

## Lottie and the Confused Little Bear.

Lottie was lonely. Lottie needed someone to hang out with. So she talked to her Dad and he said they could get a dog. He knew that a local kennel had some to spare so that's where they went, up the hill to Boondocks Farm.

Boondocks Farm was a lovely little place. It had once been a sheep farm and they still kept a few, along with other animals, as a small holding. They still breed their own sheep dogs and had started taking in borders and stays from around the way. This meant they old stables were always filled with many barking, howling and panting faces. Today was definitely no exception in fact the noise and excitement was tremendous. Dogs bounced, dogs barked everywhere was pandemonium. The only calm one was the old collie that sauntered out of the house, with a bouncy granddaughter in tow.

"ello Lottie my dear girl" whispered the grand old lady "What brings ee 'ere to visit us?"

"Hello Fran, I'm looking for a dog of my own, but first please do tell me what is happening?"

"Ah, now me dear that is a good question. Tis best I shows ee."

With that Fran turned and wandered off toward the back of the stables. When they reached the corner of the stables they met two other collies, Toby and his big brother Barney.

"Roight Barney. Ee still at it?"

"Yeah Mum ee tis"

"Tis rite weird" said Toby.

"Well 'oy brought Lottie round to see 'im maybe she can work it out. She got brains this un."

Lottie blushed at the compliment from Fran who she knew was a very intelligent dog indeed. All five of them carried on round the stables where Lottie saw the apparent cause of the trouble but she couldn't immediately say why. Lottie saw a dog, no taller than the collies but much bigger build with much thicker hair. Then, as she got closer she noticed the sound it was making. It was growling but not a simple dog growl like you might expect. It was more like a bad impression of a dog, it was saying "Growl Growl" and instead of barking it was saying "roar".

Dear reader; have you ever pretended to be a bear or a lion? Do you remember the noises you made? Now imagine a dog doing the same. How bizarre.

Lottie moved closer to the dog. She was scared of the strange behaviour but was comforted by the feeling of Toby pressing against her. The brave collie was ready to protect her if needed. All of a sudden the creature rose up on his hind legs. But not like any dog. Some dogs will rise up in a strange prolonged jump, some performing dogs do a trick where they totter around on 2 legs. This was neither, its back was straight and its stumpy front legs splayed out to the sides. "Roar" it said.

"That's just plain weird t'is" said Barney.

"Hello" said the brave little girl "I'm Lottie, what's your name?"

The creature sank back down to all fours but its shoulders sank lower and the edges of its mouth sank too. "I'm Max", it said sadly "Aren't you scared of me?"

"No" said Lottie. Lottie didn't have to lie, even though she had been scared seeing Max looking so small and sad changed it all around. "Why would I be scared of a lovely fluffy thing like you?" Max perked up and his tail began to wag. Then he suddenly seemed to catch himself and dropped it down, almost like he was ashamed of it. "You should be scared because I'm a bear!"

"You're a bear? Aren't Bears usually bigger?"

"I'm small for my size".

Lottie couldn't help but giggle.

"I am a bear!" protested Max "And that's How I like it! I can prove it too."

"Prove it? How?"

"I can do things that bears do. I can climb trees, I can fish and I can eat honey." Lottie thought for a while and then had a great idea. "OK Max if you can prove you're a bear I will take you home and you can live with me". Max smiled a great big toothy smile. "That sounds great let's go find a tree". So off Lottie and Max trotted toward the wood, with Barney and his little puppy Abi following on to watch the fun.

It took longer than expected to find a tree. Max seemed to have a million excuses why each one they found wasn't suitable. Lottie was happy to keep exploring but eventually Barney's patients wore thin and he made Max agree to one. As trees for climbing go it should have been fine. It was a tall straight pine with its lowest branch just at the height of Lottie's head. Max made a great show of preparing to climb. Meanwhile Barney made a great show of cleaning himself. Max moved up to the tree and walked his front paws up as far as he could reach. Then, with a great roar of effort, he swung his hind legs around the trunk and..... slid slowly to the ground. This made Abi giggle. Max looked ashamed and started to stammer over his explanation. "It.. It's my claws you see, worn down by living on concrete and walking on tarmac instead of in the woods where bears are meant to do their business. Everyone knows bears need claws to climb. I am a bear and what I am needs claws!"

"Never mind" said Lottie "I'm sure your right about claws. Fishing next?" And so they all headed down to the river.

On the river bank they found a fisherman. They talked to him and he said he had had an excellent days fishing. "That's great then Max let's find you a spot up stream and we can give this a try". So they were soon in a quiet spot on the bank. Max waded out, somewhat clumsily, to a rock he had selected. Very soon Max was diving his paw into the water, just like the bears do in all the best documentaries, and pulled out... a hand full of weeds and a drink bottle. "That stupid human must have scared them all away. Everyone knows bears don't fish near humans" complained Max, "I am a bear and I shouldn't need excuses".

"I'm sure your right again." said Lottie while she patted Max on the back as he clambered out of the river. "On to the last test." So the four of them strolled together toward the village shop.

Lottie found she had enough money to buy one jar of honey which she took outside and placed it in front of Max. Max smiled and dug in hungrily. "I know I couldn't climb.." He said between mouth fulls "and I didn't do well at fishing", another lap into the jar "But I can eat the honey"... "so I am a bear right?"

"Lottie" whispered Barney "Dogs eat honey too," and gestured to Abi lapping at the lid of the honey jar. Lottie simply put her finger across her lips and shushed him. Turning to Max she said "I think you are brave enough and clever enough to be whatever you want to be " "So yes you are a bear and much more than that I would like you to be my bear".

Max's eyes lit up and his tailed wagged. "I'd like that very much Lottie " and so home they went, leaving Barney and Abi with the rest of the honey.