

SHAKESBEAR



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SHAKESBEAR

To Bear or Not to Bear

Inspired by a True Story...Seriously!

By

Narendra Simone

...killing softly with his words!



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SHH...

LISTEN! Come closer. I've a secret to tell. I'm going to share it with you and I bet you've never heard anything like it before. It's about a very special bear in the Kootenays — me! Oh, I know what you're thinking. You are thinking that all bears are alike. Well, you couldn't be more wrong.

My story is based on a true event that took place years ago. You must have heard of the 2010 crime story of Christina Lake in British Columbia that all but wrote itself. It went viral, spreading in days all over the world. 'Don't Smokey Near This Bear,' declared the New York Post; 'Grizzly Drug Lords,' shouted Daily Mail (UK); and for a tear-filled laugh, Russian TV reported it was all 'too much to bear'.

But you haven't heard the whole story — not yet. The New York Post and the Daily Mail didn't get it right. Once you hear my side of the story, you'll understand what really happened. But first, I have to set the stage.

You ready? Here we go.

Act I

WINTER 2009



*Is not birth, beauty, good shape, huckleberries,
growing, eating, gentleness, virtue,
youth, freedom, and such like, the pizza and
honey that season a bear?*

(Shakesbear's journal)

SCENE 1

O, brave new world



I was born in a world of pitch-black darkness because I was born blind. If that wasn't enough, I was also tiny. I mean really tiny. I weighed less than a pound and was eight inches in length. My challenges didn't stop there.

To make matter worse, my place of birth was wild and inhospitable. What I remember most was that it was bone-chilling cold. I felt that death was imminent and would arrive soon; shivering uncontrollably, I helplessly groped around in the darkness waiting to die.

But some compassionate spirit up there took pity on me. Suddenly I felt someone or something next to me. It felt soft, furry and warm, surrounding me like a good feeling envelops the hopeless soul. Unbeknownst to me, what I had found was a lifesaver. I was thankful for it

because it offered me the warmth that I so desperately needed.

Frightened and not knowing what to do next, I cuddled up to the warm thing. I could hear a throaty voice in response to me pushing my fragile body against the warm thing but I wasn't able to respond, as I could not talk. So instead I moaned constantly in an almost inaudible voice. My persistent crying did not go unnoticed. A low and amiable voice, as if understanding my dilemma, said, "Take it easy, my son. I understand your frustration. I promise you that soon you will be able to see and you'll be blind no more. There is a beautiful world waiting for you out there; you'll see it and love it, but for now, stay close to me. I'll protect you."

The voice was soft and its sound echoed as if we were in a hollow place. There was a tinge of sadness in that voice that I didn't quite understand at the time. Comforted by the kind voice I snuggled up even closer to the warmth and neither my small size nor my blindness worried my savior, who continued to offer me warmth and nourishment. I was safe and happy to pass my days mostly sleeping.



Days melted into weeks and a month passed. One morning as I awoke with a jaw-stretching yawn

I could swear I saw something. It was a smeared vision but nonetheless it was better than blindness. I blinked several times and stared into the murkiness trying to make some sense of this. Slowly, my eyes adjusted to the surrounding semidarkness and I could see a little more.

But what I saw frightened me. Sitting next to me was a huge body, several times bigger than me; it had intense eyes with which it was unblinkingly staring at me. I was terrified. I backed up a couple of spaces on my shaky legs.

But then I heard that soft voice, “There, there. You can see now, can’t you? Come here. I’m your mother. Come, sit next to me.”

My mother! I didn’t know what it meant but I was no longer frightened. She was my savior and I loved her soothing voice. In her stare there was tenderness and in her voice security. Seeing my protector with my own eyes for the very first time was nothing short of a miracle. She was enormous but in a beautiful way. Her round ears, small eyes and long snout made her look adorable. She was strong and I felt safe with her. I struggled to get nearer to her on my unsteady legs, dragging myself closer to her because my legs were still quite weak.

“Give it another week or two and you will be walking. You’re growing quite quickly,” the tender voice said, as if reading my mind.



