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YE CINNAMON BEARE

by Angelee Sailer Anderson

In the olden, golden days of Beardom, when honeypots were fuller and sweeter than now, and brightest of all the constellations shone the Ursas Major and Minor, there was born into a noble house a red-brown bear. The bear-lord and bear-lady that were his father and mother christened him "Cinnamon," not only because that is the colour his fur was, but because it was a tradition in those days to name one's cubs after spices and herbs. Some say this tradition was due to spices being rare and precious, and others say it was because bears spend most of their thinking-time thinking of FOOD. Whatever the truth of it, no parent would have dreamed of naming his cub "Theodore" (which is the real name of all Teddys though they seldom admit it). No, but in the golden days bears had names like Caraway and Marjoram and Sesame, and most popular of all Cinnamon, the name of our hero, to whom we will now return.

Cinnamon was trained from his cubhood to be a knight. He learned jousting, and archery, and falconry, and heraldry, and the most expeditious way of mounting a horse, and the precise requirements for a proper suit of armour, and how to chivalrously court a bear-lady. He studied hard in the bear bestiaries to learn the strengths and weaknesses of the sundry monsters he, as a knight, might be expected to battle. He learned that dragons are not ticklish except on their underbellies, that one should wear earplugs when pulling up a mandrake root, and that one must never, under any circumstances, look a basilisk in the eye.

When Cinnamon had reached the proper age, and had proven his mettle by serving first as a page and then an excellent squire to an old bear named Sir Tarragon, he was ready to become a "Sir" in his own right. He equipped himself with a suit of armour of dazzling brightness, a sturdy shield, golden spurs, and a well-tempered sword, which he named "Honeyseeker." He chose this device for his coat-of-arms: Argent, a bear rampant gules towering over a honeypot. Then having been duly dubbed "Sir Cinnamon" by Sage, the Bear-King, our hero settled down to a life at court.

He settled a bit too immovably. Now that he had demonstrated his worthiness by becoming a genuine knight, Sir Cinn felt that he had had quite enough of deriding-doing and dragon-dashing and rescuing distressed damsels. I hope that you will not think too harshly of him when I tell you that he now fought all his dragons by proxy. And what did Sir Cinnamon do instead of riding out upon quests and adventures? He did what a bear,

knightly or otherwise, does best.

He ate. And ate. He breakfasted on scones buttered with the ground bones of cameleopards. For dinner he had bannocks baked with (of course) honey. At supper-time it was peacock pie with peppercorns and mango chutney, chased down by a full barrel of Rhenish wine. Sir Cinn's dessert consisted of one tub of syllabub, a second of gooseberry fool, and a third of trifle made with a 10 lb. jar of raspberry jam. I won't embarrass you by mentioning what the bear had for snacks, except that his favourite was toast sprinkled with heaps of (yes) cinnamon.

The end result was that Sir Cinnamon grew rather weighty. His belly grew more plump than was pleasing and his red-brown fur became thick and matted. No one at court remarked on this, because it is an infirmity to which bears in general are prone. Yet bears do have their pride, and respectable ones draw the line at seven snacks a day besides the regular five meals and three desserts. Sir Cinnamon had degenerated to twenty snacks a day, almost three times the decent number.

And so finally somebody did remark on it, and that somebody was the King. One midsummer's evening the King hosted a scrumptious feast in his castle's great hall, and knights courageous and ladies lovely and jolly jesters and merry minstrels from all over Beardom came together for it. The feast itself defies description (there were 103 courses), so I shall go on at once to telling you what happened after supper.

The bear-knights -- Sirs Chervil, Coriander, Nutmeg, Parsley, Saffron, and Turmeric to name a few -- were sitting around the board with their drinking-horns of mead, and the ladies were flirting and the jesters were gesturing and the King was presiding sagely over all. The company was engaged in listening to a bear-minstrel, who sang of those heroes so admired by knights in the golden days: heroes like Bearowulf, and Sir Galabear, and King Richard the Bear-Hearted. The minstrel had just finished an especially exciting lay about Bearowulf's battle with the monster Grendel, and King Sage and his knights were clapping wildly and enthusiastically. The good, strong "slap, slap"-ping sound of all those paws hardened by chivalrous deeds was noble and inspiring.

