

***The Adventures of Aries***

***The Little Bear***

***That Couldn't Sleep***



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Little Bear That Couldn't Sleep**

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Aries is an unusual little bear. Her great, great, great grandfather was a polar bear and she has inherited white ears and white paws that mark her out as unusual amongst the other brown bears.

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## Chapter 1. Rise and Shine!

Picture this place with your mind's eye. It is a valley in the majestic Redwoods national nature reserve. The valley is surrounded by towering mountain peaks covered in snow with thick pine forest on their lower slopes. In the valley sits a hill. The hill is sparsely wooded with one ancient and tall giant redwood tree dominating all the other fir trees around. Icicles hanging from the branches are slowly melting in the spring morning sunshine, dripping onto the fresh green grass surrounding the tree. At the bottom of the hill runs a stream. In the height of summer it is little more than a babbling brook, home to sticklebacks and tadpoles, but today it is quite deep and fast, swollen by the melting snow.

Now if you look carefully, at the foot of the redwood tree there is a dark shadow. Look closer and you will see that the shadow is really the entrance to a cave. You could not tell from the outside but the cave has been home for a female bear and her cub while they hibernated through the long cold winter snows. While we are watching, a large bear's head appears at the entrance to the cave and peers cautiously around. It listens for a moment to the sounds of the birds singing in the trees, welcoming the spring. Then the bears head disappears back into the cave.

Inside the small cozy cave, a little bear is sleeping on a bed of soft dry grass and moss. She is most unusual for a brown bear in these parts, as she has a badge of white fur in the middle of her chest and white fur on the tips of her paws. Her mother tells her that there is some polar bear in the family way back on her father's side, a great, great, great grandfather from the lands of ice and snow far away to the north.

A big paw gently shakes the baby bears shoulder.

"Wake up sleepy head," the mother bear whispered into the little bear's ear.

The little bear snuffles and yawns but then curls.

"Wake up Aries, come on now, rise and shine. Spring is here at last and I for one am absolutely famished."

Aries slowly rolls onto her back, stretches her arms above her head and opens her eyes.

"Hi Mom, what time is it?" she said in a sleepy voice.

"It's April".

"Now let's be moving little lady. We've got things to do, places to see and friends we haven't spoken to for months. I wonder if my sister and your two young cousins are awake yet? Probably – those two rascals can't keep out of mischief for long."

Aries sat up immediately excited.

"I am just so hungry Mom. What's for breakfast?" She asked.

"Well now, that depends," the mother bear replied. "I expect we will start with some fresh grasses and juicy clover, some roots and maybe if we are really lucky, I just might be able to find us a big fat ant nest."

Aries pushed past her mother and charged out of the cave.

"Oh goody, good, goody..." she shouted.

"Wait a second. Wait for me..." called out her mother. Too late. Aries was clearly in a hurry to discover the world.

Mommy Bear shook her head and chuckled to herself.

"Just opened her eyes after a whole winter asleep and already charging around the place like a crazy caribou. Where does she get the energy?"

Aries came out of the cave at full tilt, tripped over a tree root and tumbled head over heels down the hill.

"Whoaoa"...She cried.

Aries landed in the stream with a huge splash and for a split second disappeared under the water. Climbing quickly back onto the bank, she shook herself vigorously, spraying water in all directions then stuck a finger in each ear to get the last water out, just as her mother caught up with her.

“Wow that was chilly,” Aries said. “If I wasn't properly awake before, I certainly am now!”

Mommy Bear reached out a paw and tousled the fur on Aries head.

“Don't be in such a rush,” she told the young bear. “Seriously, don't get too far away from me. It can be dangerous out here for a little bear alone. Some bears can be very bad tempered when they wake up after hibernating and you don't want to get on the wrong side of them. They don't call them grizzlies for nothing you know.”

“OK Mom, I'll be careful,” promised Aries.

“Now if my memory serves me correctly, the tastiest clover will be down in the valley,” continued the mother bear. “Let's go. We don't want to be the last bears at the party now do we?”

She set off following the direction of the stream, down the hill and into the valley, with Aries following close behind her.

“Sure thing Mom. Err...What's clover? Come to that, what's a valley? Can I eat it? Like I said, I'm soooo hungry.” Aries had a lot to learn.

On the far bank of the stream, two big green frogs saw the whole thing...

