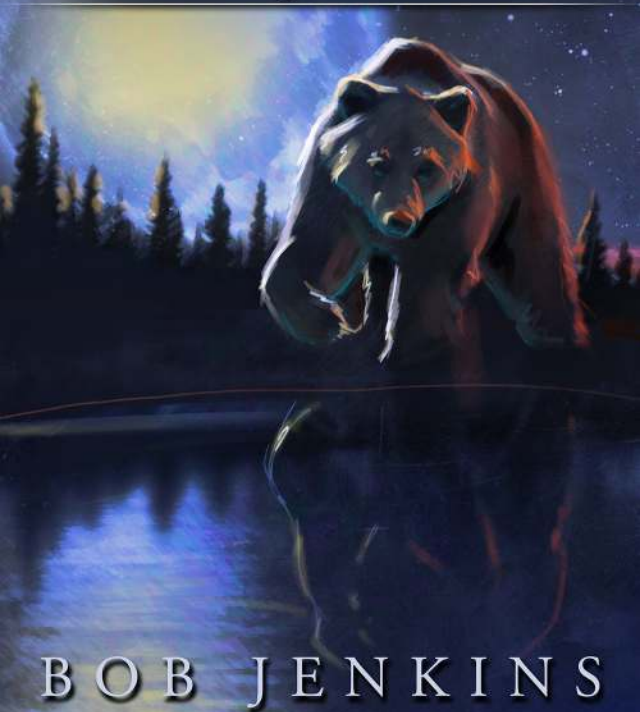


BOOK TWO OF
SHARP TEETH, FLAT TEETH

Berry Face



BOB JENKINS

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B O B J E N K I N S

Sharp Teeth, Flat teeth: Book Two

Berry Face

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This is a work of fiction. The names of the forest animals have been changed to protect them from the hunters and trappers who would exploit them for sport or fur.

Dedicated to the Fur Clans and Feather
Clans of the California Foothills

ILLUSTRATIONS BY

Deg Philip

CHAPTER I

LONG CLAW

C ***HEEEYAAA!***
From her perch atop the great Blue Rock, Flitter the pack rat was first to see the eagle.

“Long Claw!” Flitter shrieked.

Stark white and glowing in full moonlight, the monstrous bird circled above the clearing, peering down at the Fur Clans with cunning yellow eyes.

The animals, flat teeth or sharp teeth, it didn’t matter, scrambled for cover. Flitter, Old Mother, and Zip darted inside their pack rat nest deep beneath Blue Rock. The female cougar, Snaggleteeth, snatched

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one cub in her jaws, her mate grabbed the other, and raced for the trees. Three Paws the beaver, High Mama the deer, Bent Ear the jackrabbit, Chatternut the squirrel, Yip Yip the coyote, and Slippery the River Otter scurried under thick manzanita bushes where they crouched in the shadows, hearts pounding. An unruly gang of raccoons, skunks, and mice dove into the blackberry brambles.

Only Berry Face, the old she-bear, and Wazi the human girl, stood their ground. The bear was sightless and confused. The human was not going to leave her bear friend to face Long Claw alone.

Wazi put her hand on the bear's massive white shoulder.

Something happened!

You may call it magic. You may call it whatever you like, but when the girl touched the bear, the old blind bear *saw* the eagle through the girl's fresh, young eyes. Whatever Wazi saw ... Berry Face *saw*.

And just in time.

Long Claw plunged into the clearing like a lightning bolt, her enormous talons extended, her terrifying beak open. Wazi and Berry Face ducked as deadly claws swept over their heads.

Then, *another* miraculous thing happened. Take a deep breath ...

Berry Face rose up on her hind legs. Wazi raced up the bear's back, planted her feet on the bear's massive shoulders and ... and ... leaped! Up, up, up into the night sky, she *leaped!*

Whew!

No human girl had ever leaped so high.

Long Claw didn't see her coming. The eagle was busy searching the moonlit land below. She screeched with glee at the thought of her next prank. Then, without warning, Wazi snagged one of the eagle's tail feathers and plucked it right out of the bird's rear end.

“EEEYAAAK!” Long Claw screeched,

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twisting back upon herself to rip the attacker to pieces. How could such an earthbound creature violate her aerial domain? The human would die for this insult!

But Wazi was already falling, falling to the earth below, lying on her back in midair and falling, her long black hair streaming upward toward the enraged bird. Falling ... and *smiling*. Something about the smile confused the eagle. Who was this human?



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Long Claw screamed her blood curdling battle cry.

CHEEEYAAHHH!

She beat her enormous white wings against the air and climbed higher and higher, around and around, climbing until she reached the heights where she would turn over, fold her wings and plunge down, down, down, toward her enemies. At the last second, she would open her talons, and grab! No near-miss this time! She would impale the human in the soft flesh of her shoulders. She would whisk her away to the secret lair in the mountains. And then ... and then ... she would eat the human alive.

CHAPTER 2

BOOM BOOM BOOM

MEANWHILE, WAZI FELL TOWARD THE rocky ground below. From the safety of their hiding places, the animals ran into the clearing. Catching sight of the falling girl, they cried in alarm.

Wazi continued to fall, calmly looking up at the eagle, the moon, the night sky. Taking it all in, she fell, still clutching the tail feather. She wasn't going to lose that!

At the last moment, at the very last *second*, the girl flipped over. How did she know this was the point of no return?

ShhhhaaaaaWAP!

She landed on all fours like a bobcat.

For a moment nothing moved, no sound disturbed the forest. Then, Wazi rose to her hind legs in the preferred manner of humans.

Everyone gave a soft sigh of relief:

“Ahhhhhhhhh.”

Wazi tied the feather in her hair, just behind the right ear, where it hung all the way to her waist and swung quite sassy as she ambled over to Berry Face. Jackrabbits jumped and squirrels scrambled out of her way.

Many of the animals did not trust the girl. Most were still afraid of her. Snaggletooth the cougar hated humans and spat at the girl as she passed by. Wazi nodded to the big cat as if wishing her a pleasant evening.

“Sssssssss,” hissed Snaggletooth.

Wazi ignored the cougar.

Coming up to Berry Face, Wazi put her hand on the great she-bear’s shoulder and whispered in her ear, “The next time Long Claw will kill me ... if she can.”

Berry Face rumbled agreement.

Wazi was about to add something when a shadow swept over them. The eagle soared back and forth across the full moon, making sure she was seen from below. She screeched her challenge:

CHEEEYAAHHH!

Again, the animals scuttled to the safety of thick bushes and thorny brambles. They hid in secret places beneath logs and inside hollow trees.

Once again, the girl and the bear faced the eagle. Long Claw grew larger, much larger, as she dropped toward them, filling their ears with her scream.

Wazi climbed onto Berry Face's wide back. She sang into the bear's ear:

*Hey Ya Hey Ya,
Shot-in-the-Butt-Ya,
Now we go to fight!*

Holding onto the bear's shaggy shoulders, Wazi leaned her head against the bear. In that instant the magic happened again.

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Berry Face saw the world through the girl's eyes. She shot Wazi a quick question, "What is happening?"

"No time!"

The avian monster fell upon them. Together, bear and girl reared up to meet her. Human curses and bearish roars battled against the ear-shattering screams of the pale winged killer. Tooth and claw, beak and talon, fist and feet tore at each other.



Long Claw struck first, sinking sharp talons into the bear's face. The eagle opened her wicked beak to ravage the bear, but before she could plunge her head down for the kill, Wazi hammered her on top of the skull with three blows of such force they could not possibly have been delivered by a normal human, much less a sixteen year old girl.

BOOM BOOM BOOM!

Wazi's blows did not break Long Claw's skull, but the bird was afraid the next blow would, and in that moment of indecision, she loosened her grip on the bear. Berry Face wrested her face away from the talons. Freed, the bear attacked with her teeth. She seized Long Claw's leg in her jaws.

Back and forth, back and forth, the bear shook the bird until Long Claw hung limp in her jaws. Then, with a mighty toss of her head, Berry Face flung the eagle's body into the night sky.

Wazi pressed her cheek against the bear's

head. Together, they watched the bird's lifeless carcass rise up, up, up, hesitate for an instant, and then fall to earth. But at the last possible instant, the wily old bird, who had only *pretended* to be dead, flung open her wings with a loud *WHOOMPH!* She flapped away, awkwardly, drifting off to the side, her useless leg dangling down.

