

Wind Runner and the Hunt

by Jacqueline Guest

Part 1

Silently, I stood in front of our teepee and watched as the warriors of my tribe prepared to leave.

I, Wind Runner of the Raven People, would not be going on an important hunt – and this shame would follow me like black smoke from a campfire. True, I was only twelve ... but I was a proven tracker and I could run. I was like the west wind, the Chinook, when it blew past so fast the campfires flared. I would be a valuable warrior on any hunt.

At that moment, Black Eagle, my father, came out of our teepee and I stood straighter, my chin held high. Maybe he'd change his mind and take me.

"I have a gift for you."

"What is it, Father?" I asked.

"You may not be old enough to join this hunt," he said knowingly, "but you are old enough for this." He held out his prized knife in its beaded sheath.

My breath caught at the importance of this gift. "Thank you. I will protect it with my life!"

Chuckling, he laid his hand on my shoulder. "The knife is supposed to protect your life, Wind Runner."

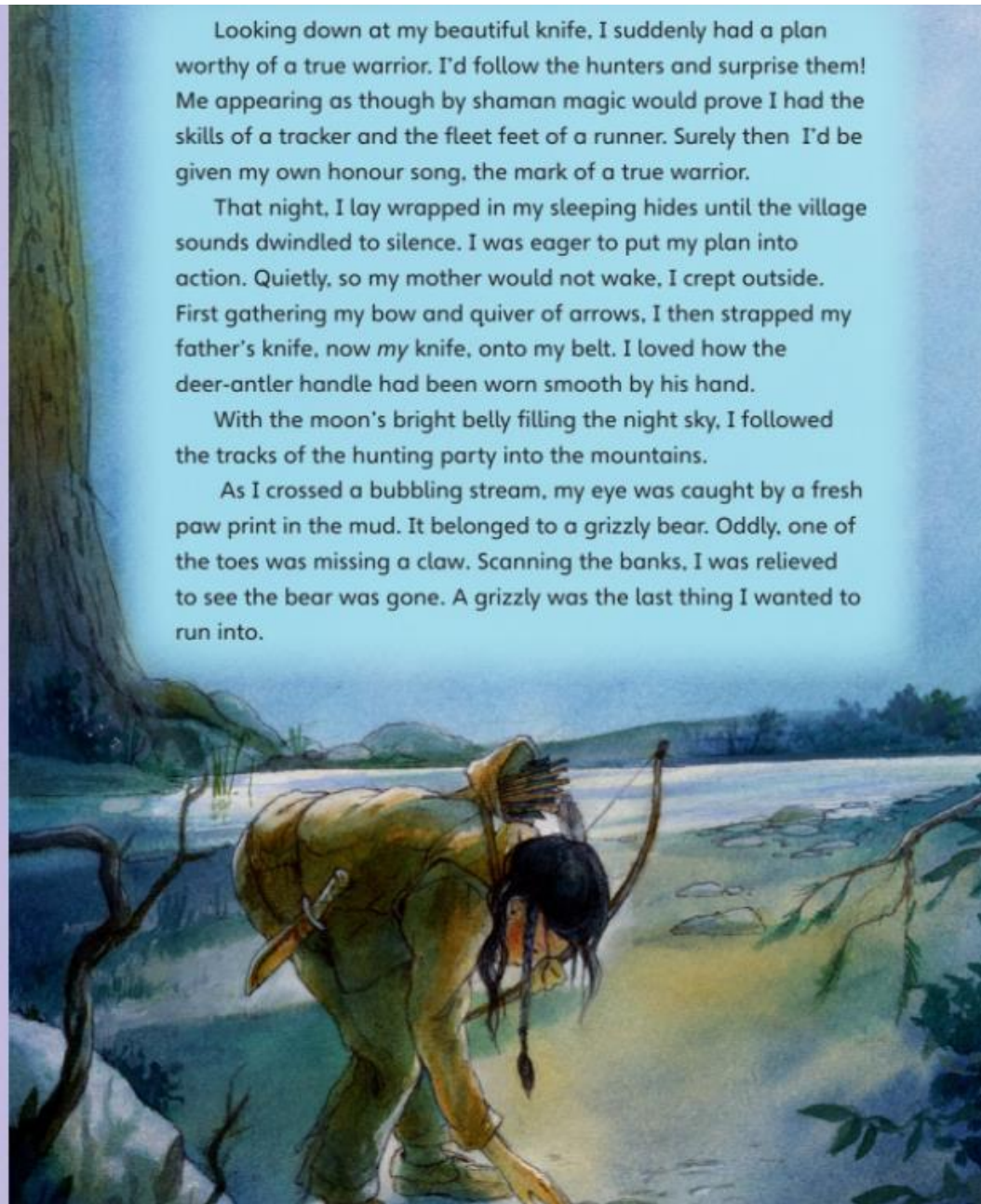
He joined the other warriors and I watched the hunting party ride away.

