

Benjamin Bear and The Long Winter

Once upon a time there lived a little baby bear called Benjamin. Benjamin lived in a big green forest with lots of other big and little bears. His home was a very snuggly, cosy den where he lived with some of his favourite big bears. He felt very lucky.

One day, the birds came flying down to bring the news that there was going to be a very long, cold winter. All the animals in the forest started preparing. They needed to get lots of food and supplies to last them through the long, cold winter. It was a strange time, with everyone rushing around gathering food and looking worried, but then, as the snow started to fall, the forest became quiet. Everyone was ready for hibernation.



Benjamin's den was full of yummy food, snuggly blankets and his very favourite bears. He had everything he needed, he couldn't wait for hibernation to begin! Benjamin and the big bears closed the door to their den, shutting out the icy wind, and snuggled down into their beds. They were safe and dry and warm and very, very happy. Benjamin LOVED hibernating. He loved having lots of extra bear hugs and time together. Every day he woke up feeling smiley, he wanted to hibernate forever.

But one day, he started to hear birds singing outside, and he saw light shining through the door to the den. "Look! Spring is here!" said the big bears, excitedly, stretching and yawning. "Time to get up and go outside!" but Benjamin didn't get up. He didn't *want* to go outside. He stayed right where he was, frowning.

"Come on Benjamin. It's time to leave our den. The sun is shining! It's warm again! Now we can go outside and play and hunt and explore," said the big bears.

"But I don't want to. It's warm and cosy in here. I love it in here. I'm not going outside ever again." He said.

The big bears sat down with Benjamin and gave him a hug. They explained how much they loved being inside with him too. Of course Benjamin wanted to stay in the den forever, it was very special to all be together feeling safe and happy. Benjamin nodded, "yes! Exactly!" he thought. They understood.

"We do understand," they said, "but you know, little bears can't stay inside forever. They need to learn how to fish and climb trees and play with their friends!"

Benjamin wasn't so sure. He hadn't seen his friends all winter and that wasn't *so* bad. Climbing trees was fun, but what if he fell down and hurt himself? And learning to fish was really hard, what if he couldn't do it and the other bears laughed at him? No. He decided it was too risky, and he should definitely stay inside the den forever and ever.

"It's OK to be scared you know," said the big bears. "Going outside after such a long time will probably feel a bit strange, but that's OK. Lots of little bears will be feeling the same way too. And there will be plenty of big bears around to catch you if you fall, AND to help you learn to fish. It will be fun, and we will keep you safe!" they told him.

But Benjamin didn't FEEL safe outside. He knew what safe felt like. Safe felt like days inside with his favourite big bears, no one coming in and no one going out. Safe felt like cuddles and games and laughing together. Safe felt like not having to try new scary things or go to new scary places. Safe felt warm and smiley and calm. Safe felt good.



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The big bears smiled. They were glad that Benjamin bear knew what safe felt like. "Do you want to know a secret about feeling safe?" They asked Benjamin. He nodded.

"Safe is a feeling you keep in your heart. Being in the den has made that feeling grow so big it takes up your whole heart now, but that just means you've got lots you can take with you when you go outside. Outside might not feel so safe sometimes, and so the safe feeling might get smaller or even go away... But you can always find a big bear you trust very much and tell them if that happens. They can help you find it again, until it's time to come back home and fill your heart right back up. And coming back to our cosy den will feel even better when you've been outside all day,"

And the big bears were right.

Benjamin was a nervous bear, but he was a brave bear too, and so he went outside again. At first, it didn't take much for that safe feeling in his heart to shrink. Sometimes it would disappear completely! But he always remembered to find a bear he trusted who helped him get it back again. Sometimes, if Benjamin was feeling extra nervous, he would take something special from his den to keep in his pocket and remind him of his safe feeling. As the days went by, Benjamin started to enjoy going outside, climbing trees, catching fish and playing with his friends. The big bears were so proud of him and he was proud of himself too!

Best of all, every single day, when he was done with climbing and fishing and playing, he would go back to his cosy den, snuggle up with the big bears and tell them all about his outside adventures. And that safe feeling in his heart? It grew, and grew, and grew.



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