

## The Three Bears and the Fish of Heaven

The water ran around him. It was a lake in the mountains it came from and wound downhill between the pines and rocks and grassland before opening out into the delta to send fingers of life into the flats. Up the hills and between the pines was where he stood to his ankles in water. He had learned when he was young how the fish would swim down to the delta in winter and move upstream come summer, so there he stood looking down over the land watching for the shine of trout or the hue of salmon.

He bent down and when he came back up he held a fish. There is something strange about the dance of a fish out of water and he watched it do so. There is something strange about the panic of a fish; there is something strange about the elegance of it. Eyes like buttons and scales flashing the sun it writhed and wriggled and bucked and bowed. When he took a bite, the fish stopped and so did he.

For it was a fine fish, all fine and full and lacking bones. The fish was tender and fine and good and he wanted more. So he took another bite and still it was tender and fine and good and he thought "This is the best fish I have ever tasted and it is beautiful even with its blood dripping and innards showing. This is the best fish I have ever tasted: this is truly the Fish of Heaven."

So with the half-eaten fish in one paw he set off to find his brother to share this fish. And there amidst the pines and rocks and grassland he found him picking apart a deer.

And he said "Brother, leave that disgusting deer be and try some of my fish, for I believe it to be truly the Fish of Heaven."

The brother scratched his jaw and said "Fish of Heaven? It cannot be that good, let me try."

He bit the fish and it was a fine fish still, all fine and full and lacking bones. The fish was tender and fine and good and he wanted more.

And he said to him "Brother, this is truly the Fish of Heaven and I thank you for sharing it with me. Perhaps our other brother would appreciate this fish."

So the two brothers walked through the forest with bloody chops dripping onto their fur to find the third brother resting against a tree.

The first said "Brother, rise from your apathy and try some of my fish, for I believe it to be truly the Fish of Heaven."

"No thank you," he said patting his stomach.

"But brother," said the second, "it is fine and tender and good. I have tried it myself. You must try some."

"No thank you," he said again. "I am full from toe to tip with berries and content."

"Try some brother. You have not lived until you have tried it," said the first. He was becoming angry.

"Yet I am alive to tell you no."

"But you must try some," said the second. "You will regret it for eternities if you do not."

"No thank you, brother."

"Just try some of my fish. I will force you to if I must."

"You will force me to do nothing," smiled the brother. "I am happy enough without your stinking fish and its disgusting innards – I can see its bones and guts from here."

Then with the swipe of their paws three bears became two, and they ate their fish and noted how their brother was fine and full and now lacking bones in his jaw. His flesh was tendered and fine and good and dead. Blood ran down his front and the tree he rested against. They thought how beautiful and righteous it was, even with blood running and tongue showing, for he refused to try their Fish of Heaven.