

Rightsholder/publisher: Iđut AS
Address: Iđut AS, Ikkaldas, NO-9710 Indre Billefjord
Phone +47 78464749 or +47 955 50 627
www.idut.no
idut@idut.no
nan.persen@idut.no

Author: Beate Heide
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English translation by: Shari Gerber Nilsen

The Name Song

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Do you have a song that someone in your family has written for you? Children in Greenland are often given a little song that is sung for them as an extra name, just as Sámi children are given a joik. Now you'll hear the story of a polar bear child who has a name song.

p 4

It is warm and cosy inside the snow cave. The polar bear child stretches.

Behind him the mother polar bear is still sleeping. The world is all white.

His mother turns over in her sleep. She mumbles the little song again.

The song about him. He likes it so much.

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Sleep my little child
Born in the cold winter night

Sleep and grow up tall
Mummy will take care of you

p 8

The polar bear child closes his eyes again. He sleeps. Every time he wakes up his mother gives him milk to drink. Then he stretches, hears the song, and falls asleep again.

Many days go by this way. The world is safe. The world is warm. The world is Mummy and him.

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Then one day the child wakes up because something is tickling his nose. What could it be? Half asleep, he tries to push it away. It is a yellow beam that is dancing in the cave. He sits up in surprise. His mother is also awake.

“It’s the sun, my boy. Let’s go out and say hello to it.”

His mother digs an opening in the cave, and wriggles her way out. The child follows her with uncertain steps. The world is white, and the snow is swirling around in the wind. The sky is big, and the child looks up at the sun.

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How bright it is! How big it is!

“Mummy?” the child shouts. “Mummy, is this our world?”

His mother nods and lifts her snout into the wind.

“Smell,” she says. “Smell how delicious and fresh it is.”

The child smells, the child sees, the child jumps and leaps about wildly. It’s so lovely to be outside. There is so much room to run about.

p 14

The child learns to slide in the snowdrifts. He learns to dance in the wind. He jumps in great leaps over the snow. He rolls in the snow and throws snow into the air.

Every evening he falls asleep to his mother's song. With a full stomach, lying close to his mother. He dreams about the snow, the sun, and the wind, and looks forward to the next day. Then he will be able to play some more.

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One day his mother says that they must walk to the sea. She is hungry, and he is now big enough to manage the trip. "The seals live near the ice cap, and they're good to eat," says his mother, licking her lips.

The next morning they begin their journey. The wind is howling, and the air is full of snow. It is snowing and snowing. Soon the child can't see anything but his mother's bottom in front of him.

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The child is tired. They have been walking for hours and hours. Suddenly the ground below him caves in, and the child slides down a steep slope.

He is dizzy, and shakes the snow off. He is alone.

Where is his mother?

"Mummy!" he calls again and again, but he gets no answer.

He cries bitter tears. What should he do? The wind is cold and his mother is gone.

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It is getting darker. The child is crying, and calling for his mother. He is cold.

He is afraid of getting lost. Then an Arctic fox appears.

"Hello," says the fox. "I'm an Arctic fox. Who are you?" he asks, sniffing at the child. The child stops and thinks. Then he sings his song.

Sleep my little child

Born in the cold winter night

Sleep and grow up tall
Mummy will take care of you

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“So you are your mother’s child,” says the fox. “But who is your mother, then?”

The child thinks for a moment, and then answers:

“She is big, soft, white and kind!”

“I will help you look for her,” says the fox. “You’re too big for me to eat. I don’t know anyone who fits the description of your mother.”

The child is surprised. Would the fox have eaten him if he had been smaller?

“We all need food,” says the fox.

The child understands, and is happy that he is big. They walk on together. The child likes having someone to search along with him. A friend.

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Suddenly the fox runs forward. He returns with a mouse.

“Would you like to taste it?” he asks, holding the dead mouse in front of the child.

The child shakes his head.

“My mother gives me milk, if only we can find her.”

The fox eats the mouse in a hurry. And then he licks his lips.

“That tasted good,” he says, and they walk on.

The child feels hunger gnawing at his stomach.

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After a while they see a wolf. The fox jumps nervously.

“I’m afraid of him,” he whispers to the child. “He looks hungry, and I’m afraid that he’ll eat me.” There is a scraping sound in the snow, and the wolf asks who they are.

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"I am the Arctic fox," answers the fox, and draws away in fear.

"And he is his mother's child. He has lost his mother in the storm, and he doesn't know his name. Just listen!"

And the child sings his song.

Sleep my little child

Born in the cold winter night

Sleep and grow up tall

Mummy will take care of you

p 30

"Hmm," says the wolf. "What does she look like?"

"She is big, soft, white and kind," the child answers. "And she has good, warm milk, just for me."

"I can go with you and help you look for her, too," says the wolf. "I have a good sense of smell, and now I'm so full that you don't have to worry," he says to the fox.