“Whadya make of that performance then?” Asked the first frog.

“I'd have to give it 7 out of 10 for technical difficulty but just a 2 for artistic impression,” replied the second frog, as if he were a judge in an Olympics diving competition. “When it comes to artistic impression, well, frankly bears suck.”

“Yup,” agreed the first frog. “Too big a splash when she entered the water. No finesse. Bears just ain't got what it takes when it comes to water sports. To be fair on the big hairy guys, we amphibians are a hard act to follow.”

The second frog nodded in agreement, flashed out a log tongue and expertly swallowed a passing fly without moving his body, then executed a perfect dive into the water, leaving barely a ripple.

“Now that was sheer class,” the first frog proudly declared to nobody in particular, before diving in after his friend.

## Chapter 2. Meet the Family

The next morning found the bears still following the stream but much lower down the valley. Here the snow had already gone and the valley was lush and green. Gently sloping fields of grass were fringed by fragrant pine forest.

Several bears were dotted around the valley, some with cubs in tow, and the mother bear put a gentle paw on Aries shoulder pointing to one of the big female bears eating clover at the edge of the forest.

“Look Aries it’s your aunt Ethyl,” she exclaimed.

She waved both her arms in the air to attract the other bears attention and shouted over to her.

“Hey Ethyl. It’s us.”

The two bears ran together and hugged.

“Hey sister, it’s so nice to see you again. So how was winter?” Ethyl asked.

“How would I know? We slept through it the same as you did,” the other bear replied. Ethyl then turned to look at Aries.

“And who is this young lady with you?” She asked.

“Surely it can’t be Aries? My you’ve grown since I last saw you.”

From just inside the forest a pinecone came flying through the air and hit Aries firmly on the back of the head.

“Ouch!” she complained, and picked up the offending object, studying it closely. Ethyl and Gentle turned to see where the pinecone had come from and saw two male cubs much bigger than Aries coming bounding towards them from the tree line.

Ethyl let out a long-suffering sigh. “Oh, no. Here comes trouble.”

“Bor and Bru behave your selves! Come say hello to your aunt and cousin.”

“Hi Aunt Gentle,” the cubs said together. “Hey cousin, nice to meet you”, said Bru.

Bor pointed at the large white patch on Aries chest. “Wow, cute fur cousin. How did you get the white markings?”

Aries puffed out her chest proudly. “I am part polar bear on my father’s side. My great, great, great grandfather came from the far North,” she told them.

“Interesting,” said Bru. “But not as interesting as what we just found in the forest.”

“Yes, we found an old dead log just inside the forest and it’s just full to bursting with ants!”

His brother added. “There’s enough for everybody. Come on, what are you all waiting for? Let’s go before some other bear finds them.”

With that, the two cubs scampered back off to the forest.

“Now that’s an offer you can’t refuse,” said Ethyl. “Maybe those two rascals are good for something after all. Let’s go to lunch ladies,” so the other three bears followed the cubs to the forest.

Aries was still examining the pinecone and she now held it out to her mother.

“What’s this Mom?” She asked.

“It’s a pine cone,” she answered.

“Can I eat it?”

“Well you could I suppose...” but before she could finish the sentence the hungry little bear popped the cone into her mouth and bit down hard.

“Urgh”, spluttered Aries, spitting out the cone.

“That’s absolutely horrible”.

“But they are very hard and don’t taste very nice,” continued her mother.

Ethyl chuckled at this.

“That wasn’t very nice of you sister,” she said.

Ethyl turned to her two cubs. “Ants you say? Mmm, mmm. I just love ants for breakfast. I do hope they are the red ones. So much tastier than termites I find. Lead the way boys. And boys...”

“Yes mom?” Asked the cubs.

“It’s very rude to throw pinecones at young ladies.”

Bor and Bru faced each other trying to look innocent.

“Pine cone? What pinecone? I didn’t see any pinecone,” said Bru.

“Me neither,” said his brother. “But I did see an ants nest and ants taste a heck of a lot better than clover. Let’s go Bro!”

Bor & Bru turned and scampered back to the forest and the rest of the group followed at a slower pace.

“The twins are still a handful then?” Asked Gentle.

Ethyl sighed deeply. “Yes Ma’am. Every minute of every day, it seems. Take my advice Aries, if you want to stay out of trouble, just watch what the twins are up to and do exactly the opposite.”