She was right. After just over a week I took my first proper steps and walked around my mother. I was so excited that I wanted to say something to my protector but the only word-like sound that came out of my mouth was, “Maa...Maa.” But I could see my mother’s eyes light up every time I cried out, “Maa.”

Each time I got tired and plopped down on the ground, she would encourage me to walk some more. I became very attached to her; she was affectionate, protective, strict but sensitive, and attentive to my needs. She was a perfect mother — a supermom.



As days passed, I bulked up and soon I was double my weight at birth and still growing steadily. Time passed slowly. Just two months after my birth I was almost six pounds in weight and quite steady on my feet. I slept and ate, and ate and slept, and at the end of another eight weeks, I had more than doubled my weight to about fifteen pounds.

I became accustomed to my world of semi-darkness and play fighting with my mom. I scratched her, punched her, pulled her hair and instead of being annoyed she encouraged me. She was helping me build my strength and preparing

for the outside world. If I ever felt unsettled she would tell me stories of the world beyond our den.

“Ah, the West Kootenays. There is a beautiful world out there,” she would say, “full of lush green forests, warm lakes and crystal-clear rivers rich in salmon. You’ll love salmon. Kootenays is heaven on earth for bears.”

I couldn’t visualize what she meant and would look at her inquisitively. But she would simply smile and continue, “We can roam the whole range of the Kootenays. I feel so content in its snow-capped mountains and lush green valleys. It is the ultimate dream.”

Dream! I understood dreams. I had already started dreaming of the outside world. And once Mama started talking about the west Kootenays she would continue in a wistful voice until I fell asleep. “The mountain ranges here abound in natural beauty and are generous in its pleasures. They welcome even the grizzly. Mind you, we’d have to watch out for big, bad grizzly. They’re not the friendly sorts. West Kootenays also welcomes friendly animals like moose, elk, deer and a whole plethora of animals in its incomparable stride. It gives us all a collective hope. Kootenays’ dreams of tomorrow are not marred by the realities of today. And the reality of today is something you will have

to learn and learn fast.” I didn’t understand then half the stuff she talked about but that didn’t stop her from talking. I always liked the way she talked. It sounded so...so...smart.



Almost five months had gone by and one morning I awoke with sleepy eyes and saw Mama sitting up alert staring at me. I looked at her with a big smile on my face and noticed anxiety registered in her eyes. “Something the matter, Mama?” I asked.

After a few moments of silence she said, “Today is a big day for you and come to think of it, for me too. Today we’re going to venture into the outside world.”

Not wanting to leave our wonderful place, I asked, “Why, Mama?” I must admit I had been eagerly waiting for the day when I could see all that Mama had been talking about for the past several weeks, but at the same time I liked my home and was reluctant to leave.

“It’s beautiful, that’s why.” Mama took a deep breath and exhaled it slowly. “You’ll love it. But you must not wander off on your own.” Suddenly her voice was a little stern and she went on, “There are a few dangers out there that I must warn you about. And you’d better listen to me and listen good — your life may depend on it.”

“What is danger?” I asked, staring at her. I fidgeted with excitement, ready to explore the outside world but scared to leave the comfort of my cozy home.

“Something you’ll have to experience for yourself to understand.” Mama looked at me contemplatively, and then looking straight into my eyes she continued. “Listen, there’re two-legged creatures called humans that are not our type. You must stay cautious of them.”

“Are they dangerous like the grizzly?” I had heard a lot from her about the grizzly.

“No, not like that,” Mama assured. “The humans are...well, unpredictable. They can be very nice but then they can also be troublesome.”

“How will I know which ones are friendly?” I was getting more confused by the minute.

“You will know. We bears have amazing instincts for such things. But for now stay close to me and everything will be just fine.”

Fine? I pondered. *How could everything be fine when she kept reminding me of dangers?* “Any other dangers?” I asked inquisitively.

“Well...” she paused. After a brief moment she said, “There are animals that might be our type but might hurt you. You must not trust anyone and never leave my sight till you can take care of yourself. You hear me?”

“But why? Why would anyone want to hurt me?” I insisted. My mind was awlirl with new ideas and fears.

“Because...because they are scared of us.” Mama gradually stood up, stretched, and made ready to leave.