During the wild celebration that followed, Three Paws the beaver quietly ministered to the bear's wounds. The punctures looked frightful with bright red blood soaking the bear's white fur, but the wounds were shallow. A thick padding of fur protected the bear's tender flesh underneath.

Wazi excused herself, saying that she needed to wash up. She quietly withdrew. Alone, she walked toward Beaver Pond. Only High Mama, queen of the Deer Clan, watched her go. High Mama gestured to Three Paws with a flick of her ears. The beaver nodded, gave the bear's wounds a final lick, and followed the human into the shadows.

CHAPTER 3

MOONLIGHT SWIM

WAZI WALKED TO THE WATER'S edge. Her mind bubbled in a strange froth of thoughts. Behind her, she heard the unmistakable footsteps of Three Paws. *Tat-tat-tat. Tat-tat-tat.* The three legged beaver walked in dainty triplets as if dancing. *Tat-tat-tat.*

Reaching the pond, Wazi sat on a smooth rock as Three Paws slipped into the water beside her. Seconds later, the beaver's head popped above the surface.

"My, that feels good on a hot summer night. Come on in," Three Paws invited.

"I believe I will," the girl said. She

stripped off her clothes and dove in. They floated there together, girl and beaver, on their backs, looking up at the night sky.

The beaver asked, "What do you humans call the full moon?"

"We call it *Purnima, The Moon of New Beginnings.*"

"Ahhhhh," Three Paws sighed, "very good."

"What do you Fur Clans call the full moon?" Wazi asked.

"We call it *The Moon is Happy,*" the beaver answered.

"That's nice," Wazi said.

Neither spoke for a while.

Paddling closer with a swish of her tail, Three Paws stopped when their heads were inches apart. In a whisper, the beaver asked, as gently as one could ever ask such a delicate question, "What troubles you? How can you be so sad under this beautiful Moon is Happy?"

Wazi answered, "It's just that ... that ...

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there was something that disturbed me about Long Claw. Something *familiar*.”

“Familiar?”

“When I got up close, I felt like I knew her.”

“Well, I don’t think that’s very likely,” Three Paws said, scrunching up her nose.

“Probably not.” Wazi bit her lip.

“So?”

Wazi didn’t answer. Flipping over, she swam to shore and pulled herself out of the calm water and onto a rock ledge.

Three Paws jumped up on the rock beside the girl and shook her head in the manner of humans. “These are hard thoughts and unknown to me.”

Wazi smiled, “Better that way.”

“Well,” Three Paws whistled through her front teeth as beavers do when they are ready to play, “all I know is she is *gone*, not to return for a long time. You gave her such a beating on her head.” The beaver

danced around, pantomiming Wazi's mighty blows:

"BOOM BOOM BOOM!"

Wazi joined the game, acting out Long Claw's part, and screeching:

"EEYAAAK!"

"BOOM BOOM BOOM!"

The two friends chased each other around, laughing and shouting so loudly they were heard all the way back at Blue Rock. Alarmed by the ruckus, the other animals called out, "Three Paws! Wazi! Where are you? What's wrong?"

"We should get back to the storytelling," Three Paws said.

Wazi panted, "What shall we hear tonight?"

"Why, my dear," Three Paws looked at her in surprise, "whatever you like. Everyone will want you to choose the story."

"Even Snaggletooth?"

"Yes, even her. This night, you are the *champion* of the Fur Clans!"

CHAPTER 4

BAAAAROOOOOO
OOOOOOOOOO

FLITTER PEERED OUT AT THE thousand glittering eyes of the Fur Clans. What a picture! Sharp Teeth and Flat Teeth, sitting next to each other in friendship. The young pack rat was new to the nerve-racking role of First Talker. She had only performed these duties once before. And now, on her second Moon Is Happy ... *two* frightening attacks by the eagle! Didn't she have enough to worry about? Her heart fluttered. She looked down at the human.

Wazi gave Flitter a wink. Flitter did not

wink back. Winking one eye was a human trick that was catching on among certain clans, but Flitter wasn't ready to try it in front of everybody. Flitter gave Wazi a pack rat finger wiggle to be polite.

Might as well get started, Flitter thought. She took a deep breath. *Here we go*:

“Now, the Fur Clans come to Blue Rock, the Sharp Teeth and the Flat Teeth, showing Good Manners, gather at this sacred place under the Moon Is Happy.”

Three Paws slapped her flat tail on the ground three times.

SLAP! SLAP! SLAP!

That was the signal to be quiet. On this night, Moon Is Happy had already risen, but in the panic of Long Claw's attack, she had hidden herself behind a storm cloud. The Clans had to wait for Moon to come back out. Animals are very patient. It didn't matter how long they had to wait, but it wasn't very long. Soon, Moon crept

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out from behind the clouds and into the clear night sky.

“The Moon. The Moon. The Moon Is Happy,” the little ones cheeped, and barked, and squealed.

Yip Yip, the elder Coyote Talker, threw back her head, “We sing to Moon-Is-Happy who brings light to the forest:

“BAAAAROOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO.”

The animals turned their faces to the sky:

“BAAAAROOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO.”

Wazi threw back her own head and joined in:

“BAAAAROOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO.”

Flitter waited for the howls to die away, then very quietly she asked, “What tale shall we have tonight?”

Nobody answered. Every head turned to Wazi. Every eye fixed on her odd human face. Every ear cocked in her direction to hear her say the words. Wazi looked around. More friendly faces. Her triumph

over Long Claw had silenced much of the distrust. She caught the eye of the cougar. They stared at each other. Finally, Snaggletooth gave a twitch of her ears, a small, grudging sign of approval.

“Berry Face,” the human smiled. “Tell the story of Berry Face the bear. Tell how she came to be known as Shot-in-the-Butt.”

CHAPTER 5

THE STORY OF BERRY FACE THE BEAR

F *LITTER PAUSED DRAMATICALLY AND HELD her paws in the air. She took a deep breath, then spoke the first words of the story:*

In the days before Green Sky, Berry Face was not called Shot-in-the-Butt. That came later. First she had to be born.

Mother Bear's two cubs were only the size of squirrels, naked and hairless and brown—for our Berry Face was not always white with age as she is today. The cubs spent the first months of their life in hibernation, safe and warm, cared for

by their loving mother. Only when spring catkins burst from Aspen branches, did Mother Bear allow the cubs to come out under the blue sky to learn how to become bears in the world.

Right away, Mother Bear began to think of the tiny female as Berry Face. The cub loved berries so much that her face was usually smeared with red or black or purple juice. She loved berries more than any other food ... black berries, gooseberries, strawberries, any kind of berries.



The cubs grew bigger every day. It should have been a pleasant time for Berry Face, her first summer in the world, but she discovered that her brother was a cruel companion. Soon, he came to be known throughout the forest as Prank.

The animals hissed at the mention of his name. Flitter gave them a stern look.

Prank was a bully from the day he was born. When he saw Mother Bear cradling Berry Face, his head filled with nasty ideas. He stole his sister's food. He nipped her. He scared her away from nursing on their mother's milk. Only when Mother Bear took notice, did he move aside so Berry Face could suck. Together, the two cubs nursed.



Prank pretended to be the sweetest little thing. Berry Face wasn't fooled. She could see mean eyes staring at her.

Bigger and more powerful than his sister, Prank enjoyed hurting Berry Face. He bit and pinched. He knocked her around. He pushed her to the ground. He dug his sharp hind claws into her soft belly. He made sure he didn't draw blood. Oh no! That would have been going too far. Mother Bear was a tolerant parent, but she would not have put up with that.

Prank learned he was good at sneaking. He played tricks on Berry Face that Mother Bear never saw.

To tell the truth, Berry Face was afraid of him.



In the late fall, Mother Bear and the two cubs returned to their den to hibernate through the cold winter. Of course, Prank took the warmest spot for himself.

His punishment for being so cruel was coming sooner than he imagined.

By the summer of their second year, bear cubs are able to take care of themselves, so a mother bear usually drives the younglings away to find new territories and start their own lives. She snapped at the air in front of Prank's face. She growled, and swatted dirt. She false-charged at him. Prank squealed like a first-year cub and dashed for safety. Mother Bear chased him out of the woods, over several hills, across the river, up the other side of the canyon, crashing through the brush, swerving around great gray boulders until she had driven him miles away.

When it came time to chase Berry Face away, Mother Bear paused. Looking at her female cub, she decided to wait another

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day, or a week, or some other time. Here's the truth of it: Mother Bear loved her daughter. Mother Bear did not want Berry Face to go away.