But gradually, one by one, the company noticed a sound of quite a different sort amidst the slapping. As nearly as one could describe it, it was something like: "poof, poof." One by one the knights quit clapping, and last of all the King quit clapping, till the mysterious poofing was the only sound to be heard in the hall. And now

it became apparent from where the sound was coming.

It was Sir Cinnamon. His paws were so well padded and so very plush with red-brown fur, that when he clapped he did not make a "slap, slap" sound, but a flabby, fluffy, cutesy, CUDDLY sound like that made by the paws of today's under-adventurous Teddys. "Poof, poof," said Sir Cinnamon's clap. "Poof, poof," went his paws.

"Poof, poo . . ." Sir Cinnamon stopped in mid-clap. The hall had become absolutely silent, and all the knights were looking at him, and worse yet the King, and worse yet Lady Rosemary.

Lady Rosemary -- Sir Cinnamon's true love, the she-bear so beautiful in her Lincoln green kirtle and her wimple fairly framing her golden-furred face -- Lady Rosemary was the first to break the silence. She broke it in a most humiliating (to Sir Cinnamon) way. She giggled.

Sir Cinnamon hung his shaggy head in shame. The other knights felt sorry for him, and politely looked elsewhere. But King Sage, who was an elderly bear and a trifle deaf, had not heard the giggle. And so, with the very best intentions, he said something which made Sir Cinnamon's red-brown fur turn more red than brown.

The Bear-King cleared his throat. "Sir Cinnamon," quoth he, "as thou knowest we are rather hard of hearing, and thusly we may be mistaken -- but did we or did we not hear thee say, or rather hear thy paws say, 'Poof, poof?'"

"I fear, Sire," replied Sir Cinnamon dolefully, "that thy hearing hath not deceived thee."

"Sir Cinnamon," said the kind old King as tactfully as he could, "hast thou taken thought, of late, of perchance going on some quest? An enterprise for exercise? They say that the Bearacens want battling in Bearusalem, and that there is a crusade afoot to prevent Bearonesse from sinking into the sea. You might pay a visit to our brothering in Cambearlot. Bearantium is very nice this time of year..." The King's voice trailed off -- he was sure that Sir Cinnamon had got the general drift of his speech. "It seems to us--" he ended apologetically, "--we believe we are correct in feeling -- that 'poof, poof' coming forth from a bear's paws is a sound not quite knightly."

Sir Cinnamon lifted his eyes to meet the King's -- there was the beginnings of a tear in one of them. He could feel Lady Rosemary noticing how voluminous was the waistline of his surcoat. He himself remembered that when he had last put on his armour his overgrown fur had stuck out from between the plates and made him look like a mattress losing its stuffing.

"I will go on a quest, Sire," began Sir Cinn with a depressed sigh; then he decided, for the sake of his honour and his lady, to put on a cheerful countenance. He smiled so widely that all his teeth showed, which in a bear has a rather ghastly effect. "Surely there is some unfortunate soul abroad whose pet hippogriff has got out of hand, or some bourgeois bears from whom one might justifiably steal to give to the poor, or some foul worm who has been making his midnight meal on damsels. By the Great and Lesser Bears of Heaven," Sir Cinnamon growled with forced ferociousness as he unsheathed his sword, "whatsoever evil-doer I encounter, his evil deeds will I put to an end." The knight returned his blade to its scabbard with a bold flourish, but what he was thinking was, "Maybe -- hopefully-- the dragons are out of shape, too."

So Sir Cinnamon polished his armour and squeezed himself into it, donned a new sword-belt into which Lady Rosemary had woven some of her fur, and gathered together his yew bow, and his lance, and his dirk, and his shield, and his gauntlets, and his golden spurs. Nor did he forget to sharpen Honeyseeker until it could accurately pinpoint a freckle on a bumblebee's stinger. He put on his helmet with its phoenix-feather plume, mounted his good steed Oregano, and turned back towards the castle to wave a sad farewell to Lady Rosemary. The lady leaned from a turret window, and tossed him a honeycomb. Sir Cinnamon caught it between his teeth.