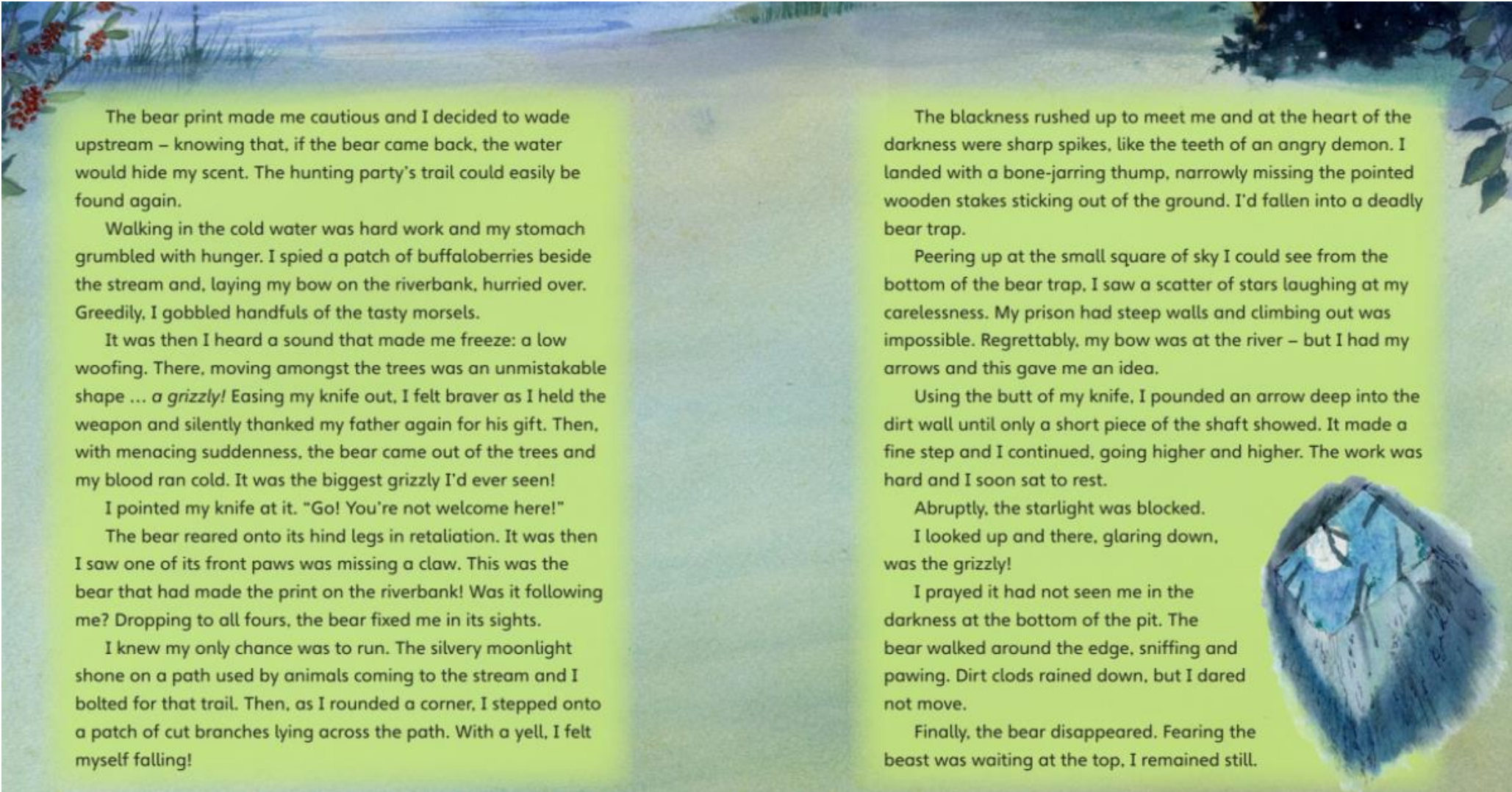
Looking down at my beautiful knife, I suddenly had a plan worthy of a true warrior. I'd follow the hunters and surprise them! Me appearing as though by shaman magic would prove I had the skills of a tracker and the fleet feet of a runner. Surely then I'd be given my own honour song, the mark of a true warrior.