So it came to pass that the two females lived together in the same den.

But not for long.

CHAPTER 6

THE GREAT DANCE

THE ENORMOUS MALE BEAR CROUCHED under the cover of tall pines. Motionless, he stared at the river below. It was high summer, and so hot down in the canyon that even the bugs looked for shade.

The bear paid scant attention to the mosquitoes, except to flick them away from his head by twitching his ears. Other than those tiny flicks, the male did not move or make a sound. For eight days, he had been stalking Mother Bear and her cub. He knew exactly where to find them. Every morning, they came to the same spot on

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the river. Mother Bear fished for trout, while the cub splashed nearby in pools among smooth gray rocks.

Mother Bear ignored the male, but she knew where he was. She had been watching him from the beginning of his courtship. He knew that she knew he was there. He wanted her to know. He made sure of it by leaving his claw scratches high on the trunks of trees. Bears could not speak in those days, but if he could, he might have been saying:

“No other bear can scratch this high! I am so BIG!”

Mother Bear pretended not to notice, but she put a saucy swing in her step whenever she walked away. It was all part of a great dance that swept them up. The same dance pulses through every living being in the forest. It throbs in every animal and bird and fish and snake down to the tiny mice that frolic on rocky hills.

The great dance of attracting a mate.

Mother Bear, busy with fishing, forgot to keep a careful eye on the big male. Delicious smells of freshly caught trout filled her nose. The roar of river rapids stuffed her ears. She never caught scent of her suitor's approach. She never heard him coming.

The male, huge as he was, moved toward them in utter silence. This was a very dangerous situation for Berry Face. When the male is ready for love, he will do just about anything to get to the female, and he will not abide some other male's cubs hanging around. He knows the mother bear will refuse his proposal as long as she is attending to her baby. Sometimes male bears will drive the cubs away, but most of the time, they will kill the little bears ... and ... eat them.

Berry Face was happily dabbing at her reflection in a nearby rain puddle. She had just enough time to scramble behind her mother when the male bear

crashed through the blackberry bramble and splashed across the shallow river. He hurdled into Mother Bear, and tumbled her in the dirt. The male whirled on Berry Face and lunged, his great jaws slavering foam and spittle. Mother Bear grabbed his hind leg in her teeth, and held on long enough for the cub to run.

The male wrenched his leg free and chased after Berry Face. A fully grown bear can easily catch a youngling. But, not this time. The male stayed close behind the cub's heels, snapping and huffing. He could have closed the gap at any time, but he seemed to be satisfied with chasing Berry Face away without hurting her. Berry Face was terrified ... but alive.

When the male bear chased the cub far enough away, he turned around and returned to Mother Bear. She was waiting in the same spot by the river. Berry Face crept closer so she could watch. But not too close. She needed to keep a safe distance.

Eventually she found a spot along the canyon ridge where she could look down at her mother and the male.

She didn't understand what she was seeing. At first, it looked like her mother was fighting the male. But that couldn't be! The two bears nuzzled against each other. Never before had Berry Face seen her mother act like this. Then the big male climbed up behind her, hugging her around the middle with his strong front legs. She twisted around to bite at him, but she was just playing. With his own teeth, the male grabbed the fur behind Mother Bear's neck and held her still. Both bears growled, but it was a kind of growl Berry face had never heard.

After a while, the grownups finished playing. The male meandered over to a sand bar and flopped down in the sun. Mother Bear wandered over and groomed his fur with her claws and tongue. They

lazed around for a while, then more sniffing and licking, nuzzling and hugging.

Sprawled in the dirt, Berry Face spied on them all day. As the sun began to set, she grew tired. She wanted her mother. Now! This was the worst day of her life! In the small, dark cave she made by wrapping her shaggy front legs over her head, Berry Face whimpered and whined. When she had cried out all of her tears, she unwrapped her front legs and peered down.

The river canyon was empty.

Mother Bear was gone.

Berry Face never saw her mother again.

CHAPTER 7

LICK

BERRY FACE SLUNK AWAY INTO the darkening forest. Every shadow seemed filled with danger. Every sound made her jump. She felt so lonely, so sad, so scared. After a while she sniffed out a wild pig wallow under a fallen tree. She crept deep into the farthest corner and moaned herself to sleep.

In the days that followed, Berry Face wandered the familiar hills, hoping to catch scent of her mother. She traced her way back to her mother's den, but it was cold and empty. The only smell was that of the male. She knew she had to keep

away from him. He had warned her away. The next time, he would kill her.

Her time as a cub was at end. She knew what to eat, and how to find water. Mother Bear had taught her well. Berry Face survived on her own ... and thrived.

Over the next four seasons, she grew muscular and mighty, one of those creatures who are born small and then explode into astonishing size. Berry Face was huge, larger than any of the males. She was also beautiful in the manner of bears. Her fur was glossy chestnut without a speck of the white fur that would someday cover her from the tip of her snout to the claws of her paws.

Male bears caught her scent. In the Ancient Way, they knew she was ready to mate. They came sniffing around, seeking her favor, but they were wary. Berry Face did not like males. She remembered Prank, her mean brother. She remembered the big male who had chased her away from

her mother. No, she wanted nothing to do with males, and most of them, she chased away. But one particularly charming fellow caught her eye ... and her nose. He smelled just right. He was playful and affectionate. He did not force himself on her until she was ready. Then, in the rumble tumble way of bears, she joined with him.

In the winter to follow, Berry Face gave birth to a single cub, a male. She named her first cub ... Lick. That name will give you a good idea of what the cub liked to do most. He just had to lick everything. He learned the world through his tongue. It was a bit of a bother to Berry face ... except when it came time for grooming. His insistent rough tongue was quite useful.

Ahhhh.

It felt so good.

Why did he stop?

She turned her head to investigate ... and he licked her right on the nose.

Ha ha!

Lick was a funny little cub. Berry Face came to love him very much.

In the greening of the year, when Aspen catkins blossomed, when leaves grew luscious, when the sun warmed the ground, Berry Face and Lick emerged from their den to gorge themselves. Their hunger was endless, their stomachs bottomless.

Finally, when Berry Face had eaten the very last juicy blackberry, she snorted and turned toward their den. There, in their warm, safe home, they would dream the dreams of well-fed bears.

They were crossing a wide meadow when something happened. Something that would change ... *everything*.

CHAPTER 8

THE SKY TURNED GREEN

F *LITTER STOPPED THE STORY TO look down at the Talkers who sat in a semi-circle on flat-topped rocks, each to their own, as befitting their great ages and marvelous deeds. White as snow, and much bigger than any other adults of their kind, the Ten Elders of the Fur Clans sat together in the front row.*

Three Paws the beaver.

High Mama the deer.

Snaggletooth the cougar.

Bent Ear the jack rabbit.

Chatternut the squirrel.

Slippery the otter.

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Only One the fox.

Yip Yip the coyote.

Old Mama the pack rat.

Of course, in the center, in the place of honor, rested Berry Face the bear. She could no longer see, but she well-remembered that moment from long ago when the sky turned green.

Flitter took a deep breath. This was the scariest part of the story.

Many seasons ago, on a day just like this one, when the sun was setting over the western ridge, Green Light flashed across the sky. One moment the clouds were pink and the sky late-afternoon blue.

SWOOSH!

Everything turned Green!

Not the cheerful green like grass is green. Not the dark, thoughtful green of pine needles. This was a sickening green like swollen intestines on the ground crawling with flies.

That's what it looked like to the animals who were there. That's what they said.

The ones that lived.

Rabbits looked up at the Green Sky and dropped to the earth. They never rose again. Coyotes went crazy and killed whoever they could. Bears became so stupid they wandered into trees, fell over, and died.

But not every bear.

Not Berry Face.



Berry Face froze as if made of granite. She stared at the Green Sky. The strange event was dangerous. She and her cub were in trouble. Caught out in the open, she knew the best way to vanish was to freeze. That's what she did. Lick, fixed on his mother for instructions, did the same.

Berry Face barely breathed. Slowly, ever so slowly, her eyeballs slid from side to side. She took it all in. The Green Sky cast a sickening olive glow on everything below.

It doesn't hurt. That is good. Let's get out of here!

She spun around to gather up her cub when a wave of some *horrible-thing-we-have-no-words-for* swept over her. The *horrible-thing* sent her tumbling into trees along the edge of the meadow. Berry Face reached out with one paw. Lick, who had fetched up on his own trees some distance away, sprang to his feet and raced toward his mother. He dove under her arm. She

curled around him until he was safe, down deep within her bulky embrace.