For a year and a day, Sir Cinnamon wandered from border to border of Beardom and to places beyond. He jousting in 90 tournaments, and, after the shock to his system of the first one, won them all. He slew 27 dragons, 15 amphibaenas, and 3 sorceresses in whose invisible dungeons many knights bearrant were kept prisoner. He saved a paladin of the great Emperor Bearlamagne from



death at the hands of the infidel, and fought by the side of the Spanish knight, El Bear. With the booty he gained from the wars and tournaments he relieved 114 poor widows and hermits. Throughout all his wanderings he concealed his true identity, but from the device blazoned on his shield and surcoat he was known as "The Red Bear Knight."

On the final day of the year and a day, a much thinner Sir Cinnamon was riding upon a much thinner Oregano on a pilgrimage to Canterbury. One would expect Sir Cinnamon to be in triumphant spirits over his accomplishments, especially on a fine summer day with all the peonies in bloom; but in fact he was extremely disconsolate. For though in bear-flesh he was a mere sliver of his former self, in bear-fur he was still fluffier than a bear has a right to be.

Sir Cinnamon was especially unhappy at this particular moment, because he had just tried a discouraging experiment. He had known what the results of it would be before he tried it, because he had tried it last only fifteen minutes ago. But, just in case, he had made the experiment anyway. He had clapped together his paws. "Poof, poof," they had mocked him.

"I shall never go back to court, never behold my Lady Rosemary again. I am no knight, I am a poof-bear," moaned Sir Cinn. As if to add an exclamation mark to his misery, an impudent bee lighted on his nose, and no amount of flailing with Honeyseeker would shoo it off. "What seekest thou here, bee?" grumbled Sir Cinnamon. "This nose has not been dipped in honey for a year. Wouldst thou like to know what I had for breakfast this morning? A brambleberry. ONE BERRY." He tightened the sword-belt made by Lady Rosemary, which by now wrapped around him four times.

Sir Cinnamon was just preparing to quench his thirst with an eyedropper full of water, when he heard the sound of scuffling punctuated by feminine screams coming from a nearby wood. "A lady in need of a knight!" he cried, and spurred Oregano in the direction of the sound.

Leaving trampled undergrowth and broken branches in their wake, the bear and his mount charged through the trees into a clearing. There, in the clearing's centre, was a most dastardly and villainous knight, Sir Mace, who never dared to show his face at court. And there, in Sir Mace's brutal clutches, was his own sweet Rosemary.

Sir Cinnamon felt the bear-blood boil within him. "Holla!" he commanded Oregano. The horse skidded to a halt.

Sir Cinn gazed haughtily and contemptuously upon Sir Mace, and, disguising his voice so that Lady Rosemary would not know him, spoke in as unmannerly a manner as the code of chivalry would allow. "Thou - - sir knight - what doest thou there with that young damsel?"

Sir Mace, a huge black grizzly, grinned wickedly. "What I do with her is none of thy concern."

Rosemary looked up at Sir Cinnamon with tear-filled,



pleading eyes. He was so changed from the roly-poly bear she remembered, that, even without his helmet on, she would not have recognized him. She broke Sir Mace's hold enough to fall on one knee. "O please, please, gentle knight - deliver me from this vile villain, ere he bring upon me some shameful dishonour."

"Fear thou not, lady," answered Sir Cinnamon with his eyes aflame. "The Red Bear Knight will be thy champion." He drew Honeyseeker from its scabbard, and pointed it menacingly and meaningfully at Sir Mace. "Yield, recreant. Unhand the maiden."

"By the Muzzle of the Great Bear and by his Tail, I will not," pouted Sir Mace.

"Ha, knave!" shouted Sir Cinn. "Dost dare to defy me? egone, caltiff, churl! - get thee gone, I say - else thou wilt feel the point of my blade within thy furry throat."

Diminished as Sir Cinnamon was in size, his aura of knightly power was grown to impressive proportions. The threat was too much for Sir Mace. He let loose of Lady Rosemary, and stopping every few steps to snarl back at Sir Cinnamon, he shuffled away.

