

WHAT THE BEAR SAID

from Aesop's fable
"The Bear and the Travelers"

screenplay written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. ROCKY MOUNTAINS - AFTERNOON

In the distance we see carved rock faces and scattered pines. As we PUSH IN, we detect a sliver of a trail weaving along, obscured now and then by trees and rock outcrops.

PUSHING IN FURTHER, we see three men plodding along. The first, the GUIDE, a rugged mountain man, is loaded down with an enormous pack. Several paces behind are two dudes who are not dressed for this journey: a TALL MAN, who carries a much smaller pack, and a FAT MAN with a comically small pack.

THE GUIDE

hikes along, his eyes bright with wonder at the spectacular vista. He labors under his burden, but whistles quietly to himself. We like him: he is making the most of a hard climb.

As he passes CAMERA, WE FOCUS on the two others. Their expressions are dark. The Fat Man sweats profusely; every step is a complaint. The Tall Man constantly adjusts his pack, more out of irritation at the idea than the weight itself.

They trudge along, missing the view, their heads close, glancing at the Guide:

TALL MAN

It's insupportable... this pack is giving me blisters! Blisters!

FAT MAN

Oh, shut up! My feet are killing me. And look at him--he's whistling!

TALL MAN

Laughing, more likely--at us! Look at us! Mere beasts of burden!

FAT MAN

True. I feel like an ass, carrying all this weight.

TALL MAN

You do pack a lot, my friend.

FAT MAN

I simply cannot take another step!

He does, but acts like it's his very last. He bends over, breathing heavily, sweat streaming down his corpulent face.

The Guide looks back and waves his companions onward.

GUIDE

We're making good time!

The Tall Man waves, faking a broad smile.

TALL MAN

What's his hurry? We'll surely make it to Sweetwater by tonight.

FAT MAN

A town! Rest! Refreshment! A foot bath! The necessities of life!

The Tall Man jabs the Fat Man in the ribs.

TALL MAN

And for you: a twelve-course meal!

The Fat Man indicates the Guide.

FAT MAN

He enjoys seeing us suffer.

TALL MAN

Then we shall not disappoint him.

He waves at the Guide that they're coming, then strides ahead, hauling the Fat Man along.

The Guide starts forward again.

TALL MAN (CONT'D)

Behold: a brilliant plan unfolds.

He starts hopping on one leg.

TALL MAN (CONT'D)

Oh, oh!

He collapses on the ground, clutching his ankle, his face contorted with pain.

The Guide turns and rushes to them.

GUIDE

What is it? What happened?

TALL MAN

My ankle! It's sprained!

GUIDE

Let me see.

The Tall Man jerks away, tears streaming down his cheeks.

TALL MAN

I fear it's broken!

GUIDE

Oh, no!

TALL MAN

Oh, yes!

The Fat Man turns away, rolling his eyes.

FAT MAN

Oh, brother.

GUIDE

This here's a piece of bad luck!

The Tall Man affects a dramatic pose, a forearm across his forehead.

TALL MAN

You must leave me behind!

The Fat Man turns back suddenly, his voice gleeful:

FAT MAN

Oh, let's!

The Guide again reaches for the foot, but the Tall Man jerks away, moaning.

The Guide looks at the Fat Man.

GUIDE

Leave him? Ain't nobody gettin' left behind.

TALL MAN

I'm just a burden...go on without me!

FAT MAN

Oh, let's!

The Tall Man gives him a sneer.

The Fat Man reciprocates.

The Guide, his mind racing, misses the exchange.

GUIDE

I reckon not. This here pass is dangerous. There might be Injuns about... or wild critters.

The Fat Man nearly dances with joy.

FAT MAN

Yes! Lions! Tigers!

GUIDE
And mebbe bears!

TALL MAN
Oh, my! What shall I do?

GUIDE
Kin ya hobble some?

FAT MAN
No!

TALL MAN
(stepping on him)
Maybe!

Angry glances are exchanged.

