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Opening extract from

# Littlenose: The Explorer

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# Littlenose's Hibernation

It had been snowing all night; come to think of it, it had been snowing all *week*. The Ice Age landscape was covered in snow . . . and ice, of course. In the caves of the Neanderthal folk, snores came from under fur bedclothes, while the sun rose reluctantly over the trees, its pale winter light shining into the caves to tell people that it was time to get up.

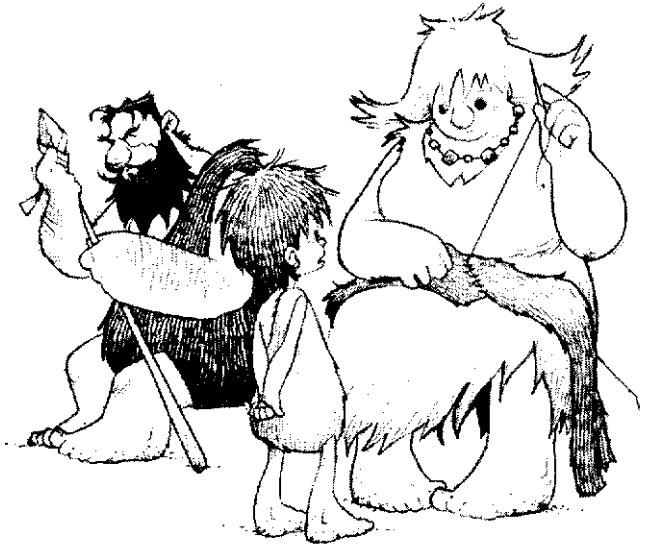
and a stone axe in his hand. "Fill that pot! Chop that wood! That's all I ever hear these days," he muttered to himself.

He muttered while he broke a hole in the river ice with the axe and filled the pot with water. He was still muttering as he brought it back to the cave, and he continued to mutter as he chopped a branch from a dead tree and dragged it home. "Stop muttering," said Mum. "I think you must have got out of bed on the wrong side this morning."



winter, hibernate like the squirrels and the bears and the dormice? But it was not something to be done on the spur of the moment. It required a lot of thought.

That night after supper, Dad sat with an air of great concentration, binding a new flint point on to his spear, and Mum was sewing. Littlenose hesitated for a moment, then spoke to Mum. "I'm going to hibernate," he said.



more than usual, but he had to admit to himself that he had handled the whole scheme very badly. The problem was that the cave wasn't his; it was Dad's. And Dad made the rules. Bears and other hibernators prepared special places to spend the winter. He would have to do the same.

As soon as Dad and Mum were busy, Littlenose slipped into his own special corner of the cave and gathered up his bedding, plus a few fur rugs that no one appeared to be actually using at that precise moment. Then, looking like a large, round, furry animal with no head and two legs, he left the cave and set off through the snow. A cave of his own was what he was looking for. Not too big. Just somewhere he could roll up in his furs and dream the winter away. It was more difficult

He looked carefully around; there were no signs of a fire or anything else that might suggest people. Cautiously, he entered. The cave seemed spacious and had a soft, sandy floor. Might as well give it a try. Littlenose spread out the furs, then lay down and rolled himself up in them. It was perfect. And it seemed such a pity after coming all this way to waste such a find. He would start his hibernation there and then.

Littlenose woke with a start. Was it spring already? He didn't feel as if he had slept for very long. Something hit him gently on the head. He put his hand up to feel. His hair felt wet, and something hit the back of his hand . . . a drop of water.

Littlenose jumped up. He could hear it now. A steady drip, drip! He looked up.

carefully examined the floor for puddles and damp patches, and peered as well as he was able, into the gloom above his head for any sign of a leak. It seemed perfect! The trees outside cut off most of the light from the very back of the cave, but Littlenose groped around and spread the fur rugs and bed covers into a comfortable bed. Then he rolled himself up and closed his eyes to await the coming of spring.

Littlenose woke slowly. He felt quite refreshed. Was it spring already? Well, there was one way to find out. He made to push back the bed-clothes . . . and had a horrible surprise. He couldn't *move*!

Something seemed to be holding his arms tight. He couldn't move his body, although his legs seemed to be free. What had happened? Was it magic? Had he



bear with one huge, hairy arm around Littlenose, cuddling him as it slept. Littlenose's heart almost stopped beating with fright. What had happened? Had the bear come in after he had gone to sleep? Or was it already asleep and hibernating when Littlenose had made up his bed in the semi-darkness? It didn't really matter. What mattered was getting out before the bear woke. It might wake hungry, and Littlenose didn't fancy being a midnight snack for a