and drops to the ground)

THALA (Cont'd)

Ursu ...

URSU

Thala, go!

(THALA nods and hurries after PIHO. URSU paces. He roars. Finally he settles beside the barrier and stares into the distance. Blackout. End of play.)