“Scared of me?” I couldn’t help giggling. “Really? Am I scary, Mama?” I stood on my hind legs, thrusting my stretched out front legs with claws sticking out towards her face and shouted, “Are you scared of me?”

She smiled thinly and rubbed her big head against mine. Pointing towards the opening of our den, Mama said, “You’re cute. You’re very cute, but the denning days are over. Now let’s get out of here and say hello to the brave new world. You’re going to have such an adventurous life.”

Adventure. I liked the sound of it. Much better than danger! But I was still uncertain about the unknown outside world; I had this conviction in my little heart that my life was about to change forever and yeah, I must admit, I was a little scared.

Mama looked at me with questioning eyes. “Are you ready? Shall we go?”

After a few moments of exchanging glances I finally got up and nuzzled her. I crooned, “I don’t want to.” I didn’t want to because I’d never been out of my secure home. I liked it the way it was,

just me and Mama and our little den! I looked at her with frightened, welled-up eyes but she shook her head in disapproval and I couldn't bear the thought of that.

"Mama!" I tried in a trembling and pleading voice. She didn't respond and I yielded, "Okay, I'll do it...but I'm hungry. Can I eat first?"

But Mama was not listening. She was thinking of the outside world; somehow she knew that the winter had let go of its hold on the earth and spring once again had breathed life back into the forest. It was a cool spring dawn in the west Kootenay Mountains in British Columbia on the Pacific coast of Canada. Its beauty could be captured in a single word — supernatural.

And Mama was in no mood to feed me for she knew I was deliberately delaying our departure. She had made up her mind and she was going to act on it. As she stretched again she towered over me. She started to nudge me towards the den opening. "You'll be *okay*," Mama assured in a firm voice while gently continuing to push me towards the opening.

I skidded slowly towards the den opening. The closer I got to the opening of the den the more my legs dug in. "No! Mama, I don't want to!" I cried.

"There is nothing to fear," she assured me again but this time in an amiable voice. "What's

gotten into you? Before you were so excited to go outside and play and now—”

“I know everything about the outside world,” I interrupted. “You’ve already told me all about it. I don’t need to see it. Why don’t we just stay here and you can tell me more stories about the outside world. You’re a very good storyteller, Mama. That would be fun, wouldn’t it? Okay?”

“No, that is not okay,” Mama responded in a riled voice. She exhaled loudly in exasperation. “Look, I’ll go out first and show you that there is absolutely no reason to be fearful. And then you can follow me. Understand? Now, let’s *do* it.”

She waited for a positive response or at least some sign of willingness from my side but seeing neither she insisted quietly, “You’ll love it, I promise you. You trust me, don’t you?”

Mama can be very convincing. I had no choice but to follow her, so I finally nodded, hiding behind her as she ambled towards the opening. I followed her but at an increasing distance between us. She knocked down a few shrubs and stones to open up the den and stood just outside the entrance.

“Ah,” she exhaled deeply and then turning her head towards me, she smiled. “This is so good. I’ve waited all winter for this. Come on out and smell the fresh air.” Then she turned

her head away and, raising it towards sky, she slowly closed her eyes as if slipping into bliss. She appeared to have found paradise.

We were blessed to live in one of the most beautiful regions of western Canada; during the dark winter days, she had often told me that her eyes longed for the spring colours of blossoms and her ears yearned to hear the sounds of the forest. But she had also warned me that our voices must never be heard for some of the humans didn't appreciate our presence.

"Are there any dangers outside?" I asked slowly.

"None whatsoever," she assured.

I inched sluggishly towards the opening, and putting just my head out through the opening, looked around nervously.

Before I was afraid and now I was confused. She had told me about the trees, blue sky, shimmering lakes and majestic mountains and all I could see from where I was standing was the same semi-darkness as inside the den.

"Okay Mama," I said in a voice laced with disappointment, "I've seen it. It's nice. Now, come inside. There is a cold breeze coming in. Please, Mama?"

"Listen to me," Mama persisted. "You have to come outside. All the way out. There is

something out here you must see. Come out and stand right here next to me. Come on, come on — you do that once and then we’ll talk about what to do next.”