Together, they huddled under the *horrible-thing* that squeezed their bodies and pounded their minds. Pounded and pounded and went on and on ...

ma WHUM ma WHUM

ma WHUM ma WHUM

ma WHUM ma WHUM

ma WHUM ma WHUM

Berry face was not afraid.

And as for her cub, that's a different story, but for now, please keep your attention on brave Berry Face who remained calm, even when her mind floated right up out of her head and high into the Green Sky. She looked down on all the land.

Up and down, this way and that, her mind grew so big it filled the whole world. She was everywhere, all at the same time. Her mind poured down like water through canyons. Her mind gushed around hills and seeped into the thickest thickets. She

heard every tiny sound. Her bearish ears gathered in the whimpers of her animal brothers and sisters as they suffered under the pounding of the *horrible-thing*.

Humans! Somehow she knew that the two-legged beings with their firesticks and metal beasts had caused this trouble. Humans had sent the Green Sky to the forest.

Her nose, most prized among her senses, sniffed out the burrows, nests, and dens of the forest creatures, down through the tunnels of moles and up into the hives of bees. Berry Face cried as she smelled them die.

Most amazing were the *thoughts* of animals. The short snapping thoughts of squirrel and the cool, measured thoughts of cougar. Their thoughts came to Berry Face in clear pictures of things seen now and memories of things seen long ago.

And when she heard their thoughts, she felt love the way a mother loves and protects

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her children. All of her children. In that moment, her mind birthed a stunning new idea. Stunning but simple, an idea that I will tell you in just one word:

Family.

In that moment, all of the creatures, Sharp Teeth and Flat Teeth, became her children. And most of them were dying. She watched and listened and smelled them die. There was nothing she could do about it ... but cry.

By and by the *horrible-thing* faded away. Her mind swirled back into her head. Once again, she was just a bear.

She forgot her stunning idea about family.

The sky returned to its normal sunset colors, then darkened into night. Berry Face and her cub resumed their journey to the den. They wanted nothing more than to hide. To curl up on their dry grass bed and close their eyes.

CHAPTER 9 [

FIRESTORM

TRUE NIGHTFALL SETTLED UPON THE forest. Berry Face made her way uphill through tall pines barely seen in the dark. Lick panted behind, going as fast as his little legs could scamper. Berry Face concentrated on the fastest way home, which paths to take and when to cross overland. She kept her head low to the ground, her eyes fixed on the landscape sliding by. That's why she never noticed the orange glow in the sky. That's why she never paused to consider what strange *thing* might be making the forest *brighter* with each passing second.

Berry Face heard it before she saw it. A roaring noise, low in the background, more vibration than a sound, but growing louder at alarming speed.

Now, she looked up! Now she saw it!

The mountain ridge across the canyon was a wall of flame. Firestorm! It gathered strength, then hurled itself down the mountainside, jumped the river, swept up the next slope, used the tree tops to propel its fiery face to the next ridge top ... hesitated ... plummeted down the near side, an unstoppable hurricane of red, hot fury.

Instantly, Berry Face made a decision. Her den was too far. No nearby cave. Run! Put distance between her cub and the fire. Quick, take the Human Road! She hated and feared the Road for good reason. Humans with firesticks drove their beasts up and down the Road. But it was her best chance to escape. Climbing the steep embankment, she ran out into

the middle of the Road, looked in both directions. The red-orange glow of the fire was everywhere. The roar of flames filled the world. She didn't know which way to go. Wind whished by her head, moving uphill. Her instinct told her to follow the wind, to get down wind of the danger.

Mistake! The wind was leading her straight into the wall of fire. She felt the forest grow hotter. Was this the wrong way? She ran around a bend in the road and froze at an unexpected threat in front of her.



There, stampeding down the road toward her, a frightened herd of bleating goats. At any other time, the goats would have sent Berry Face into a hunting frenzy, but not this moment, for standing in the midst of the herd, a human female. The human held a rope tied around the neck of a large white dog. The dog began to growl, its challenge rising to the point of attack. The dog's eyes glowed red in the glare of the fire.

These *things* were in the bear's way.

Rip them to pieces!

Lick ran out in front of his mother to see what was happening. Berry Face shoved him behind, rose high, so high, on her thick legs, opened her mouth and bellowed forth her battle cry. Now! Drop and charge ... but ... but ... but ... she stopped.

The female was crooning soothing human sounds. She was holding the dog close by her leg, making no move to attack.

Bob Jenkins

Berry face smelled fear on the human, but no threat. The human was just as frightened as she was. Reared up so high on her hind legs, Berry Face could see over the human's head. Fire! It was right there! Coming fast! The female was running for her life.

Berry Face had turned the wrong way on the human road. Wasting not another thought on the human, she whirled and charged down the embankment on the other side of the road. There, at the muddy bottom, a round black hole. It opened into a cave of metal, the hard, shiny stuff of humans. Berry Face knew metal from playing on farm equipment left overnight in the fields and from garbage cans she raided when food was scarce. No time for hesitation, for cautious investigation. She lunged into the dark metal tunnel.

Lick squirmed beneath her to get away from the fire that was now very, very near. Berry Face shifted to let him crawl under

her body and out the other side, putting herself between her cub and danger. Though the cave was a tight fit for a bear of her size, she managed to squeeze and roll until she had turned about to face the opening. Baring her magnificent yellow teeth, she prepared to fight to the death.

Flaming and dancing outside, the fire sucked air out of the cave as if inhaling one mighty breath before exhaling destruction upon everything in its path. Berry Face backed away, deeper into the hole, shoving Lick behind with her rump. She tried to roar, but couldn't get enough air. She gasped and panted, but there was ... no ... air. She collapsed into the mud. In her last moment, she heard Lick crying. She heard the roar of the fire. She heard a loud explosion.

Thunder?

That was her last thought before she toppled into a black hole that had no bottom.

And that's where she stayed for a long, long time.

When Berry Face woke up it was pitch dark. Bears see well at night, but all she could make out was the dim gray circle of the opening. Lick! Where was her cub? Ah! There, against her chest. He had crawled inside the shelter of her great arms, laid his head under her snout. She felt him wiggle and snuggle closer.

She listened. The roar of the fire was gone, replaced by a softer rattle. What was that sound? It took Berry Face a few seconds of hard thinking before she understood what she was hearing.

Rain.

Rain, outside the cave. Rain, spattering on the rocks. Rain that quenched the fire's thirst.

There is something nice about the sound of rain if you are warm and dry inside a cave, but never in the bear's life had she imagined the sound could be this

wonderful. She listened ... and listened ... until ... she drifted off again into the dreamland of bears, which is quite colorful and full of gooseberries.

CHAPTER 10

THE MISTAKE

BERRY FACE WOKE UP WHEN she felt water seeping underneath her body. The downpour had stopped. She listened. When bears set their minds to listen, they hear every tiny sound. Nothing. She sniffed the tiny currents of air that carried the smells of the world. She choked. Her eyes watered. Her nose burned with the stench the firestorm left behind. She coughed. It was extremely unpleasant.

Mixed among the threads of smells, and the strange silence, she detected no immediate threat. Though exhausted from

the ordeal, Berry Face decided to move to safer ground. She poked her head out of the metal cave and looked from side to side.

Broken land.

That was her first thought. Stretching down the slope she saw a forest of naked tree trunks charred black, the undergrowth burned away completely. Gray mud mixed with water and ash spread over everything. The mud hissed like a snake in the drizzle that followed the thunderstorm.

Broken. She thought again. *Broken land.*

Grunting a command to her cub, she led him out of the cave and away from that bad place. Her sense of smell was uncertain out in the thick of the fire stench, but she had other ways of finding her way back to the den. Berry Face relied on the New Ways that she learned from her mother. She also relied on the Ancient Ways that all bears somehow *know* soon after they are born. She knew how to read the sun,

how to flow with the natural curves of the land. Most of all, she had a *feeling*, a pull toward the Best Way To Go. She followed that feeling through the stinking mud until, at last, they came out of the Broken Land and into a meadow she remembered, and from there, easily to the creek that ran just below their den. They stopped to drink and wash before entering the cave. Feeling a bit better, Berry Face and Lick curled up and fell asleep.

Light rain was still falling when she woke up. *Hungry* she thought. Lick was still asleep. She nudged him awake. He swatted at her, hoping for playtime. She growled in the way that meant *Stop*. He froze. She growled the command that meant *Stay here until I come back*. She growled it a second time to make sure he understood. He whined back his understanding ... and also that he didn't like the idea very much. She snorted and licked his snout. He licked her back and she left him.

