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READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Hunter's Friend, Johnnie Bear

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In a hut on the side of a mountain lived an old hunter all alone. He had only one room, which was very scantily furnished, and he cooked his meals in a fireplace. In the fireplace was a big hook where he hung his kettle, and he cooked his meat by holding it between two sticks over the coals.

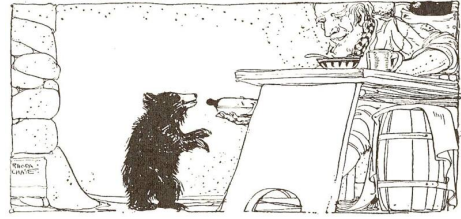
You need not pity this old man, for he would rather eat his food cooked in this way than in any other. He had a bunk built in the room about half-way up the wall, where he had to climb a ladder to reach it, and when he went to bed he covered himself with a big bearskin. Beside the bunk a gun hung on the wall where he could quickly reach it if it were needed. Across the door at night he fastened a big bar, for he did not intend that any one should enter while he was asleep.

The old hunter had set a trap by his door, and one morning he found a baby bear caught in it by the left hind paw. He very carefully opened the trap and took the little fellow out. Then he took Johnnie Bear, as he named him, into his cabin and very carefully washed the poor cut foot and bound it up with some healing salve.

Johnnie Bear seemed to know that the hunter was helping him, and he did not bite or try to get away. He made a funny little noise like a baby when it is hurt. Then the hunter warmed some milk and put it in a bottle, which he gave to the bear. Johnnie Bear took the bottle in both his paws and held it to his mouth and drank the milk very greedily. Then the hunter fixed a bed for him and put a log on the fire to keep the place warm while he went for a hunting trip.

Johnnie Bear slept all day, and when the hunter returned at night he tried to run to meet him, but his poor foot hurt him so he had to lie down again. Several weeks passed before Johnnie Bear's foot became quite well, and he always limped, because the trap had cut so deep.

The little fellow became very fond of the hunter and would run to meet him at night, and when the hunter brought in his game Johnnie Bear would poke it over with his nose and paw, as though to tell the hunter that he had done well.



One day he did not run to meet the hunter, and when night came he did not come to his supper. The old hunter began looking around the cabin and he found the footprints of two bears. One was Johnnie Bear's, which he could tell by the light mark which the lame foot made, and the other was of a big bear, which had enticed Johnnie back into the woods. The hunter felt very lonely and looked for Johnnie every day for a long time, but after a year had gone by he gave up all hope of ever seeing Johnnie again.

A long time after this the hunter was going through a part of the wood that was filled with bushes and vines and in some way his foot became entangled and he fell, breaking his arm. His gun fell some distance from him, and as he went to pick it up he saw a big mother bear with two cubs coming toward him. She was growling and showing her teeth and the hunter felt that he had little chance for escape from a fight, and with his right arm broken he wondered how the fight might come out.

He braced himself against a tree and waited for the bear to come up. He held his gun in his left hand, intending to use it to beat her off as long as possible. Just then another bear came in sight and the poor hunter gave up all hope. But all at once the first bear stopped and looked at the other bear, then suddenly walked toward him. Both stood and looked at the hunter, who did not move. Suddenly the second bear growled strangely and the first bear walked away with the two cubs. Then the second bear came nearer, and as he walked the hunter saw that he limped. It was Johnnie Bear, and in some unknown tongue he had sent the other bear away and saved the hunter's life. He did not come any nearer the hunter, but only looked at him, as though to say, "You saved my life once, now I have paid my debt to you." Then he limped away in the direction the other bears had gone. Perhaps the mother bear was Johnnie's wife and the cubs were their children.

Who can tell?

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