You see? I told you there was no arguing with my Mama. She was so stubborn. Compared to her I was still too small to put up a fight but one day I would be just as big, if not bigger than her — Mama had told me that — and then I would be able to do whatever I wanted. But that day was a long ways away. Right now, Mama was the boss.

“Okay Mama,” I moaned, hanging my head low. “I’ll do it...just for you.”

I saw a big grin appearing on her face and a sparkle in her eyes. Slowly, I walked past the edge of the opening with most of my body out of the den, and looked around. I still saw nothing. Nothing! There was the same old semi-darkness as inside the den. *What on earth was she going on about?* I wondered. Maybe she was imagining things. Mama told good stories.

“That’s my brave boy,” she encouraged me. “Now step all the way outside and look way away over there.”

Carefully, I stepped out of the den but not completely. Still keeping my hind legs firmly inside, just in case, I could feel the air was different but the sky was just as murky as the ceiling in the cave. I

looked up at Mama and blinked in confusion. She gestured with her head towards the horizon in the east. I blinked a couple of more times. I squinted and a few moments later what I saw was truly amazing. No one could have prepared me for that.

On the far horizon, I saw the faintest glimmer of brightness. I had never seen light before. The dawn, fragile like porcelain, was still in the embrace of the darkness of the night but gradually, the increasing brightness spread its light, awakening the entire forest on the mountain we were standing on. A few minutes elapsed and gradually the sky lightened. Shades of deep purple and vibrant pink danced on the horizon. Soon, as has happened every morning for millennia, there appeared the miracle of a brand-new day.

Once again the sun caressed Christina Lake. Once again the west Kootenays awoke in its spring-time splendor. And once again, Mama, the witness of the past splendor of spring mountain dawns, was looking intently towards the east as if eager to watch destiny unfold silently and unnoticed by the rest of the world.

Mama suddenly went very still, mesmerized by the rising sun. She looked lost in deep thoughts. Perhaps she was wondering if today, now that she had one of the cutest cubs with her, things in her life would change for the better.

I couldn't have known then that she was silently rejoicing the fact that with a cub in tow she would now be able to wander unheeded closer to towns, or visit some of the backyards during the summer months when the fruit trees were weighted under the bounty of apples, pears and plums. In the past, she had learned that people didn't bother bears with their cubs; in fact, they made an extra effort to get out of their way. That's the respect Mama craved. But for now she seemed under the spell of spring magic and looked as if her spirit was dancing at the periphery of ecstasy.

With infinite elegance, the colourful lights danced in the sky and Lake Christina shimmered from the first rays of the rising sun. It gradually ascended in the eastern sky and its bright slanting rays with a silvery glow displaced the night's fading shades of purple.

Surrounding the lake were towering mountains with snow-clad glistening tops reaching for the heavens. As I stepped completely out of our den, I couldn't believe what I was seeing. Though Mama had told me numerous stories about the outside world, what lay stretched before me was sheer magic — a wondrous world of bright, vibrant colours!

I blinked several times to adjust to the bright light. Whatever Mama had told me did not do

justice to what nature had in store for me. “This is so *beautiful*,” I cried. Suddenly I stopped as I stepped into something silky, soft and cool.

“What-is-*this*?” I asked, shaking my paw.

“This is snow, my son. Isn’t it wonderful?” She said with a smile on her beautiful, large face. Then there appeared something wrong, a tinge of sadness in her eyes as she gave a forlorn look to the empty den. How was I to know that she was sad because, unlike other mothers with three or four cubs, she had just me. And she worried about me being all alone one day. Multiple cubs had safety in numbers but I, being a lone cub, might be exposed to all kinds of perils. The look only lasted a second then she smiled her pride at me as her only son and nodded at the snow.

“You can play in it if you want.”

“Really? It’s kind of...ticklish,” I said giggling. “It’s so soft and cold.” I looked up at her and then the surrounding mountains. “And we have mountains of it?”

She nodded. Before me was the enchanting landscape with its powerful mystery and I was lost in its sheer magic; but lurking in its magic were demons ready to sniff out my life.