Alone.

As the hours went by, Lick grew bored. He tried napping and rolling from one side to the other, and playing with his toes, but now he was hungry and angry and bored.

Maybe I should go find her. No, she told me to stay here. But maybe she needs me. Maybe she is lost!

And just as he finished with those thoughts, just as he made up his mind to disobey his mother and leave the den, her shadow filled the opening.

Mama he squealed.

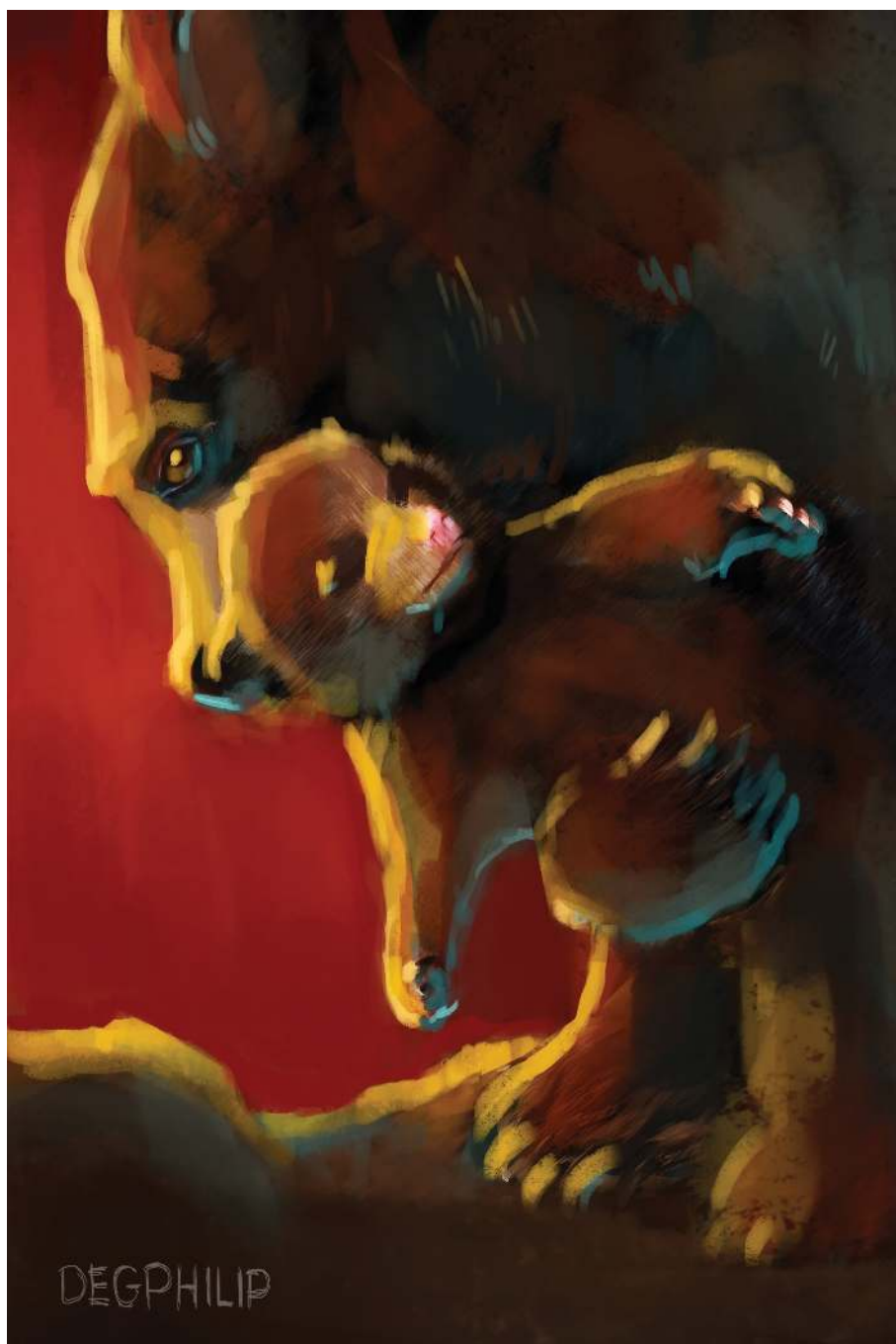
But it wasn't his mother. No, not at all.

First a dark, dripping snout eased its way into the den. The snout was attached to the massive head of a male bear. The male sniffed, turned in the cub's direction, then came in closer to where Lick was shaking in the corner. The huge animal spied the cub. He drew back his black lips to show glistening yellow teeth.

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How could the cub know he was staring at Prank, his uncle, his mother's brother?

Did Prank laugh at the little bear's terror? Back in those days, hardly any of us knew how to laugh, but if Prank did know how ... he was laughing now. It was not a nice laugh.



Minutes later, when Berry Face burst into the den she found only silence. Lick was gone. One sniff. Prank! No doubt in her mind what had happened. Even with the stench of the fire in her nose, Berry Face smelled her brother.

She had made a mistake, an awful mistake. Why, oh why, did she think Lick was better off alone while she hunted. Why? Why? Why? She screamed.

Berry Face erupted from the den, nose in the air. The thread of Prank's smell led her to the edge of the Broken Land. At that point she lost the scent. But, there, in the mud, his footprints! For the rest of the day, she stayed on his trail. She never saw another animal. Never heard a single bird. The Broken Land was dead.

When it grew dark, she had no choice but lie down on the wet ground and wait for morning, wait through many cold, dark hours, and when finally the dawn grew light enough to find the trail again, she

followed the footprints until she came to a
roiling river of mud that slid by her claws
and stretched as far as she could see.

The footprints were gone.

Along with her cub.

CHAPTER II

SHOT-IN-THE-BUTT

FOR THREE DAYS AND NIGHTS, Berry Face searched for Lick. She crossed back and forth through the Broken Land. Returning to the unburned border of the forest, she turned west and ranged the line between healthy earth and mud-covered desolation. She hoped to find the end of the mud where she would turn again and circle the firestorm's destruction. Somewhere along the edge, she hoped to regain Prank's trail.

It was not to be. The devastation went on mile after mile. Late on the fourth day, weakened by fatigue, and light-headed from

hunger, she needed a long drink. Hearing a creek, she lumbered downhill, crashed noisily through a screen of manzanita bushes, and splashed into the water. Careless! So intent on getting that drink, she never saw the human male until it was too late. She heard a metal *SNIK* as he did something with his firestick. Before she could whirl to confront him, the firestick *BANGED* and hot pellets slammed into her left hip, knocking her to the ground.



The human stalked toward her pointing the firestick. No time for thought. Hoisting herself up on three good legs, she made a false charge at the human. He panicked and ran. She used the moment to scramble up the embankment and into a dense tangle of deer brush.

Only then did she feel the agony of her wound. Pain came in waves, one searing wave after another. She twisted around. Her rump was tattered and bleeding. It looked as if a pack of coyotes had been tearing at her. The world spun around her head ... faster ... faster ... faster. She fell away into nothing.

Licking woke her. Someone was tending her wound. *Lick! Lick has found me!* She opened her eyes and turned to look at her backside. It wasn't Lick. She was astonished.

A fully-grown female *beaver* with a missing front paw was licking her wound. At any other time, any time before the

Green Sky, she would have taken exception and sent the beaver sprawling with a flick of her paw. But now, everything was different—and the licking felt so *good*. With every lick, the pain grew less. Relief flooded her body. With a sigh, she relaxed, and lay there with half-closed eyes as the three-pawed beaver licked and healed.

By and by, the beaver ceased making the great medicine, the same medicine that has healed so many of us. Beaver to bear, eye to eye, they looked at each other. Neither moved, hardly even breathed, but something marvelous happened between them, something that would bind them together for the rest of their lives. If they knew how to smile they would have done so.

Without warning, the beaver turned and darted into the brush and out of sight.

Had beaver seen the hunter with the firestick? Had the human returned for the kill?

Berry Face lay perfectly still.

Nothing.

She got to her feet. The wound ached, but the bleeding had stopped. Berry Face tried her hind leg. Stiff and sore, but she could limp along, and that's what she did. For a little while she sought to put much distance between herself and the human. But then ... but then ... Her steps slowed. She stopped.

Humans brought the Green Sky!

Humans made the fire!

