

Sulle tracce del PANDA

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High on a mist-wrapped mountain, cradled in a leafy nest, Panda holds her newborn cub gently in her giant paw.

Small as a pine cone, pink as a blob of wriggling sunset, he sinks squawking into his mother's fur until her warm milk fills his mouth.

For days Panda stays with her cub in the hollow tree den. But the need to feed herself grows stronger, and one bright August morning she leaves him and follows her old tracks to the patch of bamboo grass she eats.

She rolls on her back in a soft bed of ferns and grabs a handful of bamboo. Slowly her big black nose wrinkles: these leaves smell good and she is very hungry. Before she goes back to cuddle and suckle her cub, Panda strips ten stems bare.

For seven weeks the cub's eyes stay shut. He feeds and sleeps, cries and gurgles. While he grows, around his ears and eyes, across his legs and like a road of hairy ink on his back, some of his fur darkens, like his mum's, into black.

One autumn day, he crawls up Panda's chest on to her neck. Something cold and wet tickles his nose and his eyes open for the first time – on a world of falling snow.

The cub grows fast through winter. He still climbs and plays on his mother, but now he takes his first steps along the mountain tracks.

But Panda has not eaten well for weeks. Her bamboo patch is dying. Now that her cub is six months old and strong enough to travel, she knows they must find a new home.

Below her old territory the path is steep. Weak with hunger, Panda stumbles and bumps her cub into a deep drift of snow.

She goes to him and smells an unexpected buried meal there. Snow flies as she scrapes. This deer meat is old but full of goodness.

After eating, Panda suckles her sleepy cub, then, thirsty, drinks from a stream.

A shadow slips through the trees. Closer it comes, its long tongue lolling.

Panda lifts her big dripping head. Like knives, her long claws slash the air, and the wild dog growls and slinks away.

With danger in the forest, Panda needs a safe place to sleep... in a tree.

She hugs the fir's frosty trunk with both arms, and her strong claws and furry feet grip the bark. Her cub clings to her

shoulder as they clamber towards the clouds; then he leaves her and scrambles to his own high perch.

When she wakes, Panda suckles her cub, but still needs food for herself. They move on.

Soon she sees a new mountain rising, with bamboo on its slopes. Cold water laps at her tired feet and she walks into a stream's dark pool.

Her paws touch bottom all the way, but in the middle the cub has to swim. He kicks hard with his feet, and his paws turn to paddles as she pushes the water behind him.

This new territory has plenty of food. Panda won't go hungry now. Her cub, too, begins to eat bamboo. He grips a stem and, copying his mother, curls his sticky tongue around the leaves.

Spring brings warm rain, and juicy new shoots of bamboo poke up. One day, mother and cub are feeding when they hear axes thud and branches clash nearby. Panda stops chewing. Villagers are chopping firewood. If they move up the mountain, she and her cub cannot stay.

Slowly she climbs up a deer path, her cub close behind...

Cloud curls around their tracks as they go. Their hunt for a new home is beginning again.