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Why The Bear Sleeps All Winter

Carolyn Sherwin Bailey

Once upon a time, little Brother Rabbit lived, quite sober and industrious, in the woods, and just close by lived a big, brown Bear.

Now little Brother Rabbit never troubled his neighbors in those days, nor meddled with their housekeeping, nor played any tricks the way he does now. In the fall, he gathered his acorns, and his pig nuts, and his rabbit tobacco. On a frosty morning, he would set out with Brother Fox for the farmer's; and while Brother Fox looked after the chicken yards, little Brother Rabbit picked cabbage, and pulled turnips, and gathered carrots and parsnips for his cellar. When the winter came, he never failed to share his store with a wandering field mouse, or a traveling chipmunk.

Now, in those days, old Bear was not content to do his own housekeeping, and doze in the sun, and gather wild honey in the summer, and dig for field mice in the winter. He was full of mischief, and was always playing tricks. Of all the beasts of the wood, the one he loved best to trouble was sober little Brother Rabbit.

Just as soon as Brother Rabbit moved to a new tree stump, and filled his bins with vegetables, and his pantry with salad, along came old Bear and carried off all his stores.

Just as soon as Brother Rabbit filled his house with dry, warm leaves for a bed, creepy, creepy, crawly, along came old Bear, and tried to squeeze himself into the bed, too, and of course he was too big.

At last, Brother Rabbit could stand it no longer, and he went to all his friends in the wood to ask their advice.

The first one he met was Brother Frog, sitting on the edge of the pond, and sticking his feet in the nice, cool mud.

"What shall I do, Brother Frog?" asked Brother Rabbit; "Brother Bear will not leave me alone."

"Let us ask Brother Squirrel," said Brother Frog.

So the two went to Brother Squirrel, cracking nuts in the hickory tree.

"What shall we do, Brother Squirrel?" asked Brother Frog; "Brother Bear will not

leave Brother Rabbit alone.”

“Let us ask Brother Mole,” said Brother Squirrel, dropping his nuts.

So the three went to where Brother Mole was digging the cellar for a new house, and they said:

“What shall we do, Brother Mole? Brother Bear will not leave Brother Rabbit alone.”

“Let us ask Brother Fox,” said Brother Mole.

So Brother Mole, and Brother Squirrel, and Brother Frog, and Brother Rabbit went to where Brother Fox was combing his brush behind a bush, and they said to him:

“What shall we do, Brother Fox? Brother Bear will not leave Brother Rabbit alone.”

“Let us go to Brother Bear,” said Brother Fox.

So they all went along with little Brother Rabbit, and they hunted and hunted for old Bear, but they could not find him. They hunted and hunted some more, and they peeped in a hollow tree. There lay old Bear, fast asleep.

“Hush,” said Brother Fox.

Then he whispered to Brother Frog, “Bring a little mud.”

And he whispered to Brother Squirrel, “Bring some leaves.”

And he whispered to Brother Mole, “Bring some dirt, little brother.”

And to Brother Rabbit he said, “Stand ready to do what I tell you.”

So Brother Frog brought mud, Brother Squirrel brought leaves, Brother Mole brought dirt, and Brother Rabbit stood ready.

Then Brother Fox said to Brother Rabbit, “Stop up the ends of Brother Bear’s log.”

So Brother Rabbit took the mud and the leaves and the dirt, and he stopped up the ends of the log. Then he hammered hard with his two back feet, which are good for hammering. And they all went home, for they thought that old Bear would never, never get out of the log.

Well, old Bear slept and slept, but after a while he awoke, and he opened one eye. He saw no sunshine, so he thought it was still night, and he went to sleep again.

After another while, he awoke again, but he heard the rain and sleet beating

outside, and it was very warm and dry inside.

“What a very long night,” said old Bear, and he curled up his paws, and he went to sleep again.

This time, he just slept, and slept, until it began to be very warm inside the log, and he heard in his dreams the footsteps of birds outside.

Then he awoke, and he stretched himself, and he shook himself. He rubbed his eyes with his paws, and he poked away the mud, and the leaves, and the dirt, and he went outside.

But was he not surprised?

It had been a frosty night when he had gone to sleep, and now the woods were green. Old Bear had slept all winter.

“That was a fine, long sleep,” said old Bear, as he set out for little Brother Rabbit’s house to see if he had anything good for breakfast; “I shall sleep again, next fall.”

So every summer, old Bear plays tricks on little Brother Rabbit, but when the fall comes, he creeps away to a warm, dark place to sleep until spring.

And so have his grandchildren, and his great-grandchildren ever since.



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