

Storytime with Dad

Bao and the Secret Fox

Welcome to Storytime with Dad! Today we will be reading Bao and the Secret Fox.

Bao was a young panda boy who lived in a quiet village among tall, swaying bamboo hills. He was cheerful and full of energy - always climbing trees, rolling down grassy slopes, and sneaking extra honey cakes from the kitchen.

But there was one thing Bao wanted more than anything else. A pet.

Every morning on his way to school, Bao passed his friends playing with their animals. Mei carried a cricket in a little cage. "Look how high it hops!" she said proudly. Jun had a turtle that blinked in the sun. Lin, the shyest of them all, had a sparrow that perched on her shoulder and chirped whenever she giggled.

Bao stopped to watch, his round panda face full of longing. "I wish I had a pet, too," he whispered.

But at home, his parents always said the same thing.

"No pets, Bao," his mother reminded him. "They're too much work."

"They make messes," his father added, folding his arms.

"And you," his mother said, "already leave bamboo sticks all over the floor!"

Bao groaned. "But I'd take care of it. I promise!"

Still, his parents shook their heads. No pets.

That night, Bao lay in bed staring at the moonlight spilling across his floor. He felt like the only panda in the world without a little companion. He picked up a long blade of grass and blew across it like a whistle. The sound was high and squeaky - wheeeeeee!

He blew again, louder this time. Wheeee-eee-eee!

The bushes rustled. Crunch, crunch, crunch.

Bao froze. Out of the shadows peeked a small red fox with bright orange fur and a snowy white chest. Its ears flicked nervously, and its bushy tail twitched like a broom.

The fox tilted its head, curious but cautious. Bao was so big, and foxes knew to be careful.

Bao sat down on the ground so he wouldn't seem so tall. He set the grass whistle down and spoke softly. "Hello there. Don't be scared. I won't hurt you."

The fox sniffed the air. His paws stayed close to the bushes, ready to dart away, but Bao's eyes were kind and his smile gentle. Little by little, the fox crept closer. Step by step. Finally, he brushed Bao's knee with his whiskers.

Bao held still as a statue. After a long pause, the fox curled up in his lap, tail wrapped tightly around his nose.

Bao let out a slow breath and whispered, "You're wonderful. I'll call you Luli."

From that night on, Luli became Bao's secret pet.

At bedtime, Bao tucked the fox under his blanket, her tail spilling out like a flame. In the morning, he slipped her into his bamboo backpack, hiding bits of honey cake inside to keep her happy.

At first, it was perfect. Luli was shy at times, but her playful side came out quickly. She pounced on beetles, chased shadows, and once stole Bao's dumpling right out of his paw before dashing under the bed. She curled up on Bao's shoulders like a scarf and sometimes peeked out of the backpack with her ears twitching like little flags.

But keeping a secret fox wasn't easy.

One night, Luli yipped in her sleep, kicking her paws as though chasing a dream rabbit. Bao's father banged on the wall. "Bao! Stop squeaking in your sleep!"

At school, Bao's backpack wiggled so hard the teacher frowned. "Why is your bag moving, young panda?" Bao squeaked, "Uh - too many pencils?"

At dinner, Bao's mother sniffed the air. "Do you smell something... musky?" Bao coughed. "Nope! Just my socks."

Trouble was building.

The worst came on a bright afternoon at school. Bao opened his backpack to sneak Luli a crumb of honey cake. But before he could stop her, she wriggled free, nose twitching, and bolted across the schoolyard.

"Luli, no!" Bao shouted, racing after her.

The other panda kids gasped. "Bao has a pet fox?!"

"Catch it!"

"Can I pet it?"

Soon everyone - kids, teachers, even the principal - was chasing her. Luli darted under swings, leapt over jump ropes, and scrambled up the tall flagpole, her tail flashing like fire in the sun.

Bao's parents had come to fetch him from school just in time to see it all. They stood at the edge of the playground, their mouths wide open.

Bao's heart sank. The secret was out.

He ran to the base of the flagpole, looking up at his little friend clinging tight. "Luli!" he called, out of breath. "Please come down. I don't want you to get hurt."

The fox's ears twitched. She trembled, torn between fear and trust. She looked down at Bao, then at the crowd below. She had hidden for so long, always in shadows and whispers. Now the whole village knew.

Bao felt his chest tighten. He turned toward his parents. His voice shook, but he spoke bravely. "Mom, Dad... I'm sorry. I know you said no pets. But I love Luli, and I'll take care of her every single day."

The playground fell silent. The children, the teachers, even the principal waited.

Bao's mother and father looked at each other. His mom frowned, then sighed softly. His dad rubbed his chin.

"Bao," his mother said at last, "do you really love her?"

Bao nodded. "More than honey cakes."

That made his father chuckle. "Well, that is serious."

The crowd laughed. Even Luli let out a nervous little yip.

Bao's parents thought for a long moment. Finally, his mother said, "Alright. You may keep her - but only if you prove you can care for her, not just today, but every day."

Bao's face lit up like the sun. "I promise! I'll feed her, clean up after her, everything!"

Luli slid down the pole and leapt into Bao's arms. Bao hugged her close, joy bubbling inside him.

From then on, he no longer had to hide her. Life got busier - feeding her, brushing her fur, sweeping up the little paw prints she left on the floor. But Bao didn't mind. Because loving something out loud, even when it meant hard work, felt better than any secret.

And Luli? She was the happiest, slyest, silliest fox in all the bamboo hills, and she and Bao were never apart again.

The end.



Aww, I'm so happy for Bao and Luli! Having a friend is a great feeling, and those two were made for each other! It's a good thing that Luli decided to investigate the noise and take a chance getting to know Bao, eh? I wouldn't recommend going up to a panda and trying to be friends, but I'm also not a little fox, am I? Good for Luli.

Before we talk about the story, I want to give a thanks to my listeners Isaac and Ben! Thanks for your message Isaac, and the wonderful story idea! I had a lot of fun trying to think up the characters here, so I hope I did a good job bringing your panda to life!

Now, my takeaway here is that it's a lot of work to care for a pet! I don't have a pet fox, but I do have my dog Manny to care for and he can be a handful! Sometimes he tries to eat my shoes or tear up the carpet in the house, but I'm talking more basic things like food and exercise.

Maybe the best way to explain it is like this: have you ever missed a meal? Like, you're really hungry for lunch but maybe someone forgot to feed you or there was no food in the house? I hope this has never happened, but that's not fun is it? When we have pets, they depends on us for everything. Every meal, every trip outside, everything. That's what Bao's parents were saying. A pet like Luli may be part of Bao's life, but Bao is all of Luli's life. They just wanted Bao to do a good job at caring for Luli, which, I hope makes sense now.

Do you have any pets? I'd love to see some pictures. Tag me on Instagram @storytimewithdadpod but also, I want to let you know some big news! I made a coloring book! I'm really excited, I already have a copy and am coloring it with me kids. it's available on Amazon and my website shop.storytimewithdad.com. It's called Dad's Favorite Coloring book, and it has 15 shortened version of my most popular stories, with pictures to color as your adult reads the story to you.

So, get yourself a copy, and then tag me on social media as you color along to the stories. As always, send more story ideas to me at hello@storytimewithdad.com and...

Thank you for listening and I'll see you again next time.

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Narrated by: Grant Dryden

