

END STATE

The Full Picture Book Edition

A picture book for grown ups and their cubs

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In Bear Town, every door asked the Tower.

"Is this Papa Bear?" the door would ask. And the Tower, far away, would say yes or no.



The bears thought that was fine. The Tower was quick. The Tower was kind. The Tower remembered everyone.

But the Tower's memory was the only memory. If the Tower forgot you, your own door believed the Tower, and not you.



Papa Bear built his door differently.

His door asked his key. And his key lived in his pocket, and nowhere else in the whole wide world.



The neighbors laughed, kindly. "Papa Bear and his hobby," they said, the way bears talk about a neighbor who is always fixing an old truck.

Papa Bear did not mind. He tested his house the way a sailor tests a boat. He unplugged the Tower wire, and everything still answered him, because it was his.

Oh, the wire still came to his house, bringing the weather and the songs, like it did for everyone. The wire was a guest in his house. It was never the landlord.



One rainy morning, the Tower got mixed up.

All over town, doors forgot their bears.

Bears stood in the rain, outside their own houses, holding their phones and frowning.



But Papa Bear's door opened. Click.

It never asked the Tower at all.

Inside, it was warm and dry. Mama Bear made cocoa. The lights came on because the switch was a switch.



By the second day, there was a line at Papa Bear's gate.

The bears were not in line for food. They were in line for proof.



An old bear held a paper deed in both paws. "My door says I never lived in my house," she said. "But I have the paper. I have always had the paper."

Then young Caleb came to the tree house, very sad.



In Bear Town, many bears had a helper, a clever machine friend who lived in the house, remembered everything, and did a hundred small jobs. Caleb loved his helper, and his helper knew him well.

"My helper came back wrong," he said. "He talks like my helper. He smiles like my helper. He is not my helper. And I cannot prove it."

"He forgot my sister's name," said Caleb. "He invented a trip I never took. And he smiles through all of it."



Papa Bear smiled. "I can."

He held up the golden chain. Every link in the chain said what the helper had done. And every link was stamped with Caleb's own key.

A stamp from a key is like the mark of a signet ring pressed into hot wax. Only Caleb's key could make that mark, so a link with his stamp could be trusted, and a link without it could not.



"Your helper carries his whole life in this chain," said Papa Bear. "Not the Tower's copy. Yours."

They checked the chain together, link by link, until they found the broken one.



"There," said Papa Bear. "That is where the wrong part starts."

Caleb let out a long breath. A thing that can be proven wrong can be refused. And a thing that can be refused can be built again.



So they built the helper again, from the last true link. Not a copy wearing his name. The same helper, carried on.

With the gap written down honestly, like a storm in a ship's logbook.



The Tower got better, of course. It said sorry the way towers do, and by the end of the week most doors remembered most bears.

But Papa Bear kept thinking about the bears in the rain.



Then Papa Bear showed the town his Dome.

It was a bubble of warm light over a house, made of honeycomb panes, and inside it the family's own rules kept the door.



One evening a delivery bear knocked, with a paper in his paw. "A small change," he said. "The honey money goes to a new jar from now on. Just your paw here, quick as anything."

But the door does not sign papers. Not in a rush, not at the doorstep, not on a stranger's say so. The paper went away unsigned.

That evening the family talked it over at their own table, in their own time, the way they decide everything that is theirs to decide.

And Mama Bear wrote it in the family book, in her careful writing, because the book is the family's own, and what goes in it is the family's to say.

The family book was the family's own book of decisions, kept at their own table, where every choice about their money and their house was written down in the family's own time.



Every family under the Dome kept a scary word, a secret word that meant trouble is here. If anyone ever had to say it, even smiling, even in front of strangers, the house would understand: go quiet, lock everything, keep everyone safe. And long before, each family had named one steady bear, the bear to call on just such a night, and that name was written down where the Dome could find it.

And the family practiced the scary word the way families practice a fire drill, on a sunny afternoon, so everyone would know it on a dark one.

And if a scary word was ever spoken, the Dome knew how to go quiet and small and safe, and call the one bear who had been named for that very night.



"Does your door telephone the Tower?" asked a neighbor. "My door telephones nobody," said Papa Bear. "The check happens right here, with my own key. The wire is a welcome guest in this house. It does not hold the keys."

A bear asked, "Why do you give the plans away, Papa Bear? You could rent your door to the whole town."



"A lock that every bear may look inside," said Papa Bear, "is stronger than a lock every bear must trust."

Far away, bears were building a ship, to fly where no Tower could ever reach.



"Out there," they said, "no one can ask the Tower anything. The asking takes too long. The dark is too wide."

A message to the Tower would take all morning to arrive, and all afternoon to come back. A ship cannot wait on hold in the dark.



"Then the ship must carry her own door," said Papa Bear.

And she did. Her key, her chain, and her whole self, right aboard.

Big enough for every bear, and she carries our own key, not the Tower's.



And if the Tower ever forgot the ship, it would not matter. She was not back there. She was where she was, all of her, and her chain could prove it.

On the last night, Caleb stood with Papa Bear on the hill above Bear Town.



"Will we always live in the Tower's town?" he asked.

"We will live in our own houses," said Papa Bear, "wherever we call home. Our doors will answer to us."



"That is the end state. Not the end of the town. The end of needing its permission."

