

ELWES ALFRED

THE ADVENTURES OF A
BEAR, AND A GREAT
BEAR TOO

Alfred Elwes
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Содержание

AT HOME	4
UPON HIS TRAVELS	13
TOWN LIFE	21
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	23

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AT HOME

Yes, it is an "at home" to which I am going to introduce you; but not the at-home that many of you – I hope *all* of you – have learnt to love, but the at-home of a bear. No carpeted rooms, no warm curtains, no glowing fireside, no pictures, no sofas, no tables, no chairs; no music, no books; no agreeable, cosy chat; no anything half so pleasant: but soft moss or snow, spreading trees, skies with ever-changing, tinted clouds, some fun, some rough romps, a good deal of growling, and now and then a fight. With these points of difference, you may believe the *at-home* of a bear is not quite so agreeable a matter as the at-home of a young gentleman or lady; yet I have no doubt Master Bruin is much more at his ease in it than he would find himself if he were compelled to conform to the usages of human society, and behave as a gentleman ought to do.

But there is a quality that is quite as necessary to adorn one home as the other, without which the most delightful mansion and the warmest cavern can never be happy, and with which the

simplest cottage and the meanest den may be truly blest; and that one quality is, good temper. Of what avail are comforts, or even luxuries, when there is no seasoning of good temper to enjoy them with? How many deficiencies can there not be overlooked, when good temper is present to cover them with a veil? Perhaps you have not yet learnt what a valuable treasure this good temper is; when you have read the history of my bear, you will be better able to form an opinion.

I cannot tell you when this bear was born, nor am I quite sure where; bears are born in so many parts of the world now, that it becomes very difficult to determine what country heard their first growl, and they never think to preserve a memorandum of the circumstance. Let it suffice that our bear was born, that he had a mamma and papa, and some brothers and sisters; that he lived in a cavern surrounded by trees and bushes; that he was always a big lump of a bear, invariably wore a brown coat, and was often out of temper, or rather, was always *in* temper, only that temper was a very bad one.

No doubt his parents would have been very willing to cure this terrible defect, if they had known how; but the fact is, they seemed always too much absorbed in their own thoughts to attend much to their family. Old Mr. Bruin would sit in his corner by the hour together sucking his paw; and his partner, Mrs. Bruin, would sit in her corner sucking her paw; whilst the little ones, or big ones, for they were growing up fast, would make themselves into balls and roll about the ground, or bite one another's ears by

way of a joke, or climb up the neighbouring trees to admire the prospect, and then slip down again, to the imminent destruction of their clothes; not that a rent or two would have grieved their mother very much, for she was a great deal too old, and too ignorant besides, to think of mending them. In all these sports Master Bruin, the eldest, was ever the foremost; but as certain as he joined in the romps, so surely were uproar and fighting the consequence. The reason was clear enough; his temper was so disagreeable, that although he was quite ready to play off his jokes on others, he could never bear to receive them in return; and being, besides, very fierce and strong, he came at length to be considered as the most unbearable bear that the forest had known for many generations, and in his own family was looked on as quite a bug-bear.

Now I privately think, that if a good oaken stick had been applied to his shoulders, or any other sensitive part of his body, whenever he displayed these fits of spleen, the exercise would have had a very beneficial effect on his disposition; but his father, on such occasions, only uttered his opinion in so low a growl that it was impossible to make out what he said, and then sucked his paw more vigorously than ever; and his mother was much too tender-hearted to think of mending his manners in so rude a way: so Master Bruin grew apace, until his brothers and sisters were wicked enough to wish he might some day go out for a walk and forget to come home again, or that he might be persuaded by a kind friend to emigrate, without going through the ceremony of

taking leave of his family.

It began to be conjectured that some such event had occurred when, for three whole days, he never made his appearance. The respectable family of the Bruins were puzzled, but calm, notwithstanding, at this unusual absence; it evidently made them thoughtful, though it was impossible to guess what they thought about: if one could form an idea from the attitudes of the different members, each of whom sat in a corner sucking his right paw and his left paw alternately – it was a family habit, you must know – I should say their thoughts were too deep for expression; but before their meditations were converted from uncertainty into mourning, the object of them made his appearance at the entrance of the cavern, with his coat torn, limping in his gait, and with an ugly wound in his head, looking altogether as disconsolate a brute as you can well conceive. He did not condescend to say where he had been, nor what he had been doing; perhaps no one made the inquiry: but it was very evident he had been doing no good, and had got his reward accordingly. If, however, this great bear's ill temper was remarkable before, judge what it must have been with such a sore head!