Aries nodded her head and grinned.

“Aw come on now sister,” said Gentle. “Don't be too hard on them. Before long it will be time for them to leave and find a new life of their own. You will miss them, you know you will.”

Ethyl chuckled to herself at this remark. “You think so? Some days I can hardly wait! I have a hunch it’s going to be an interesting summer.”

With that, the bears entered the relative shade of the forest and set about a tasty snack of red ants.

### Chapter 3. A Close Call at Antler Falls

Some days later, all five of our bears could be seen walking along a well-trodden woodland path through the trees. Aries was lagging behind.

“We’ve been walking for hours and my paws are aching. Where are we going again?” The tired cub asked, rubbing one aching paw with another.

Her mother turned round to explain. “We are going to the big river. Today is a great day for all the forest bears and an important part of your education.”

“This is the time of year all the bears meet at Antler Falls to wait for the spawning salmon,” her mother continued.

“We are going to teach you how to catch fish.”

“Okay...so what are fish and what do I with them once I catch them?”

“They are creatures that live in the water. For a couple of weeks every summer thousands of them swim up the Big River to lay their eggs.” Her mother explained.

“And when they get to Antler Falls we will be waiting for them,” said the twins making a show of catching fish with their paws.

A thought occurred to Aries and her eyes lit up. “Hey! Can I eat them?” she asked in an excited voice.

“Of course you can eat them,” said Bor.

“That’s kind of the whole point of the exercise,” said Bru.

Aries was curious.

“Do they taste nice?” She asked.

Bor looked at her incredulously. “Taste nice? Are you kidding? Cousin, let me tell you, fish are even tastier than ants, and that’s saying something.”

“Last year we ate so many we could hardly walk.” Said Bru, while he patted his stomach fondly remembering the experience.

“Don't worry Aries. Not far to go now,” said Ethyl. We should be able to see the big river from the next ridge.

Reassured, Aries picked up her pace and caught up with the others.

A short time later, the group reached the top of the next ridge and looked down onto Antler Falls. The Big River lay below them, a series of rapids with foaming waterfalls and deep pools. There were bears everywhere, some along the banks, some in the water, others perched precariously on slippery rocks waiting for the salmon to come.

“Wow! Just look at all those bears!” Aries had never seen so many bears.

“It looks like we are a little late. Everybody got here before us,” said Gentle.

“From up here it looks like the best fishing spots are already taken.”

Ethyl wasn't worried. “Don't worry,” she said. “There's always more than enough fish to go around. I see Aunty has got the best spot as usual.”

Ethyl pointed to a large female bear stood on a flat rock in the middle of the river. The water was funneled around her and fish were jumping within touching distance of her as they tried to swim upstream.

Aries was curious.

“Is she really my Aunty?” she asked.

“Actually no. We are related to most of the bears here some way or another.” The mother bear replied. “Aunty is just her nickname among the other bears.”

“It's not her real name. It's short for antisocial. She has made being bad tempered into an art form. She's the girl that put the “Grrrrr” into Grizzly.”

As they watched a male bear tried to join Aunty on the rock, but she jumped up and karate kicked him in the chest. She landed nimbly on her feet as the other bear fell back into the water with a huge splash.

“Go find your own fishing spot sucker! Hah!” yelled Aunty.

Ethyl and Gentle looked at each other. “Yep, that’s Aunty alright.” They agreed.

With that, the bears made their way down towards the river and Antler Falls.

After reaching the river, the two families split up to fish from their favorite spots. Gentles fishing spot is on a rock surrounded by foaming water. Aries is on another rock in shallower water, much closer to the riverbank.

The salmon are swimming upstream and can frequently be seen jumping out of the water. “Now watch me closely Aries,” she tells the young cub. “Every bear has their own fishing technique, but this way works fine for me.”

Gentle is an experienced angler and patiently waits for the right moment to strike.

Suddenly a fish jumps out of the water to her right. She flashes out a paw and the salmon lands at her feet, flapping around on the rock.

She flashes a paw out at another jumping fish, but this time misses her mark.

“Watch how I do it Aries. We’ll just catch another one or two then go relax for a while in the grass. After dinner when there aren't so many bears fishing we’ll find a quiet safe spot where you can try your hand at catching some supper.”

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

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