GUIDE
Dern. We'll just have to tote your
necessaries.

He looks at the Fat Man for agreement but sees surprise
instead.

FAT MAN
Me? I'm already overburdened! I cannot
carry one ounce more!

The Guide looks at the Tall Man, his mind working. T
he Tall Man looks at the Fat Man, whose face has gone hard.

TALL MAN
He's right--it's too much to ask.

FAT MAN
Yes! He's right: it is.

The Guide looks at the Fat Man. Then his face softens.

GUIDE
(to the Fat Man)
All right. I'll tote his gear.

TALL MAN
You're very kind. Very kind indeed.

FAT MAN
Too kind, if you ask me.

GUIDE
An' you kin tote him.

The Guide dons the Tall Man's pack.

The Fat Man looks daggers at the Tall Man, who gets gingerly to his feet.

The Tall Man beams at the Fat Man.

TALL MAN

You're very kind. Very kind indeed.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ROCKY MOUNTAINS - MINUTES LATER

The trio are back on the road. The Guide carries the Tall Man's pack as well as his own. Although it's heavy, he starts whistling again, but with some difficulty.

The two others trudge behind. The Tall Man leans heavily on the Fat Man, who scowls at him.

When the Guide turns to see how they're doing, they both effect miserable looks.

The Guide smiles encouragement and turns back to the trail.

The Fat Man shoves the Tall Man away.

FAT MAN

A lot of good you did me! Now, look!
I'm carrying even more, and you're
carrying nothing!

The Tall Man strolls along, smiling wickedly.

TALL MAN

I told you it was a brilliant plan!

FAT MAN

Brilliant for you!

Ahead, the Guide turns, concern on his face.

Immediately, the Tall Man leans heavily into the Fat Man and limps tragically. They both smile painfully for the Guide.

GUIDE

Not far now! Just a few more miles!

He turns back to the trail.

FAT MAN

How many more miles?

The Tall Man slaps him on the back, nearly knocking him over. He does a little jig, then jumps and clicks his heels.

TALL MAN

Not far! A walk in the park!

The Fat Man's face is flushed with rage.

Then an idea lights his eyes. He smiles at the Tall Man, who cocks his head suspiciously. The Fat Man clutches his fat belly and howls:

FAT MAN

Oh, goodness! The pain!

He collapses on a rock at the side of the trail. The Tall Man raises his eyebrows.

Ahead, the Guide turns, alarmed.

GUIDE

Jiminy! What is it now?

He shuffles heavily back toward them.

The Tall Man stands, favoring one leg, shaking his head, his arms crossed across his chest, his eyes slits.

The Fat Man kneads his ample belly.

FAT MAN

A stitch! I've over-exerted myself!

TALL MAN

The only thing you're over is weight.

The Guide shucks his pack and bends over the Fat Man.

GUIDE

What are you palaverin' about?

FAT MAN

I cannot go on. I must rest here.

GUIDE

Rest? For how long?

TALL MAN

Will a week be long enough?

The Guide looks at the Tall Man, surprised at his sarcasm. He turns back to the Fat Man, his face compassionate.

GUIDE

It's getting towards night. We got to get off this mountain... and soon!

FAT MAN

It's the weight!

TALL MAN

What weight? Your pack is as small
as your brain!

The Fat Man points an accusing pudgy finger at the Tall Man.

FAT MAN

His weight. He's too heavy!

TALL MAN

Me? Too heavy? Why, you--

FAT MAN

I cannot carry him.

He looks innocently at the Tall Man, who is purple with rage.

The Guide looks from one to another and sighs heavily.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ROCKY MOUNTAINS - MINUTES LATER

The Guide now carries both his companions' packs, as well as supporting the Tall Man, who fakes his limp and looks angrily over his shoulder at the Fat Man, who strolls along, whistling merrily.

Seeing his look, the Fat Man waves, beaming in victory.

FAT MAN

What a pity you must limp all the
way to town!

TALL MAN

And what a pity your side aches so!