The experience of mankind has led to the opinion, that there are few more disagreeable beings in creation than ill-nurtured bears, – bears that have been ill-licked, – those great, fierce, sullen, cross-grained and ill-tempered beasts, that are, unhappily, to be found in every part of this various world; but when all these unhandsome qualities are found in one individual of the species,

and that one happens to have a sore head into the bargain, it is easy to believe the *at home* which he honours or dishonours with his presence can neither be very quiet nor particularly comfortable.

Habit makes many things supportable which at first would seem beyond our powers of endurance. Mr. and Mrs. B., and, indeed, all the other B.'s, male and female, had got so used to the tyranny of this ill-tempered animal, that they put up with his moroseness almost without a growl; but there is a limit to sufferance, beyond which neither men nor bears can travel, and that boundary was at last attained with the B.'s. As what I am now about to relate is, however, rather an important fact in my biography, I must inform you how the matter occurred, and what were the circumstances which led to it.

You are, perhaps, aware that bears, being of rather an indolent disposition, are not accustomed to hoard up a store of provision for their wants in winter, but prefer – in their own country, at least – sleeping through the short dreary days and long bitter nights, and thus avoid the necessity of taking food for some weeks, although they grow very thin during their lengthened slumbers. I forget what this time is called in bears' language, but we give it the name of hybernation. Now it happened that Mrs. Bruin had taken it into her head to lay by this winter a nice little stock, which she very carefully buried at a short distance from the mouth of the cavern, when she felt the usual drowsiness of the season coming on, and having covered the spot with a heap of dead leaves that

she might know it again when she woke up, she crawled into bed, and turning her back to her old partner, who was already in a comfortable state of forgetfulness, went fast asleep.

The whole family rather overslept themselves, for the sun was quite brilliant when they awoke, and it was very evident that they had been dozing away for some months. The ill-tempered bear was the first on his legs, and kicking his two nearest brothers as he got up, just to hint to them that he was awake again, he opened his mouth to its whole extent – and a very great extent it was, too – and stretching his limbs one after another, and giving himself a hearty shake instead of washing, shaving, and combing, he scuffled to the entrance of the cavern and sniffed at the fresh air. He sniffed and sniffed, and the more he sniffed, the more certainly did his nose whisper that there was something else besides fresh air which he was inhaling. The smell of the fresh air, too, or the *something else*, caused him a tremendous appetite, which was every moment becoming greater; and then it entered his bearish brain that where there was a smell there must be something to occasion it. Whereupon, following that great nose of his – and he could not have had a better guide – he scuffled out of the cavern and down the path, till he reached a little mound of earth and leaves, where, the odour being strongest, he squatted down. With his great paws he soon demolished the entrance to his mamma's larder, and lost no time in pulling out some of the dainties it contained, which, without more ado, he set about devouring. Meanwhile his brothers, who had been aroused by the

affectionate conduct of the eldest, were by this time also wide awake, and had quite as good appetites as Bruin himself; and though on ordinary occasions they stood in great awe of that most ill-tempered brute, it must be admitted that this was an *extra-ordinary* occasion, and they acted accordingly. Just fancy being months without anything to eat, and having appetites fierce enough to devour one another!

So they rushed to the spot where Bruin was making so excellent a meal, and without any other apology than a short grunt or two, they seized upon some of the hidden treasures, and with little ceremony crammed them into their hungry jaws. Bruin was thunderstruck! Never before had they ever presumed to dip their paws into his dish, and now they were actually before his face, converting the most delicate morsels to their own use, and, as it were, taking the food out of his very mouth! After an internal struggle of a few seconds, during which it seemed doubtful whether his emotions or his greediness in filling his jaws so full would choke him, he uttered a savage growl, and, with one stroke of his huge paw, felled his younger brother to the ground. Then turning to the second, he flew at him like a fury, and seemed resolved to make him share a similar fate; but the other, who was not wanting in courage, and who was strengthened by the idea that there was something still in the larder worth fighting for, and which he would certainly lose if he ran away, warded off his blows, and, by careful management, now dodging, now striking, kept his brother at bay, and avoided coming to such

close quarters as to subject himself to Bruin's hug: for he knew, if he once felt that embrace, there was not much chance of his having any appetite left with which to complete his half-finished breakfast.