That night, I lay wrapped in my sleeping hides until the village sounds dwindled to silence. I was eager to put my plan into action. Quietly, so my mother would not wake, I crept outside. First gathering my bow and quiver of arrows, I then strapped my father's knife, now *my* knife, onto my belt. I loved how the deer-antler handle had been worn smooth by his hand.

With the moon's bright belly filling the night sky, I followed the tracks of the hunting party into the mountains.

As I crossed a bubbling stream, my eye was caught by a fresh paw print in the mud. It belonged to a grizzly bear. Oddly, one of the toes was missing a claw. Scanning the banks, I was relieved to see the bear was gone. A grizzly was the last thing I wanted to run into.





The bear print made me cautious and I decided to wade upstream – knowing that, if the bear came back, the water would hide my scent. The hunting party's trail could easily be found again.

Walking in the cold water was hard work and my stomach grumbled with hunger. I spied a patch of buffaloberries beside the stream and, laying my bow on the riverbank, hurried over. Greedily, I gobbled handfuls of the tasty morsels.

It was then I heard a sound that made me freeze: a low woofing. There, moving amongst the trees was an unmistakable shape ... *a grizzly!* Easing my knife out, I felt braver as I held the weapon and silently thanked my father again for his gift. Then, with menacing suddenness, the bear came out of the trees and my blood ran cold. It was the biggest grizzly I'd ever seen!

I pointed my knife at it. "Go! You're not welcome here!"

The bear reared onto its hind legs in retaliation. It was then I saw one of its front paws was missing a claw. This was the bear that had made the print on the riverbank! Was it following me? Dropping to all fours, the bear fixed me in its sights.

I knew my only chance was to run. The silvery moonlight shone on a path used by animals coming to the stream and I bolted for that trail. Then, as I rounded a corner, I stepped onto a patch of cut branches lying across the path. With a yell, I felt myself falling!

The blackness rushed up to meet me and at the heart of the darkness were sharp spikes, like the teeth of an angry demon. I landed with a bone-jarring thump, narrowly missing the pointed wooden stakes sticking out of the ground. I'd fallen into a deadly bear trap.

Peering up at the small square of sky I could see from the bottom of the bear trap, I saw a scatter of stars laughing at my carelessness. My prison had steep walls and climbing out was impossible. Regrettably, my bow was at the river – but I had my arrows and this gave me an idea.

Using the butt of my knife, I pounded an arrow deep into the dirt wall until only a short piece of the shaft showed. It made a fine step and I continued, going higher and higher. The work was hard and I soon sat to rest.

Abruptly, the starlight was blocked.

I looked up and there, glaring down, was the grizzly!

I prayed it had not seen me in the darkness at the bottom of the pit. The bear walked around the edge, sniffing and pawing. Dirt clods rained down, but I dared not move.

Finally, the bear disappeared. Fearing the beast was waiting at the top, I remained still.