GUIDE

Come on... we got a far piece yet.

The Tall Man rolls his eyes and gives the Fat Man another hateful look.

The Fat Man does a jig and attempts to click his heels, nearly falling over.

The Tall Man laughs, then quickly turns it into a moan.

The Guide shakes his head with pity.

GUIDE (CONT'D)

I hope we done used up our bad luck.

The threesome round a corner in the trail.

Suddenly, directly in front of them is a giant KODIAK BEAR. His eyes flash and he rears up on his hind legs--he is nine feet tall!

He extends his paws, nails bared; his cavernous mouth distends, revealing five inch teeth. He ROARS his outrage.

After a moment of frozen fear, everyone moves.

The Tall Man pushes the Guide down and sprints toward a pine.

The Fat Man waddles as fast as he can toward the same tree.

The Bear moves toward the Guide, who struggles to get free of the packs.

The Tall Man has already scaled the lowest branch.

The Fat Man reaches the tree and looks up. The lowest branch is just beyond his reach.

FAT MAN

Help me!

TALL MAN

Help yourself!

He climbs higher.

The Bear nears the Guide, who struggles to get out of the packs.

He is almost free when he is overshadowed by a huge form. He looks up, his face blanched with fear.

From his perch in the tree, the Tall Man watches.

The Bear cuffs the Guide, growling angrily.

TALL MAN (CONT'D)

Ugh! He's got him.

The Fat Man jumps again, stretching to reach the lowest branch.

FAT MAN

Help me!

The Bear swivels his huge head toward them.

TALL MAN

Shut up! He'll hear you!

FAT MAN

HELP ME!

THE BEAR'S P.O.V. - THE FAT MAN'S BEHIND

fills the frame, a tender morsel.

THE BEAR

ROARS his hungry approval.

TALL MAN
SHUT UP, YOU IDIOT!

FAT MAN
HELP ME!

The Bear steps over the immobile Guide and starts toward them.

TALL MAN
Oh, no.

He points.

The Fat Man turns slowly to look.

THE BEAR

slowly advances toward them, roaring.

THE FAT MAN

turns back, his face ashen, looking at the Tall Man.

FAT MAN
I'm doomed!

TALL MAN
Better you than me! After dining on
you, he won't want dessert!

The Fat Man's face changes from fear to anger. With a sudden burst of energy, he jumps and snags the Tall Man's pant leg and begins hauling him downward.

FAT MAN
I said, help me!

TALL MAN
Hey! Don't!

But the Fat Man is too heavy and the Tall Man's grip slips.

THE BEAR

closes in, his mouth the same height as the Fat Man's bottom.

THE BEAR'S P.O.V. - A SLOW, SHUFFLING AMBLE

as the CAMERA zeroes in on the Fat Man's generous behind.

THE BEAR

roars at the tasty prospect.

THE FAT MAN

looks over his shoulder. The Bear is just ten feet away. The Fat Man lets go of the Tall Man's pant leg.

The Tall Man scrambles higher.

With a sudden burst of energy, The Fat Man pulls himself up onto the lowest branch.

THE BEAR

swipes at the air, roaring.

THE FAT MAN

ascends to a higher branch, then turns.

THE BEAR

has reached the base of the tree. He looks up, his black eyes bright with hunger. He begins to stand.

As he reaches his full height, he takes a giant swipe at the Fat Man, barely missing his protruding stomach.

FAT MAN

Never have I so wished I was thin!

The Bear swipes at him again. Even closer.

TALL MAN

Never have I been so glad you were fat!

They both cower.

The Bear takes one more swipe and goes back down on all fours, his cold eyes still riveting them.

After a long moment, he turns and saunters back toward the Guide, who lies motionless on the ground, partially hidden by the packs.

TALL MAN (CONT'D)

That was close!

FAT MAN

He'll have dinner yet! Oh! I can't look!

He puts his hands over his face, but his eyes peek through his laced fingers.