Humans hurt her with the firestick!

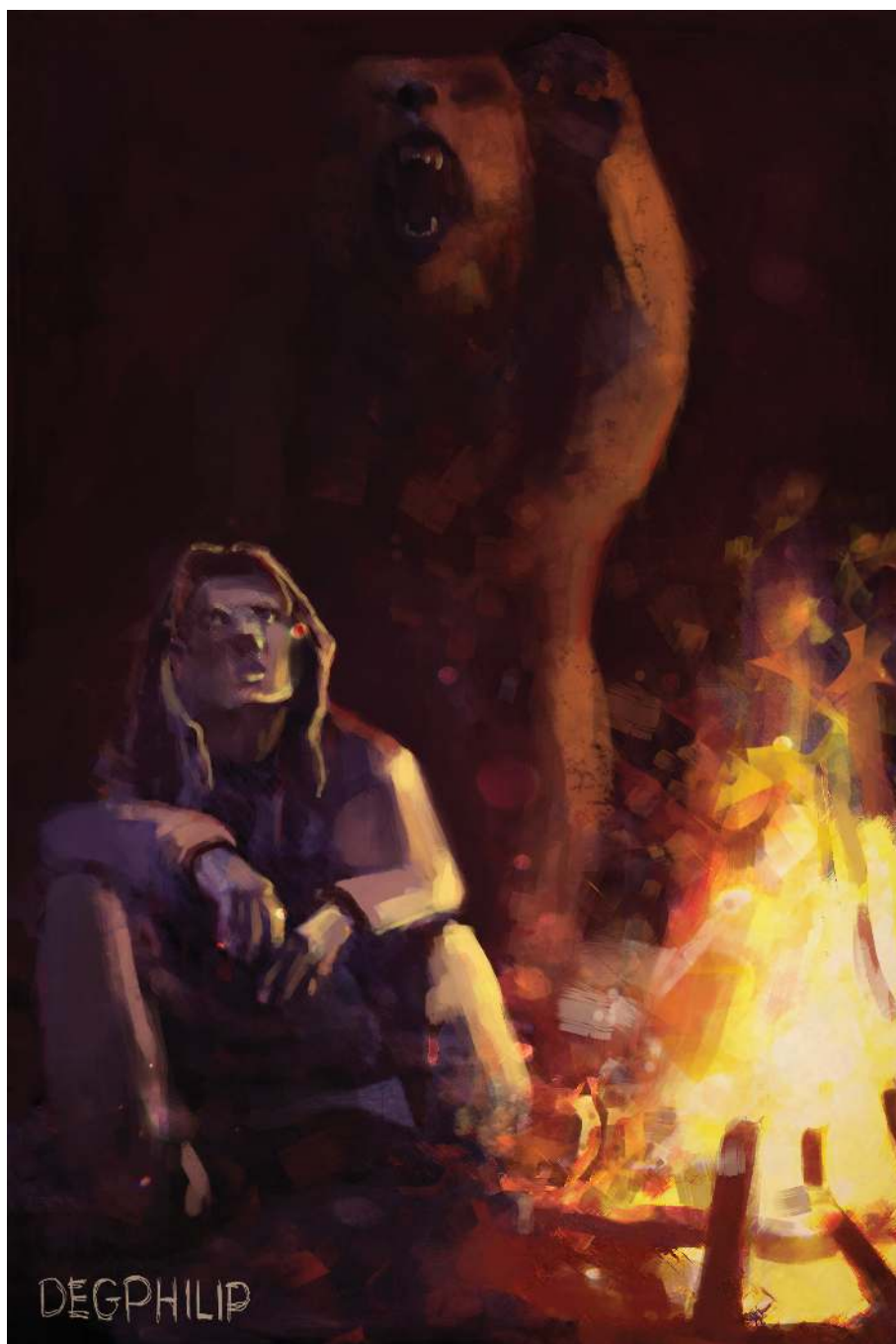
Flames of rage sparked to hot life. She growled, low and mean. She turned and headed back the way she came.

Back toward the human.

She smelled his camp. By now it was dark in the forest ... except for the glow of the human's fire flickering on the bottoms of leaves. She circled downwind. It is a wonder how large bears can move through tangled undergrowth without making a

Bob Jenkins

sound. Berry Face crept up until she was right behind the human. Silently, ignoring the pain, she rose on her hind legs until she stood high above him.



He must have sensed her. Slowly he turned. He looked up her thick legs to the enormous expanse of her chest, to her powerfully muscled upper legs, to the long yellow teeth. He looked into her eyes. Only then did she roar, and it was a roar that thundered through southern valleys and down the far sides of northern mountains.

The human fell backwards into his fire, trying to escape this monster of shadow and fur, claw and tooth, blood and fury. He never had time to scream. She opened her mouth and fell upon him.

CHAPTER 12

PRANK

“**W**ELL,” FLITTER SAID, “IT’S GETTING late. I think we have had quite enough story for one night.”

The animals groaned their displeasure.

“Oh, no,” Wazi said, “You can’t stop now. What happened to Berry Face ? What did she do with the hunter? Did she ... eat him?”

The animals of the Fur Clans snorted and made other small sounds of amusement.

“Of course she ate him!” Flitter exclaimed.

The animals roared with laughter.

Wazi knew they were having fun at her expense.

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When the audience settled down, Flitter continued the story.

Terribly wounded, Berry Face limped along.

At least her belly was full.

For the rest of the summer she drifted like fog through the valleys and over the hills beyond the Broken Land. Forest animals, watching her prowl by aimlessly, would think:

There's that she-bear again, the one the hunter shot in the butt.

As the hot months melted into autumn, the animals came to think of her as Shot-in-the-Butt. Of course, they could not Talk in those days. If they could, they might have said:

“Oh look, here comes Shot-in-the-Butt.”

“Still looking for her cub?”

“So sad. He must be long dead.”

Berry Face paid no attention. She would never give up looking for her cub! She was too busy searching for Lick to pay

attention. She barely ate, but as the days grew cold, the Ancient Way guided her to feed, to gorge, to prepare her body for hibernation.

One frosty fall morning, Berry Face was stalking upstream, shadowing a school of brown trout. She stopped and lifted her snout. She smelled a familiar odor.

No. Not her cub.

She smelled Prank. Her brother. Nearby. She easily tracked him down.

Prank was tangled in a blackberry bramble, too weak to free himself. His mouth dripped with foam. His eyes rolled in their sockets. He was shaking, shaking, all over. Sick and dying. She had seen it before, the Shaking Fever that came in the night to suck the breath from this animal and that animal, ignoring one and taking another. Those who caught the sickness fell to the ground. They never got up again. A feast for vultures.

So, there was Prank, cub-killer, stuck in

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the bramble, shivering and shaking with the Fever. He fixed his maddened gaze on her.

Get me loose.

His thought puffed into her mind like bad breath.

In answer, she pushed her head through the bramble, clamped her jaws on his neck, and squeezed. He was too weak to fight. She sent a final thought as she bit down:

You ate my baby.

Desperately, he thought back:

I didn't eat the cub! But I wanted to.

She stopped squeezing.

He's alive?

How should I know? I put him down to get a drink. I thought he was dead. The little sneak fooled me and slipped away.

She marveled at this unexpected news.

Now, stop biting me.

Huh?

Her mind returned to Prank, whose

neck, she still held in her teeth. Her eyes narrowed.

I want you to go away.

She squeezed and squeezed. She did not stop until she had crushed his throat.

Indeed, he did go away.

Far, far away.

Prank's meat was bad. She vomited up all that she managed to swallow.

CHAPTER 13

REFLECTIONS IN A POND

IN THE SEASONS AFTER THE Green Sky, strange new friendships were forged.

One summer night, Berry Face and the beaver watched the full moon. Blue, and ten times the size of a normal moon, it hung in the sky just above the surface of a still pond. Berry Face tore her gaze away to stare at an identical moon floating in the water.



The bear was used to seeing twos-of-things on the surface of ponds. Two leaning boulders, two lightning split oak trees, two bears. It didn't matter much, just another odd thing in a world of many odd things, but these two moons impressed her with their sheer size and brightness. She stared at the water moon without moving until she heard a little noise beside her. She looked down into the upturned face of the beaver. Berry Face was happy to have the beaver's company.

Three Paws raised her one front leg to point at the huge blue moon in the sky. Berry Face looked at the moon, then back at the beaver.