The noise of the combat had now, however, roused the family. Mrs. B. was the first to make her appearance, and she was soon followed by the rest. Explanations ensued, although the facts of the case were sufficiently clear, and Bruin's character was well known. Old Ursus Major drew himself up, and, for once in his life, assumed a dignified demeanour. The ill-tempered bear stood abashed before his parents, although he moved his head to and fro in an obstinate manner, as though rejecting all interference.

It is a pity I cannot relate to you what was said upon this occasion, for Old Bruin is reported to have made a very eloquent discourse on the horrible effects of ill-temper and greediness; and good advice is worth having, whether uttered by a bear or any other animal. Suffice it, that after lecturing his son on the enormity of his offences, – which probably he was himself partly the cause of, through not punishing many of his previous errors, – he bid him quit for ever his paternal roof, and seek his fortune elsewhere; cautioning him at the same time, that if he ever expected to get through the world with credit to his name, and even comfort to his person, he must be honest, good-tempered, and forbearing.

Bruin took this advice in most ungracious part; and without

exchanging a word with any of the family, although it was evident his poor old mother longed to hug him in her arms, he growled out some unintelligible words, and set forth upon his travels.

UPON HIS TRAVELS

There is no denying that when Bruin had got clear of the old familiar path, and lost sight of the dwelling where he had hitherto spent his days, he felt most particularly uncomfortable; and if he had had the power of recalling the past, he would, in his present state of feeling, no doubt have done so. For the first time in his life, the sense of his ill-temper struck him in all its ugliness; and as he sat down on a huge tree which was lying across his road, he looked such a picture of disconsolateness, that it was evident he would have felt great relief if he could have shed some tears. Alas, how much does Bruin's condition remind us of little scenes among ourselves! We give way to our bad tempers and our selfishness; we make ourselves disagreeable, and our friends unhappy; we quarrel, if we do not actually fight; and when we meet the reward of our waywardness, and find ourselves abandoned by those who would have loved us had we acted differently, we then moan over our fate, and bitterly regret what we might have avoided. Alas, poor human nature! alas, poor bear!

I am truly sorry to observe that no act of repentance followed Bruin's sense of desolation. His first feeling of sorrow over, he felt indignant that he should have been so treated; but, more than that, as he was still hungry, he felt regret at being denied a closer search into his old mother's larder.

Whilst engaged in his various reflections he happened to cast his eyes up to a neighbouring hollow tree, where, at some height from the ground, a number of bees were flying in and out a great hole, with all the bustle and buzzing usual to those busy people. Now, it is well known that bears are mightily fond of honey, and will run great risks in order to obtain this dainty, and Bruin was very far from being an exception to his tribe. He was too ignorant to reflect that it was a great deal too early in the season to hope for any store, but, consulting only his own inclinations, he lost no time in climbing up the tree; and when he had reached the spot where the now angry bees were hurrying to and fro more vigorously than ever, he thrust his great paw into a hole with the hope of drawing forth a famous booty. But the indignant insects now came out in a swarm, and attacked him with the utmost fury; three of them settled on his nose, and pricked him most unmercifully; a dozen or two planted themselves on a great patch behind, where his trousers were worn thin; and a whole troop fastened on to the sore place in his head – for it was not quite healed up – and so stung him, that, roaring with pain and rage, he threw himself, rather than descended, from the tree, and went flying through the wood to get rid of his determined little enemies: they stuck fast, however, to their points of attack, nor did Bruin get clear of his tormentors till he dashed himself into a pool of water and buried his head for a moment or two under the surface.

It was with some degree of trepidation that he raised his nose

above water and peeped about him; the bees were all gone, so he crawled out of the mud, and after an angry shake or two, for his coat was quite wet, he resumed his journey.

Bruin now travelled on till noon; and what with hunger and his long walk, you may believe his temper was not improved. A rustling noise on the left, accompanied every now and then with a short, contented kind of grunt, attracted his attention, and looking through some brambles, he descried in an open space a very large boar, with two most formidable tusks protruding from his jaws, busily engaged in rooting up the ground, from which he had extracted a curious variety of roots and other edibles, the sight of which made Bruin's mouth water. For the first time in his life he felt the necessity of civility; for though he had never made any personal acquaintance with the tribe to which the animal before him belonged, there were many tales current in his family of their ferocity when provoked; and the few reasoning powers he possessed were sufficient to assure him, that not even his rough paws or burly strength would secure him from those glistening tusks if directed angrily against him. So Bruin resolved to try and be civil; and with this determination walked into the stranger's domain, and accosted him in as polite a way as his rude nature would permit him to assume.

