

Thubby the Plush Polar Bear sat in his stocking atop the mantle on the fireplace, massaging the wool-knit fabric of the sock absently. His snout peered just out the rim, beady eyes watching the world, but his body was safe inside. The stocking had been Thubby's home for many, many years.

He chose it out of necessity, but that was a long time ago now. Today, it was the dawn of a new year; a time to look forwards, not back.

For Thubby, a new year meant new opportunities. This would really be the year. He'd go do all that stuff he'd always wanted to: he would crawl out from his stocking and have himself a little journey.

He'd make an impact on the world, he'd find someone to love him, and he'd no longer have a need for this old stocking. No longer would dust powder his head every morning! Yep, that does it. He was resolute!

Thubby crept out the sock one paw at a time and, when at last he was free, he fell gingerly to the floor. Thubby didn't worry, he didn't stop to think if he were ready for the world. He just assumed he had to be. He was alive, wasn't he? What other prerequisites were there to take on life's challenges?

But for now, Thubby just wanted a cookie, maybe a board game; he'd send off the year with play. Some folks would get on their knees but Thubby didn't know how to pray.

A nice big wooden chess set, hand-carved under the Christmas Tree. It had been left there, had it been left for Thubby?

He unwrapped it with vim, paper all over him, and he opened it hinge by hinge.

He set it up, like it looked on the box, and couldn't decide whether to pick black or white. Sure, his fur was light, but underneath his skin was black as an ox.

Well, that was enough rhyming for Thubby. New Year's Resolution #2: less rhyming. It gave him an awful headache.

Ultimately, Thubby realized he had to play white. After all, white went first, and so if he was black, the game would never start—but he was playing for two anyway. This all made the poor polar bear's head spin. Better to just start making moves.

Chess for one, by the tree at night.

Well, there was always next year to make those big changes. It's not like he could just roll over and have them all done tomorrow anyway. Maybe Thubby wanted to be an artist, and nothing in the world would bend to him. I'm not Thubby. I wouldn't know.