

Unstable Cola

By Pendell

Everett was going for his evening walk. There wasn't much interesting to look at, it being the North Pole and all, but he enjoyed the fresh air and just getting away to relax for a while. Recently, he'd been enjoying going up to an edge of ice and lying down in the snow to stare up at the sky while listening to the chilly water move calmly.

He found a nice spot where the water gently splashed up against the edge of the ice, without actually going onto land. The sound was very relaxing, and he laid down nearby and looked up at the stars. The sky moved almost too slowly to see, but he could tell after a while when the stars had moved in the sky. The sound of the weak waves splashing around a few feet away was so continuous and calming that soon enough he found his eyelids becoming quite heavy, and he decided there could be nothing wrong with taking a little nap...

Half an hour later...

CRASH!!!

Everett jerked awake, being snapped out of his doze. He sat up quickly and looked around, his heart in his throat. What could have made such a loud noise, especially out here in the middle of nowhere?

His eyes locked on the edge of the ice. There was a large wooden crate, splintered and cracked open at its side, stuck on the sharp edge of the ice. It had stamps all over it, which were faded, but still legible. They all read, "RECALLED".

Everett cautiously slid over in his sitting position towards the crate, his curiosity spiked by the stamps. Where had the crate come from? What was in there that had been recalled? At the very least he felt he needed to know what had disrupted his nap.

There was something in there, he barely saw a glint through the smashed-open hole. As he approached, a dark liquid began to leak out onto the snow. Everett paused and stared worriedly at it. The dark liquid seemed to soak into the snow and stop there, staining the patch of ground a light brown.

"What in the..." He made it to the crate, being sure to avoid stepping on the tainted piece of land, and peeked inside. It was a bunch of glass bottles filled with the dark liquid. Two or three had been smashed, and had spilled out most of their contents. The bottles looked human-sized, they were relatively tiny to a beast as big as him. He gently poked one of his claws into the crate and scraped out the broken glass, and pulled out one of the undamaged bottles. He turned it around in the snow. It had a fancy logo on it that was a bit difficult to read. Turning it around, he saw that there was a big yellow sticker slapped over the back part of the label. It said "UNSTABLE".

Unstable? What did that mean? He wasn't quite sure. The liquid wasn't leaping around or glowing or anything.

He hooked one of his claws under the little aluminium cap and easily pried it off. As soon as the cap was removed, there was a hissing noise. Everett immediately looked all around,

expecting to see someone else nearby. But there wasn't anyone else. Then he realized that the sounds were coming from the bottle! He gazed into the small circular opening at the dark liquid, deeply curious. There were bubbles floating up through the liquid and popping at the surface! How had he not noticed that before? Had that only begun once he opened it?

The scent coming off the bubbling concoction was surprisingly pleasant. Sweet, smelling of some sort of mix of spices... Even with the strange bubbles floating out of it, he was still as curious as ever about how it tasted.

Everett lifted the bottle up to his muzzle and tilted his head back, letting it pour out onto his tongue and down his throat. The bubbles tickled his mouth and throat, and the flavor was unlike anything he'd ever had before. It was amazing! Next thing he knew, the whole bottle was finished.

Amazed, he held the bottle in his paws again and examined the label. He still couldn't really understand most of it, a lot of the text was clearly made for human eyes, not polar bear eyes.

While he was inspecting the bottle, a large bubble of gas suddenly rushed up his throat. **"BWWOOUURRP!!!"** The belch rumbled out of him intensely, rattling his entire body.

Everett dropped the bottle back into the snow and nearly fell over backwards. Had that sound really come from him? He wasn't particularly known to be a loud belcher back at the colony, but that one surely would have won him an award in some sort of contest.

Recovering from that spontaneous moment, he placed a paw thoughtfully on his stomach... And felt an intense, consistent rumbling. It wasn't a hunger rumble, no, in fact he actually felt quite full... Fuller... By the moment.

His gut was expanding. It was difficult to register at first, but it eventually became impossible to deny as he began to feel a strong pressure building in his middle and his sweatshirt began to grow tight around his belly area.

He was so absorbed with staring down at his slowly ballooning stomach that he was unable to stop the second massive escape of gas. A tremendous **"BHHUUURRRRPPP!!!"** from his front followed rather quickly by a sudden **"FFRPPPPRPPRPRT!!!"** from his rear. He blushed, even though there was nobody around at all to witness his humiliating gas problems.

Whatever was steadily building up inside his body was seeking escape through any means, with no regard for decency. And it showed no signs of stopping. Everett groaned as the pressure in his belly began to get very uncomfortable. He cupped one arm under the swelling mass and rested the other on top. Along with the steady rumbling were now various aggressive bubbling, gurgling, and churning sounds, and the distinctive feeling of gas rushing around his insides in what felt like the worst case of indigestion he'd ever experienced.

*Can indigestion kill you? Has anybody ever **exploded** from bloating?* Everett wondered nervously. He looked around, starting to feel quite helpless due to how alone he was out here. He knew he had to get back to the colony as soon as possible, maybe someone there could help him!