The animal, who was known in his neighbourhood as Wylde Boare, Esquire, on account of the extent of his property, received Bruin's advances with great caution, for he was naturally of a suspicious temper, his bright reddish eyes twinkling in a very

unpleasant manner; perceiving, however, that his unexpected visitor was but a mere youngster, and that he looked very hungry and tired, he grunted out a surly sort of welcome, and, jerking his snout in the direction of the heap of provisions, bade him squat down and make a meal. Bruin did not wait for a second invitation, but, stretching out his huge legs, picked up the fresh vegetables, which he thrust into his capacious jaws with every appearance of relish.

When his repast came to an end – and this did not happen till there was an end of the food – he wiped his mouth with the back of his arm, and looked at the boar; and the boar, who had said nothing during the disappearance of the fruits of his morning's work, but had contented himself with uttering a grunt or two, looked at Bruin. At length he observed, —

"Hurgh, you have a famous appetite!"

"Ah," answered the bear, "and so would you, if you had not eaten anything for the last few weeks!"

After a pause: —

"Hurgh, hurgh!" said Mr. Boare, in a guttural voice; "I never tried; but a big fellow like you ought to be able to get through a deal of work."

"Perhaps so," observed the surly bear; "but I don't intend to make the experiment."

After another pause: —

"Hurgh, an idle fellow, I'm afraid!" said Mr. Boare, half aside; "and not quite so civil as before his breakfast." Then he

exclaimed aloud, "I suppose you will make no objection to help me dig up some more food, seeing that you have made away with my dinner, hurgh?"

"Who do you take me for?" said the ungrateful beast, springing to his legs, and eyeing his entertainer with one of his furious looks.

"Who do I take you for, hurgh, you graceless cub?" exclaimed Mr. Boare, in a rage, for he was rather hasty in his manner, and his red eyes twinkled, and his back began to get up in a way which showed his agitation; "who do I take you for? Why, I did take you for one who would be at least thankful for food given you when almost starving: but I now perceive you are only an ugly lump of a bear. Out of my sight this instant, or, from want of my own dinner, which you have devoured, I shall, perchance, make a meal of you! – hurgh, hurgh!"

As he said these words the bristles on his back started up so furiously, and his tusks glistened so horridly in a little ray of sunlight, which was peeping in to see what was the matter, that Master Bruin felt thoroughly frightened, and made a precipitate retreat, turning round at every few steps to observe whether he were followed, and if it would be necessary to take refuge in one of the trees; but Wylde Boare, Esq. only grunted out his favourite expression, which, in this case, was mixed with a great deal of contempt, and recommenced digging for his dinner as if nothing had occurred to disturb his usual contented state of mind.

Bruin now travelled on till he reached a stream, which came

bounding through this part of the wood at a very rapid pace, and making a terrible fuss because sundry large stones in the middle of its course rather impeded its progress. The noise it made, and the anger it showed, seemed to please our sulky bear mightily, so he sat down on the bank with his toes in the water to enjoy the spectacle. The scene was a very striking one, and was fitted to charm the most indifferent eye; and Bruin, bear as he was, could not help being attracted by it. Whatever his meditations, however, it was not destined that he should pursue them long without interruption; for his quick ear soon detected the sharp, quick bark of several dogs – a sound that was carried along by a breeze which swept by him at intervals. He raised his head with his huge nose in the air to sniff out any possible danger, and did not seem at all pleased with the result of his observations; for he drew first one foot and then the other out of the water, and raised himself to his full height. As he did so, a more than usual commotion in the stream drew his attention, when he perceived the round head of a large otter appear above the surface, whilst two bright eyes gave a hasty look all round. On observing Bruin, the head immediately disappeared, and at the same moment a whole pack of terriers, in hot haste, came sweeping round a bank hard by, but stopped short on finding themselves in presence of such a formidable creature.

Bruin perceived that he had made an impression, and his usual insolence returned; for he had at first been startled, and he attributed the pause of the terriers to fear, when, in

fact, it was only the result of surprise. If he had been a little better physiognomist, he would have observed a certain air of determination about the little fellows, which sufficiently showed that it was prudence or a sense of duty which stayed them, and not a lack of courage: they had been sent out to procure an otter, and they were now deliberating among themselves whether it would be wise to spend their time in quarrelling with a bear.