Lady Rosemary rose to her hind paws and batted her eyelashes at Sir Cinnamon. "O thank you, brave, brave knight," she cooed, her voice sweet as a hive dripping honey. "Thou hast saved me from a fate worse than death."

"Think not on it lady," replied Sir Cinnamon modestly. "I have vowed to uphold the code of chivalry, and whilst I live so ever shall I do." He sheathed Honeyseeker, then took Lady Rosemary's extended forepaw in his and kissed it gently. "Adieu, fair damsel - the Great Bear

shield thee. When thou art at thy prayers, remember the Red Bear Knight."

Sir Cinnamon turned Oregano's head around and prepared to ride onward, leaving Lady Rosemary behind him never to be seen again. "Farewell, Rosemary," he whispered, his voice choking so that it was no longer disguised.

Just as Oregano was about to break into a gallop, Lady Rosemary caught hold of the horse's bridle-rein. "Cinnamon -- my gallant, valiant bear -- thou hast returned to me." And lovely Rosemary began to weep.

Sir Cinnamon tried clumsily to comfort her, but he knew that there was something distressing he must tell her. "Lady Rosemary, do not weep for me; spare thy tears for another bear worthy of thee. It is true that in the last year and a day I have jousting in 90 tournaments, and, after the shock to my system of the first one, won them all. It is sooth that I have slain 27 dragons, 15 amphibaenas, and 3 sorceresses in whose invisible dungeons many knights bearrant were kept prisoner. I will not deny that I have saved a paladin of the great Emperor Bearlamagne from death at the hands of the infidel, and have fought by the side of the Spanish knight, El Bear. But it is nothing that with the booty I gained from the wars and tournaments I have relieved 114 poor widows and hermits. All has been in vain. For, listen, Lady Rosemary -- listen." And, ever so mournfully, Sir Cinnamon clapped his poof-poofing paws together.

Lady Rosemary took the paws in hers and gazed on him with adoring eyes. "Silly Cinnamon -- I care not about thy paws. Thou art my truelove, my own knight, forever."

Sir Cinnamon helped Rosemary up onto Oregano behind him. The horse was so exhausted from undernourishment and excessive exercise that it could barely

bear another bear's weight.

"Cinnamon," said Lady Rosemary as they continued on their way to Canterbeary, "I am sorry that I giggled at the feast. But, Sir Cinnamon --" she said, stifling another giggle, "-- THERE IS A BEE ON THY NOSE." With a paw-nail as sharp as Honeyseeker, she flicked the bee off.

So it was that, after returning to court from their pilgrimage, Sir Cinnamon and Lady Rosemary were wed. King Sage hosted the grandest, most joyful celebration in the history of Beardom, with enough cakes and dainties and wassail to re-fatten Sir Cinnamon to his former girth if Lady Rosemary had not kept one loving blue eye on him.

Cinnamon could hardly take his own eyes from Rosemary, she was so fair in her mulberry dress and her new leather buskins. Yet out of courtesy and perhaps a bit of pride, he turned to give his attention to the bear-minstrel who was busy singing of Sir Cinnamon's exploits in the past year and a day.

The minstrel ended, and all the knights waited to hear Sir Cinnamon clap first. "Poof, POOF!" clapped Sir Cinnamon proudly, and the knights laughed and clapped, and the King laughed and clapped, and Lady Rosemary laughed and clapped, and Sir Cinnamon laughed, too.

Sir Cinnamon laughed and laughed and could not stop laughing, but this did not prevent him from stuffing another barbecued dragon-rib into his mouth. He cast a guilty eye upon his lady.

"My Cinnamon Bear," whispered Lady Rosemary, and smothered his laughter and his appetite with a kiss.

DRY LEAVES

The dry leaves crackle underfoot
Like bones of long-dead creatures
Hidden in the mists of time.

Long ago, as legend goes,
The gods came down to earth
In fire and flame upon this hill.

Did beings from another world
Remain here, far from home?
Did they, by some sad mischance,

Fall from space to lie at rest
Beneath an alien sky?
Do dry leaves hide old bones?

-- Jo Anna Dale

