

## Joy at the Zoo

The zoo was full when Ben walked through the large doors that quickly swung closed behind him. The smell was overwhelming at first. It was like fertilizer but stronger. He clutched his mother's hand tightly to avoid getting lost in the mobs of people coming from every direction. Ben couldn't read very well yet, but he knew the brightly coloured sign just above his head said "Zoo".

"Are you excited to see the animals?" His mother reached down and stroked Ben's head before handing a twenty dollar bill to the woman standing in the ticket booth.

"We're going to see the bear!" Ben told the woman. "It says grrr!" The ticket woman chuckled as she pointed the way to the bears.

Ben's eyes were wide and curious as he walked through the zoo. There was so much to see. The exotic plants, the black and white penguins that he had learned about in school and the hundreds of people who pushed passed him and his mother. Ben refused to stop though. He had been waiting for weeks for the day when his mother would take him to the zoo to see the bear and it was finally here.

As they entered the viewing room for the bears, Ben pulled free from his mother's grasp and ran toward the sheet of glass that ran from floor to ceiling separating them from the bear. He pressed his nose up against it and scanned the clearing over and over. The bear was nowhere to be seen. As his mother came up behind him Ben sputtered, "Where is it? Where's the bear?"

His mother sighed and replied, "I'm sorry honey, but I think he might be asleep. See his tail poking out of that cave." Ben followed the direction of her finger. When he saw the bear was definitely asleep he started to cry. Tears exploded out of him, as he tried to yell at it and wake it up. He was furious that he had waited for so long to see the bear, and now it wouldn't come out to visit him, even for a few moments.

As Ben's mother flung her sobbing son over her shoulder and started to leave the viewing room, people started to cheer. The pair spun around to see what the commotion was about, but it was already apparent that the bear had awoken from its long slumber and was now emerging from the dim cave. It started to turn around but stopped when, out of the corner of its eye, the bear spotted the people. The bear just stood there for a moment, staring.

Suddenly it began charging towards the flimsy glass. The room full of people started to scream and Ben grasped his mother's hand. The bear was only a couple paces away from the glass wall when an invisible force knocked it backwards to the ground. It tried to stand up but fell over at first, still in a daze after trying to pass the electric fence. The crowd laughed and cheered but Ben just stood on the spot, staring at the bear. It attempted to escape again but just like the first time, it failed and the audience cheered.

Ben looked at his mother questioningly, "Mommy, why is it doing that?" In the midst of the crowd, his mother's face fell still; her wide eyes jumped to her son, unsure what to say. "I guess it wants to be free," she managed after a moment. Just then there was a

thunderclap and torrents of rain started pouring from the sky. The crowd slowly thinned as people ran for shelter leaving the bear alone in the cold.