

JEFFREY SKINNER

*The Experiment*

I sewed my father into a specially designed, handmade bear suit. He was indistinguishable from a real bear, and yet retained the necessary functions of a human. I also provided a GPS radio collar. Then I air-dropped him into a densely forested preserve. When I returned a year later I found he had mated with an Asian black bear. He and she and their two cubs lived a quiet life in a mountain cave.

After sharing a meal of berries and honey and wild piglets I asked to speak to my father in private. He led me on a path away from the cave to the edge of a cliff. *This view of surrounding mountains and rivers and forest is magnificent . . .* “Yes, it is,” he said. “What, you can read minds now?” I said. “A small trick for a bear, as it turns out.”

I thought this over for a moment; but it did not change my purpose. “Dad,” I said, “it’s time to go home. The experiment is over.” He stared at me with his great, incongruous blue eyes and bear face, and said, “No.” “Yes.” “No.” “Yes.” “NO!” he said finally and swatted a nearby douglas fir with one paw. The tree flew several yards over my head and came to rest in the snow, dirt trickling from its upended roots.

“It’s been good to see you,” I said, and rose. “Same here,” he said and also stood, “but I think it best if you didn’t come back.” I agreed, and held wide my arms for a goodbye embrace. I could hear and feel the cracking of my ribs, which I consoled myself would heal completely in time. “Don’t tell your mother,” he said. “In fact, tell her I’ve died.” “Well, you are dead, aren’t you?” “Yes,” he said, and scampered up the path with surprising agility, on all fours.