After a short consultation, one who appeared to have the guidance of the pack uttered a decided little bark, and turning a little aside, endeavoured to pass between Bruin and the stream, but sufficiently near to show that he was not afraid to come into contact with him, followed by his companions. This evidently contemptuous mode of treating him, aroused all our ill-tempered hero's bad humour; so, without considering the consequences of the action, he raised his big paw and knocked the leader down. The sturdy little fellows wanted no further provocation; as if influenced by a single will, they turned upon him, and attacked him in front, flank, and rear, with an impetuosity which was at first irresistible, because unexpected. Finding that those behind him were his greatest and most successful tormentors, he very prudently sat himself down, crushing one or two of them in his descent; then springing to his legs, and as he did so catching several more in his arms, he hugged them till they had no more breath in their bodies, when he dropped them, and took up a fresh supply. One of the pack, however, more alert than his fellows, sprang up and seized him by the nose, making his teeth meet in

that prominent feature, and caused Bruin such intense pain, that, forgetting all his strategy, he tried to beat down his determined little foe with his paws, and ran off howling in a most terrific manner, pursued by the remainder of the pack, who bit at his hind legs, tore his already ragged coat till it hung in ribbons; and when Bruin, who, having at length got rid of the bold little fellow that had fastened to his nose, climbed up a tree, they stood yelping at the foot of it, till evening had completely set in, when they slowly retired.

And what were our ill-natured hero's thoughts, as he sat upon an elevated branch, and gently rubbed his wounded snout? Why, unfortunately for his own happiness, he laid the blame of his mishap on any one or any thing, rather than the right being or circumstance. It was the otter's fault, or the dogs' fault – those dogs were always so quarrelsome; or it was his father's fault in driving him away from home: in fact, every one was in error rather than himself and his own disagreeable disposition. And here we may observe, that they are such characters as Bruin who bring disrepute on a whole tribe; for we are too apt to form our opinions of a nation by the few individuals we may happen to fall in with, although, probably, no conclusions can be falsder. Let us, therefore, be careful ere we form our judgments, and let us not believe that all Bruin's kindred and compatriots were sulky and ill-tempered because he himself was such a disagreeable lump of a bear.

TOWN LIFE

Bruin woke up next morning with so uncomfortable a feeling of soreness from the rough treatment he had received, that it was with some difficulty he was enabled to move his heavy limbs; and he found sitting so unpleasant a posture, that he lay stretched across two or three branches for several hours, and in a very ill-humour, indeed, watched the activity displayed beneath and around him. Now a stealthy fox, upon some foraging expedition, would come creeping along, his foot-fall scarcely heard on the withered leaves and dead branches; now a timid mouse would leap nimbly by, and, at the least signal of danger, would disappear as if by enchantment; then a frolicsome squirrel, vaulting as fearlessly from bough to bough as if he were not fifty feet from the ground, would arouse him for a minute from his sulky mood, and light up his fierce eye with an expression of interest which it was very clear had no higher source than a hope that the little tumbler might fall down and break his neck, for daring to be in such a good humour. But the birds, above all, excited his anger; for seeing them flying about gaily in the sun, which tinged the tops of the trees so gloriously, Bruin actually growled with indignation – a sound which nearly caused that accident to Master Squirrel that our ungracious hero had desired for him, so terribly was he frightened.

A few days thus spent sufficiently recovered him to render

him capable of moving, when he descended from his temporary hospital, and, with the aid of a thick staff, which he had provided himself for the purpose, set off once more, supplying his wants in the way of food with such edibles as fell in his way, a bear not being remarkably particular concerning its quality or kind. One only thought now possessed him, – that of quitting the wooded ground where his life had hitherto been passed, and reaching one of those spots where, as he had heard his parents relate, animals of various kinds congregate together, and live in habitations raised by their own ingenuity; in fact, a city.

"At least," he thought, "if what I have heard of such places be true, and that merit of every kind is certain there to meet its reward, and be properly appreciated, I shall stand a better chance than my neighbours." With this reflection, he shuffled on a little quicker; and the reader, who has been thus allowed a private view of his motives, will observe that modesty was not among Bruin's list of virtues.

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