FAT MAN'S P.O.V. - THE BEAR

has reached the Guide and now straddles the body. He puts his muzzle next to the Guide's head and holds there motionless for a long moment.

Then he raises his head and looks at the men in the tree.

bellows at them, then steps over the Guide and walks slowly away.

THE TWO MEN

in the tree exchange disbelieving looks.

THE BEAR

disappears over the ridge.

TALL MAN

It's gone. Let's get out of here!

FAT MAN

What if it comes back?

The Tall Man puts his boot on the Fat Man's head and pushes.

TALL MAN

I said, it's gone! Now get down!

The Fat Man reluctantly descends, followed by the Tall Man.

They never take their eyes off the ridge where the Bear disappeared.

Once on the ground, they cautiously approach the Guide.

ANOTHER ANGLE - THE GUIDE

lies in the f.g., his face turned TOWARD CAMERA, his eyes closed.

In the b.g., the others approach cautiously, scanning the horizon for sign of the Bear.

The Guide's eyes slowly open. He knows his companions now.

FAT MAN

Is he...?

TALL MAN

Better him than us.

He scans the horizon. They are nearly upon the Guide now, but their attention is elsewhere; they scan for the Bear.

REVERSE ANGLE - THE GUIDE

turns his head to face them, his eyes angry. The two start with surprise.

FAT MAN
You're alive!

GUIDE
Sorry to disappoint ya.

He rises and dusts himself off.

The others are mute with astonishment.

The Guide regards them for a moment, then begins working at the packs, throwing their packs aside and opening his own, discarding what he was carrying for them.

TALL MAN
What are you doing?

GUIDE
Lightenin' my load.

FAT MAN
We thought you were dead!

The Guide cinches his pack straps and stands, facing them.

GUIDE
Ever'body knows a bear won't touch
no corpse--so I pretended to be one...
besides, I weren't in no real danger.

FAT MAN
No danger?! With his sharp fangs
just inches from your face?!

The Guide looks at them evenly.

GUIDE
No danger 'tall. The bear said so.

Finally he has their undivided attention.

The Fat Man's jaw drops.

The Tall Man lets out a cynical laugh.

TALL MAN
You say the bear spoke to you? What,
pray tell, did he say?

The Guide looks down the trail, then turns back. His voice is unemotional and his face is impassive.

GUIDE

He said I oughta choose a better
class of folks to travel with.

He turns and strides down the path.

FAT MAN

Hey! You can't leave us here!

The Guide waves without turning.

GUIDE

I guess your side don't ache no more.

TALL MAN

But we don't know the way!

GUIDE

And your ankle ain't twisted, neither!

He disappears over the ridge.

The others face each other, the tiniest guilt visible in
their eyes.

FAT MAN

Well! Who needs him anyway?

TALL MAN

Imagine! A talking bear!

FAT MAN

He must think we're fools!

TALL MAN

Fools, indeed!

Their guilt is almost gone, buried in self-justification.

FAT MAN

It wasn't our fault he couldn't get
to the tree. We were just more...
nimble.

The Tall Man pokes him in the stomach.

TALL MAN

Nimble is not a word I would use to
describe you, except at dinnertime!

Then a low, deep GROWL comes from behind.

They turn slowly.

REVERSE ANGLE

As they turn, they look down. Then, rising INTO FRAME, the Bear stands before them.

THE BEAR'S SHADOW

rises, falling over them. Their mouths open, their eyes go wide with fear, mirror images of each other.

HOLD ON THEM as they stare at the Bear, whose heavy, muffled breathing rumbles under their dialogue.

TALL MAN (CONT'D)

Just one thing I'd like to know.

FAT MAN

Just one? What's that?

TALL MAN

What did he say to the bear?

They take their eyes off the Bear just long enough to exchange a worried look.

A long beat, then they both look INTO CAMERA.

BOTH OF THEM

Oh, no...

CUT TO BLACK.

OVER BLACK:

The ROAR of the Bear fills our ears.

THE END