Now, the beaver pointed to the moon in the pond. Berry Face looked down at the water moon, then back at the beaver. Once again, the beaver pointed to the moon in the sky. Back and forth, the beaver pointed. Sky moon. Water moon. Sky moon. Water moon.

What was she trying to get across?

Berry Face rumbled irritation.

In answer, the beaver climbed up on a rock ledge directly above the water. She gestured with her one paw for the bear to follow. Berry Face climbed up on the rock and leaned over. Shoulder to shoulder, they looked down into the pond. There, shoulder to shoulder, a bear and a beaver looked back at them. The beaver pointed to the water bear and then touched Berry Face on the front leg. Back and forth, back and forth. Water Bear, Berry Face, Water Bear, Berry Face.

Something was coming together in the bear's mind. New thinking. Hard thinking.

Berry Face extended her front leg and touched the surface with a paw. From beneath the water, the other bear reached up to meet her paw with one of its own. Berry Face did not feel the Water Bear's touch as she thought she should. All she

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felt was her own wet paw. The water bear vanished into ripples.

Berry face cocked her head to look at the beaver who leaned out over the water, extended her one good leg, and then the stump where her other leg should be. There in the pond, another three-pawed beaver did the same.

How many three-pawed beavers could there be?

A breathtaking idea formed in the bear's mind.

That bear in the pond is *me!* It is not a real bear. I am the real bear. I am. I am. I am.

I am different from the world.

I am.

Berry Face looked at Three Paws. The beaver leaned her head against the bear's side. Together, they looked at the moon. The real moon.

CHAPTER 14

WINTER DREAMS

WHEN THE SNOWS FELL AND the ground grew hard, when the ponds froze and the very last leaf had been eaten, Berry Face curled up in her lonely den to hibernate. This winter season was the coldest, and longest anyone could remember. All over the forest, creatures were freezing and dying. Even in her deep cave, even in her bottomless sleep, even in her strangest dreams, Berry Face shook with cold. How she wished her cub was here! She would wrap him in her arms. She called to him in her dreams, *come and sleep and be warm.*

He never came.

But other animals heard her call, and they came. Limping and shivering, but desperate to find any shelter from the cold, they came to the bear's den. First, the bear's friend, Three Paws the beaver, arrived, her flat tail frozen into a stiff plank. Berry Face gave grouchy permission for Three Paws to stay. Three Paws curled up next to the bear's great, shaggy chest. She warmed her icy paws in the bear's warm breath.

AHHHHH, sighed Three Paws.

SNARG-G-G-G (then a pause) *PUF-F-F-F*, snored the bear.

Soon, others followed the bear's dream. Old Mama the pack rat, Only One the fox, Bent Ear the jackrabbit, Chatternut the squirrel, Slippery the river otter, Yip Yip the coyote, and the fawn who would grow up to become High Mama, they all came.

Finally, even Cougar sought entry into the den. Berry Face roused from her dream

long enough to grant permission for the big cat to burrow into the pile of exhausted animals.

PURRRRRRRRRR sighed Cougar ... and closed her eyes.



Days, and weeks, and months drifted by in a soft, gray haze. The animals stayed in the den and warmed it with the heat of their bodies. Berry Face was the only true hibernator. Others stirred from time to time. Sharp Teeth animals would leave to hunt in the frozen forest. They knew the Flat Teeth in the den were not for eating. Sharp Teeth might be gone for hours or days, but they always came back to find their cozy place among the sleepers.

Berry Face continued to sleep. The pictures of her dream story drifted into the minds of the others. Soon they were listening and seeing and dreaming together. What a dream it was! In the magical world of the bear's dream they lived near each other, finding homes, stalking prey, hunting and hiding, as guided by the Ancient Way. Beavers built lodges, Cougar hunted deer, and Coyote sang to the moon.

CHAPTER 15

SHARP TEETH, FLAT TEETH

“**H**OW LONG AGO WAS THAT?”
Wazi asked, “That terrible winter?”

“Sixty-one seasons,” Flitter answered.

“How do you know for sure?”

“Old Mama remembers.”

Wazi’s eyes grew big. “Old Mama was there? That white-furred Old Mama sitting over there on her rock? She is the same pack rat as in the story?”

“Yes,” Flitter said, “The Elders you see in front of you were all there.”

“Three Paws and Snaggleteeth and ...”

Flitter interrupted, “Of course!”

Wazi persisted. "That means they are all more than sixty years old! How can that be?"

"Those who stood against the Green Sky never died. Is it not the same among humans?"

Wazi shut up. She had to think. Her great grandmother lived through the Green Sky. Like the Elder Talkers, great grandmother's hair was gleaming white, and just like the Fur Clan Elders, she was strong and healthy.

Flitter waited patiently while the human tried to put the pieces of the puzzle together. Finally, Wazi sighed, giving up for the time being. She knew when she got back to her village, she would have a few interesting questions for great grandmother!

Wazi nodded for Flitter to continue.

Spring arrived at last to wake up the land. The full moon rose over the mountain ridge. The animals had survived the winter by sleeping together in the bear's

Bob Jenkins

den. They woke up knowing one thing for sure: they did not want to return to the old ways of hunting and hiding and killing and running.

For now, they could Talk to each other.

Thus, the Talkers came to Blue Rock for the first gathering of the Fur Clans.



Old Mama pack rat lived in a crack at the bottom of Blue Rock, so it was proper that she climb up to the very top to start the meeting. She called for Berry Face to come forward.

The bear walked up to the base of Blue Rock. She looked into the shining eyes of the animals, the Sharp Teeth and the Flat Teeth. She Spoke about Good Manners and Bad Manners. This is what she said:

It is the Ancient Way of Sharp Teeth to hunt and kill.

This is Good Manners.

It is the Ancient Way of Flat Teeth to run and hide.

This is Good Manners.

Sharp Teeth shall not hunt upon the hill of Blue Rock, nor in the valley below, nor on the mountain beyond. The hill of Blue Rock is the quiet place where all may gather without fear.

To hunt upon the hill of Blue Rock is Bad Manners.

Sharp Teeth shall not hunt in the family burrows of Rabbit, nor the birthing nests of Squirrel, nor the lodges of Beaver. Sharp Teeth shall not hunt fawns until the baby spots fade.

*To kill a speckled fawn is Bad Manners.
Talkers shall never harm another Talker.
To harm a Talker is Bad Manners.*

The penalty for Bad Manners is silence.

Saying these words, Berry Face gave us the Compact of Good Manners. Old Mama remembered every word. That's what pack rats do.

Thus, peace and friendship came to the Land of the Talkers.

Berry Face should have been happy, but she was restless. Always, at the back of her mind, a Pinchy bug chewed and chewed at her. *Lick*. Her first cub. Her only cub. Had she given up the search too soon? Lick survived the teeth of his uncle! Maybe he survived that first winter after

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the Green Sky! He might be out there right now! *Searching for me!*

Berry face convinced herself that Lick was alive. In her memory, he was still a little cub and she was his mother! No doubt about it! Her cub had been taken away too soon. She would keep looking.

At the next gathering, Yip Yip coyote sang love songs to the moon. Old Mama pack rat recited the Good Manners. Slippery river otter told stories. Chatternut squirrel made everyone laugh with her antics. Only One fox shared memories of her long-lost family.

Then, Berry Face rose on her hind legs.

Chattering and chirping, sniffing and snuffling, quieted and stopped. The animals looked at each other. What was happening? This *standing above* behavior was unusual for Bear! Berry face was humble in spite of her great size.

What was she going to say?

A bear's thoughts have a rumble to

them, just as her outside voice has a growl. Berry Face rumbled, “Friends. Family. I go to find my cub. I will be gone a long time. Maybe I will never see you again. I ... I ...”

We had not yet learned the human word *love*, but we understood what she meant. Without another word, Berry Face dropped to all fours and walked down a moonlit path through the trees.

And was gone.

CHAPTER 16

THE LONG SEARCH

“B *UT SHE CAME BACK!” WAZI exclaimed. It was a silly thing to say. If the animals knew how, they would have rolled their eyes.*

Wazi’s face grew red. “I mean ... she’s here now.” To cover her embarrassment, she added, “I mean ... how long was she gone?”

Flitter flicked the whiskers on the right side of her nose, a pack rat gesture of tender understanding. She went on with the story as if Wazi had never interrupted.

Berry Face wandered the wilderness

searching for Lick. She traversed the lands as far as Coyote could run in a year. To the north, she was turned back by Ice Wall. To the west, she was stopped by Great Blue Water. To the east, she almost froze to death on High Mountain. And even to the south, into Broken Land where nothing lived, where she almost died of thirst, she pushed on until she was halted by the Great Hole in the Earth.