So Everett began to run. His fluffy legs stomping along through the snow, a bulging ball of a gut hanging out in front of him. With each step, the intensely bubbly liquid inside of him sloshed around loudly, fizzing and foaming more and more in reaction to being tossed about. His shirt eventually rode up his spherical stomach quite rapidly, almost bopping him in the face, leaving his fuzzy gut exposed. The polar bear's running pants were interspersed with thick belches and roaring farts, all doing very little to relieve the pressure.

Everett didn't even notice at first when he began to waddle. He was so intent on moving forwards, towards the colony, that he wasn't even really paying attention to how fast he was getting there. It only drew his attention when he heard the SHHRRRIP of his black pants and felt the cool air on his thighs.

Everett stopped in his tracks and looked down. He was only met with swelling, bubbly stomach. Duh. He leaned over and looked down his side, around the balloon of his torso, and was so surprised he almost fell over yet again. His stomach had not been the only thing filling with soda gas, at least according to his blimpish, rounded thighs and rear. There were small rips and holes all over his pants, squishy air-filled flesh squeezing out of all of them in search of freedom.

A paw gently pressed against the thigh, which resulted in an angry gurgling sound from his thighs, followed by a loud **"FFPPRRRRPPTT"** from his rear. Everett could hardly believe his situation at this point. What kind of horrid concoction turned innocent animals such as himself into rapidly inflating balloons?

As he stared down, the paw that was pressed into his puffy leg began to tingle... And then it began to swell.

No. He couldn't believe it. He slowly raised his paw up and held it out in front of his face, mesmerized and terrified. Each of the toes on his paw grew round and full, tingling all the while, and became weirdly taut and difficult to move. The pad of his paw followed, rounding out. His paw now resembled one of those rubber gloves the colony doctor had if you blew it up. He turned his paw around, examining it, wondering if it would explode right now before him like those gloves did when they filled up too much. It didn't. Instead, his forearm began to swell up too.

"BBBHHUUUURRRRAAAAPPPP!!!" He had already wasted so much time. He had to move. **Now.**

The polar bear began to run again, although at this point it would be more accurately described as a very panicked waddle. He ignored the sounds of clothes tearing, the feeling of more and more of his legs rubbing against each other with each step, the slowing of his pace, the feeling of his chest filling with bubbles, his upper arms filling with bubbles, his cheeks filling with bubbles. He let the gas out as it came, hoping his natural processes could stave the inevitable off. But no amount of farting and belching could match the ferocity with which he was ballooning up.

Another detail which Everett chose to ignore was the feeling of his footpaws making less and less of an indentation in the snow as he moved along. He didn't want to think about what that meant for him. Some part of him knew, but he refused to even let the thought process occur. Even as the strides between steps began to grow longer and wider, the bear refused to acknowledge it, remaining hyperfocused on his goal.

Just there! I can see it! Igloos! Everett felt overwhelmed with relief. He began to wave his swollen arms over his head to try and catch somebody's attention. He opened his mouth to shout out for them, but all that came out was a deep and heavy "BBBBWWWOOOUUURRRRPP!!!"

Everett looked like he was moonwalking now, each step sending him coasting through the air, a giant naked white orb of a bear, emanating a persistent gurgling percolating noise.

He was so excited to be near safety, he didn't even pay attention where he was placing his feet, and with a gasp he tripped over a rock and went falling forwards. Everett braced himself for impact, closing his eyes tightly... But it never came. He opened his eyes anxiously, and saw the ground below him. Slowly, but surely, falling away from him. No. He was falling away from it.

Pure terror gripped him, and he waved his paws out at the ground, hoping to grasp onto something, anything. But even if his paws weren't filled with gas and unable to close around anything, all he did was swipe at snow for a few second before the ground was out of reach. His ascent was slow, sickeningly slow. Anybody could rush over and grab onto him and save him from his fate, surely. But nobody did.

He looked over at the colony. He did see some of his friends! But they weren't rushing over to help, they were staring out in confusion. All they knew was that there had been a thunderous sound they likely didn't even identify as a burp, and that it had come from this direction, where all they saw was something like the weather balloons the human explorers often deployed slowly floating into the sky, but with no human manning it below.

Everett tried to wave his arms again, but couldn't. They were so filled with gas that all they could do was stick out his sides like a starfish, bloated and round like two useless traffic cones blending into his bare globe of a body. He tried to let out another belch, maybe that would alert them, but when he opened his mouth... nothing. In fact, he now realized that the fizzing and bubbling inside of him had finally stopped! But, of course, at the worst possible moment.

So he called out, yelled for help, shrieked his name, but it was too late, he was too high in the sky, they were too far away to hear him anymore. He flapped his paws uselessly as he saw his colony scratch their heads and eventually return to their igloos. Surely they would eventually wonder where he had gone, go looking for him, find his tattered and stretched clothes, and eventually make the connection about the strange blimp they had seen that day. He only prayed that they didn't also find that crate of liquid, the same one that had effectively doomed him to float off into the sky, no longer tethered to the ground...

He came to a conclusion as he drifted quietly up into the clouds, watching the land shrink further and further away... He should pay more attention to labels.