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The child, the fox, and the wolf continue on their journey. Now they are beginning to be a long line of animals. First is the wolf, sniffing along, then the fox, and at the end the child. The northern lights are blazing in the Arctic sky. It is bitterly cold. The child is happy that he has warm fur.

p 34

When they have travelled a long way, an eagle flies towards them. The eagle is good at flying, and from her position high in the sky she can see everything that moves in the Arctic.

"Who is that?" asks the eagle while she circles over them, pointing her beak at the polar bear child.

"He is his mother's child," the other animals answer together.

"He has lost his mother. They were on their way to the sea, because his mother wanted to capture seals."

p 36

“My mother was very hungry,” the child says, and wipes away a tear with his paw. He adds, “And so am I.”

The other animals look at the child. They nod. They understand him.

“The child doesn’t want to eat a mouse,” says the fox.

The eagle nods.

Then the child sings his song.

Sleep my little child
Born in the cold winter night
Sleep and grow up tall
Mummy will take care of you

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The eagle shakes her head.

“No, I don’t know her,” the eagle says, “but I’ll come with you and search for her, because I can glide high in the sky and see a long way. So I can help.”

The child looks at the eagle happily.

“Thank you,” he says.

So they continue on their way, with the eagle circling above them.

p 40

The eagle flies ahead of them. In a little while she comes back holding a fish in her beak.

“Do you want to try it?” she asks, tossing the fish in front of their legs.

The fox wants to eat it. The child tries a little taste.

It tastes good. The child feels full of new strength.

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“By the way, I saw someone who looked like your description of your mother.

All the way down by the ice cap,” says the eagle. The eagle whispers to the fox and the wolf:

“He is a polar bear child.”

The others tremble, because they are afraid of polar bears. They have never been so close to a polar bear before. All the same, they hurry onwards: the child, the fox, the wolf, and the eagle. They know that they must get the child back to his mother.

p 44

But now a storm is brewing. The snow is whirling around them. It is difficult to see.

“Walk behind me,” says the fox. “Bite on my tail, so we don’t lose one another.” The child does as the fox says. Slowly they make their way through the snowstorm, like a little parade.

p 46

The child is so tired and hungry that he is staggering behind the fox.

There are lumps of ice all over his fur. His stomach is rumbling. Then they stop.

The eagle comes sailing in with the wind.

“Can you manage a bit more?” she asks.

The child whimpers, but nods. He thinks he can make it when he is together with the others.

p 48

Now they have reached the ice cap. Beyond them the sea stretches all around. The storm is calming down. The child stands and looks.

How beautiful the sea is! But where is Mummy?

p 50

Suddenly the child hears a sound. A sound he knows and loves.

“It’s my song!” he shouts joyfully.

And it really is his polar bear mother who is standing on a hill, singing.

She sees her child and comes running as quickly as she can.

“My child,” she sobs. “I was so afraid that I wouldn’t be able to find you.” They are laughing and crying at the same time.

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When they have dried their tears and stopped laughing, the child introduces his mother to his new friends: the fox, the wolf, and the eagle. His mother thanks them and offers her paw to shake, and says that she has caught a seal. She can see that the other animals are afraid of her.

p 54

The fox, the wolf, and the eagle draw away from her. The wolf sniffs at the mother, while the eagle takes wing and circles above the animals. The fox hides behind the wolf, trembling.

“I am so happy that you helped my child,” the mother bear sniffles.

Now the animals realise that they don't need to be afraid.

“Let's have a party together,” she suggests. “Since we eat different kinds of food, everyone can bring what they like with them,” she says.

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So they have a party, with seal meat, mice, and fish. Everyone has a good time.

Together they watch the sun disappear into the sea.

The polar bear mother sings to her child so his friends can hear the song.

Sleep my little child
Born in the cold winter night
Sleep and grow up tall
Mummy will take care of you

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They sing the song again, everyone joining in. They sing about the fox, the wolf, and the eagle taking care of the child. They are happy that they got to know one another.

“Without you I wouldn’t have made it,” says the child. “Thank you very much. You are good friends to have.”

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Afterwards they all curl up together and go to sleep. Half asleep, the child asks:

“Mummy, what is my name, actually?”

His mother laughs, and says:

“Your name is little Ursus!”

p 62

The Song of the Polar Bear Child

The world is a small place
For you
Mummy is the centre
That the world spins around

Sleep and food
Are what you need and get
And you also get
A lot of warm cuddles

Later when you are
Big and strong
We will leave
And find both people and animals

Refrain:

Sleep my little child
Born in the cold winter night
Sleep and grow up tall
Mummy will take care of you

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Use your smart phone to download a free QR scanner from the App store.

Direct the QR scanner towards the QR code, and the melody will be uploaded to your telephone.

Text: Beate Heide / Bård Mathisen

Melody, music, and mixing: Bård Mathisen

Song: Bård Mathisen