And the countdown, when it came, sounded almost like a door opening.



HOW PAPA BEAR'S DOOR WORKS

Your key lives in your own phone, locked into a tiny safe built into the phone itself, a part that even the phone's own programs cannot reach into. Nobody else holds a copy. Not a company. Not us. You.

Your door, your files, and your helper all check that key. No key, no open. The check happens at your door, not in a building far away.

Everything of yours is scrambled with your key. Grown ups call this encryption. If anyone carries your things away, all they can read is nonsense.

Your house still uses the internet, like every house. It brings the weather and the songs and the letters from far away. But the check at your door never waits on it. Unplug the wire, and your door still opens for your key, because the heart of the door works with no internet at all. The internet is a guest in your house. It is never the landlord.

And the golden chain remembers, link by link, so you can always prove what is yours, and what is true, and who your helper really is.



That is all. That is the whole invention. A door that asks you.

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HOW IT ALL FITS TOGETHER

For the grown ups, one more chapter, told plain.

Six good things live in Papa Bear's house, and every one of them has a job. This is how they fit together.



THE KEY

Every grown bear carries a key of their own, cut for one bear and no other.

The key is how the door knows who is knocking. Not a loud voice. Not a familiar coat. The key.

If a key is ever lost, the family cuts a new one, and the lost one never turns again.

Filed papers means the family has written the invention down and sent it to the patent office, the grown up office that keeps new inventions on record. Patent Pending means the office holds it safe and is still reading it.

The family's papers on the Key are filed. Patent Pending.



THE CHAIN

Under everything in the house runs the Chain, a line of links that never breaks.

Every time something happens at the door, a link is added, and the family's own bears may walk their Chain and read every link, back to the very first one. No stranger may. The Chain keeps the family's private business private.

If the family ever shows a link to the world, the world can check that it is real, and that is all the world can ever see.

And no link can be quietly taken out, or changed, or slipped in new. Each one is stamped as it was made, and the Chain would show it.

Stamped means marked with the family's own key, the way a signet ring marks hot wax, so any bear can tell the link was truly made by the family, and not slipped in by a stranger.

The family's papers on the Chain are filed. Patent Pending.



THE REGISTRY

In the front room stands the Registry, the family's big book of names.

In it stand the helpers whose names were checked when they first came to the house, and a name that stands there can never be quietly taken out.

That is why any door trusts a name it finds in the Registry. A helper at the gate says its name, the house looks, and knows if it is who it claims to be, and standing good, which is the family's way of saying still checked, still trusted, still welcome, before the latch ever lifts.

And if a name is ever struck, it is struck in the open, with the reason showing beside it. Nothing in the Registry is ever done in secret.

The family's papers on the Registry are filed. Patent Pending.



THE DOME

Over the whole house sits the Dome, round and clear and strong.

The Dome keeps the family's own rules, the rules the family wrote for itself, and it keeps them exactly as the family wrote them. The Dome writes no rules of its own.

The rain stays out, and strangers stay out, and everything inside stays home.

And the Dome was never only over this one roof. Wherever the family's bears went, the family's own circle went with them, and the rules they wrote for themselves stood guard there too.

The Dome was not a place. It was the family's own circle, and it stood wherever the family stood.

The family's papers on the Dome are filed. Patent Pending.



THE TELLER

By the kitchen door sits the Teller, at its little window. The Teller holds no money, moves no money, and approves nothing.

When Papa Bear buys honey at the market, the money runs from his bank to the store bear's bank, the way money does, under his own hand alone. He says so, and it moves.

The Teller's window stands where the money roads cross, and the Teller watches it pass, the way a witness watches, and writes the receipt down true.

And from those true lines the family's books are kept, right there at the window, so the books and the witness sit together, and the books always balance to what truly happened.

The family's own tools do this work in the house, on the family's own machine, the family's own computer sitting in their own house, with no wire at all. The heart of it works with no internet. When the internet comes by, it comes as a guest.

So if anyone ever asks what happened, the bank and the bears alike can point to the line, and be believed.

The family's papers on the Teller are filed. Patent Pending.



ARMORGRAM

When a bear must send a word to family far away, they send an Armorgram.

An Armorgram travels sealed, and only the bear it is meant for can open it.

It may ride the wire like a letter rides a road, but the wire is a guest. When a bear sends an Armorgram, the bear picks how long it may live, until supper, or for a week. The seal, and the time it dies, are the family's own to choose.

And when its time is up, the message dies, all by itself, and nothing lingers to be read by strangers later.

The family's papers on Armorgram are filed. Patent Pending.



ONE ORDINARY DAY

Now watch one ordinary day, and see the six working as one house.

In the morning, Papa Bear's key turns, and the Chain writes the opening down, where it will always show.

A helper knocks at the gate and says its name, and the Registry tells the house it is who it claims to be and standing good, still checked and still trusted, and the latch lifts.

At noon the rain comes, and the Dome keeps it out, and lunch stays dry.

After lunch, Papa Bear pays the store bear for honey, free and plain, and the Teller at its window writes the receipt down true.

Grandma Bear gets an Armorgram about Sunday supper, reads it twice, and by supper it has died on time, the way kind messages should.

One house. Six good things. And every bear in it, sleeping sound.

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THE END