Season after season, Berry Face wandered until it was time to hibernate. She found a new den wherever she was and went to sleep. Then, each spring, she awoke and resumed her search.

Berry Face Spoke to everyone she met:

Have you seen my cub?

The animals were astonished:

There are many bear cubs in the world.

This cub will be full-grown by now.

The animals were even more astonished:

There are many full-grown bears in the world. How will you ever find the right one?

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Another animal added:

Are you stupid?

Berry Face could easily have knocked the rude animal to the ground. But she had no urge to do such an ugly thing. Berry Face was no longer just a bear. She was a bear with Good Manners.

By now, Berry Face was also a very old bear. Black bears, if they are lucky, live twenty-five seasons. Berry Face was fifty-five seasons old. And she had never stopped growing. She was the largest bear any animal had ever seen. More than eight bear heads high at the shoulder. More than fifteen bear heads high when she rose up on her hind legs. The ground shook as she lumbered by.

After countless passages through forests and canyons, mountain peaks and flowered meadows, Berry Face earned the respect of all the animals in this world. Whenever she came by, they gathered to hear her Speak. She told them about the

Sharp Teeth and Flat Teeth, and how they lived together at Blue Rock without fear.

The animals heard her thoughts, though few had the skill of Talking. Those few, the ones who could Speak, if only a little, she sent toward Blue Rock to be welcomed into the Fur Clans.

CHAPTER 17

THE OLDEST BEAR IN THE WORLD

BUT BERRY FACE HERSELF DID not return to Blue Rock. The burning need to find Lick finally cooled, a small mercy, for she had grown too frail to go any further.

Sometimes Berry Face would stare at her reflection in a still moonlit pond. The bear she saw in the water was old, so very old ... and thin. Her white fur hung off her bones like melting icicles. When had she eaten last? She had seen herself change in the reflection, in the Water Picture she knew to be herself. At first, the change

had only been her muzzle, growing grayer by the day, and then, all at once, white fur covered her from snout to shoulder, paw to tail.

Then, even that picture changed. Each time she came to still water and looked for herself, the reflection was harder to see, and when she did find it, the picture was dim and gray. The colors of the world faded away.

Finally, the day came when she could see no more. She blundered into trees, and fell into holes, and sank into starvation because she could no longer find food.

Exhausted and totally blind, Berry Face collapsed in the middle of an open meadow. She rolled over on her back to warm her belly in the sun. She wished she could see the sky one more time. The mountains. The clouds. The stars. She sighed, a long tired *whoof*. Breathing softly, she waited for vultures, or wolves, whichever came for her first.

Wolves, she thought, when she felt a long, wet tongue lick the side of the mouth. *They're getting a taste of me to make sure killing is worth the trouble.* Then she took a sniff ... and another sniff ... and another ...

Berry Face remembered the smell from so many, many seasons past.

"Lick?"

He kept licking, grooming her, encouraging her to return to the land of the living.

"My cub?" She was so tired she could barely talk.

"Come on, Mama." His words were as clear as new-melt creek water. "Get up. Time to go home."

She found the strength to roll over and push up to her four paws.

"You can do it, Mama!" Lick said, "Come up here and give me a hug."

She rose up on her hind legs. He embraced her in his great warm arms. She thought:

My baby is so big, so big, so big.



CHAPTER 18

HIS MOTHER'S EYES

TENDERLY, CAREFULLY, LICK LED HIS mother to Blue Rock. He never walked too fast. Lick was fifty-five seasons old, and only five years younger than his mother. She was sixty seasons old. Both of them had outlived all other bears. For some reason unknown to them, Berry Face and Lick grew old very, very slowly. But they did grow old. The journey back to Blue Rock took a long, long time.

In the manner of males, Lick had wandered the far north for many, many seasons and no longer remembered the place of his birth. Berry Face was blind,

but her sense of smell was still keen. Together, they scrambled over windswept hills. Side by side, they padded through silent forests.

Lick let his mother rest while he went to find food.

“Just a little ways, don’t worry.”

He returned with a fresh brown trout, the kind she liked best, or perhaps with a prickly vine heavy with grapes. At night he snuggled around her body to keep her warm. With his fur, now just as white as hers, you could hardly tell one from the other when they curled up together.

Lick became his mother’s eyes ... and her happiness.

Imagine the stories they shared!

“We greeted them with great joy,” Flitter said. “We helped them move into a cozy den near Blue Rock. And they both lived happily, happily, until this day.”

“Ahhhh,” sighed Wazi.

“Ahhhh,” sighed Three Paws who never

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grew tired of hearing the story of her best friend.

“And that is the story of Berry Face,” said Flitter, quite proud of herself, as she should be, for telling such an important story so well. “That is how Berry face became known as Shot-in-the-Butt. How she lost her cub, and how he found her and saved her.”

“But ...” Wazi protested. “But ...”

“Where is Lick?” Three Paws answered her unspoken question.

“Yes,” Wazi said. “How come I have never seen him?”

Berry Face rumbled, “My son journeys to the High Mountains, and even to the Great Blue Water, and to the Wall of Ice, and even into the Broken Land. There he Speaks to all who will listen about the friendship of Blue Rock and the Family of Good Manners. He will return soon to sleep in my den. The birds have told me he is on the way.”

CHAPTER 19

THE ONE WHO WATCHED AND SAID NOTHING

“**B**IRDS?”
“Yes, my human friend,”
Flitter said. Birds from the far places of the world flocked to hillside rocks or forest branches to hear Lick speak of friendship. They gathered in the trees in great numbers to listen. A few of the birds, not all, but a few, mostly hawks and owls and crows, possessed their own kind of Talking. Lick could hear their thoughts, though the bird languages were strange.

This was good, for the birds could go anywhere and tell the Fur Clan things

they needed to know. But there was also wickedness among the winged Talkers.

Four seasons ago, before humans returned to Blue Rock, Lick wandered to a place in the high eastern mountains. Among the birds who came to listen, there was a certain white eagle known as Long Claw. Every other bird feared this eagle. In the long seasons of her life, she had grown monstrous, inside and out. She possessed a wingspread as wide as a river and a body that weighed more than an adult cougar. She was the largest feathered creature ever to fly above the earth. Rotten to the soul, Long Claw felt malice for all other creatures and a hunger that had no end.

When Lick told the birds about life at Blue Rock, Long Claw made such secret smiles as eagles make. Inside, she contrived ugly plans for the Fur Clans. We would provide her with an endless supply of food. We would feed her hunger. Long Claw hated everything that was fair and kind and

righteous. And that was everything Lick was saying about life at Blue Rock.

Yes, the great white eagle made wicked plans to follow the bear back to his Blue Rock lair. Already Queen of the Sky, Long Claw would soon rule the Land below.

With that disturbing ending to the story, Flitter stopped and groomed her fur, a habit all pack rats do when they are upset.

Wazi and the animals looked up at the sky. The Moon is Happy had disappeared below the Western ridge. The stars shone brightly. There was no sound.

The night air was cool. But that wasn't what made Wazi shiver. Silently, the Fur Clans departed for their burrows and hollows. Flitter scampered down and helped Old Mama into their nest within Blue Rock. Wazi gave the bear a hug around the neck.

"Sleep well, old girl," Wazi said.

Three Paws led Berry Face to her den.

Soon, only Snaggleteeth the cougar and the human were left in the clearing.

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Wazi started for home. The cougar fell in beside her. Together, they walked down the shadowy path to her village. To Snaggleteeth's sharp eyes, the path was clear and bright. Wazi kept her hand on the big cat's shoulder. When they reached the edge of human land, they stopped to regard each other. Wazi reached out and scratched Snaggleteeth behind the ears. The cougar purred.

"Good night, my friend," Wazi said.

Snaggleteeth turned to go, but stopped and looked back at the human. She tilted her head to one side.

"Purrrrrrrhaps, next time, you will ask for my story."

Wazi smiled.

"Purrrrrrrhaps, I will."

To Be Continued in Book Three

Snaggletooth



THANKS



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I only used one half of number three. The other half is for sale. Contact me through my website at booksbybobjenkins.com if you want to make a deal.

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How can words express our love for the Mother, our Earth, who blessed us with the marvelous forest creatures in this little book? She is our future, our happiness, our very existence. Boundless praise and eternal gratitude to the Mother of us all.
Jaya Gaia!