

WHEN LITTLE BEAR WOULD NOT WORK

BY FRANCES MARGARET FOX

One morning when Little Bear wanted to play, his mother sent him out to pull weeds in the blackberry patch. When his mother went out to see how he was getting on, she found him lying on the ground and looking at the sky.

“Little Bear,” said his mother, “Have you finished your weeding?”

“No, Mother Bear,” was the answer, “It is too hard work. I shall pull no more weeds.”

Never before had Mother Bear heard Little Bear speak like that. So she took him by the hand and led him into the house, where Father Bear sat in his big chair.

“Father Bear,” she said, “Little Bear will not work.” Then behind Little Bear’s back she made motions that meant, “But please do not spank him!”

“Ah-hum! Ah-hum!” began Father Bear, gazing hard at Little Bear. “Do I understand that you will not pull weeds, Son Bear?”

“It is too hard work,” explained Little Bear. “I am not big enough to pull weeds in the blackberry patch.”

“Ah-hum! Ah-hum!” repeated Father Bear, who was really too surprised at first for words. Then he said, “Son Bear, I ought to spank you and send you out to work, and that is what I will do if your mother is willing. But—” Father Bear said “But” in such a loud, loud voice that Little Bear jumped at the tone. “But little bears who will not pull weeds in the blackberry patch shall not eat blackberries.” So upstairs went Little Bear, followed by his mother, who

carried a plate of bread and a brown pitcher full of water from the spring. Mother Bear said nothing when she left Little Bear upstairs with the bread and the water, but he did not mind that, because at first he thought it was all a joke. At dinner time, when he smelled fish frying he felt hungry. But his mother did not bring him any fish, and his father said nothing. So Little Bear ate bread and drank water.

The afternoon lasted a long, long time. Little Bear was asleep when his mother brought him more bread and water.

When he awoke, he again smelled fish frying. He felt hungry, but still his mother did not bring him any fish, and his father said nothing. Then he called his mother and his father.

“What is the trouble with Son Bear?” inquired Father Bear, when Mother Bear led the little fellow downstairs.

“I am hungry!” wailed Little Bear.

“Have you no bread?” asked Father Bear.

“I cannot eat just bread,” answered Little Bear, “not when I smell fish. Besides, I am lonesome. I will weed the blackberry patch and the whole garden, and I’ll hoe the corn, and I’ll work like Sally Beaver, if you’ll just let me have fish for my supper, and blackberries, and honey, and milk.”

“Very well, Son Bear,” agreed Father Bear. “You shall sit down to supper, and weed the blackberry patch before dark.”

Little Bear passed his plate, and Father Bear filled it with trout, and mashed potatoes,

and currant jelly. Mother Bear passed him the johnnycake, and gave him a big dish of blackberries and a brown mug full of milk.

Little Bear was so hungry that he ate two whole speckled trout, and five pieces of johnnycake, and three heaping dishes of blackberries, and drank two mugfuls of milk before he went out and weeded the blackberry patch. He was tired when he went to bed that night, and on many other nights afterward, but he said nothing about it, nor did he ever stop his work in the garden until he had done it all as well as he could. For he soon found out that when he had worked hard, even bread and water tasted good, but that when he had not worked, there was no taste in fish, or honey, or milk, or in a heaping dish of blackberries.

