

LITTLE BEAR'S SURPRISE PARTY

BY FRANCES MARGARET FOX

Little Bear did not like to hear any talk about Sleepy Cave, which was the name of the Three Bears' winter home, the year Jack Frost came late. There were three beds in Sleepy Cave, ready and waiting for the Three Bears—a big, big bed of boughs and moss for huge Father Bear, a middle-sized bed of fir boughs and moss for middle-sized Mother Bear, and a deep, deep bed of feathery moss for Little Bear.

There were also feathery moss blankets taken from fallen logs in the forest—one for huge Father Bear, one for Mother Bear, and the softest, warmest moss blanket of all for Little Bear.

Sleepy Cave was big and warm and dry. There was no chance for snow to drift in the doorway because it was sheltered by a broad overhanging rock, and its back was toward the wind. There was blackberry jam put away in that cave, and combs of honey and other good things to eat in case the family should wake up and feel hungry before spring.

But Little Bear did not like to hear a word about Sleepy Cave. It was the same old story with him, beginning, "I don't want to sleep all winter! Mrs. Maria Wildcat, she said, "Young cub, you won't be anything but a Baby Bear, eating porridge out of a little bowl, and sitting in a wee, wee chair, and sleeping in a wee, wee bed, for another

hundred years if you lie around and sleep all winter! You'll never grow up!" She always says that! And Mr. Bob Wildcat, he said—"

"There, there," Mother Bear interrupted, "don't let me hear another word about Maria Wildcat or any of the Wildcat family! I think I said this to you once before!"

"But I don't want to sleep all winter," wailed Little Bear. "I want to stay in our own little house in the woods and see the snow in the evergreens. I'd love to play in the snow and go sliding on the ice. I want to stay here and eat porridge out of my little bowl and sit in my little chair and sleep in my little bed! Father Deer's children do not sleep all winter. They make tracks in the snow, and they lie down to rest in the evergreens and watch for their enemies in the middle of the day! Father Deer told me about it all over again! I want to stay here and play all winter like other folks! Sally Beaver's mother, she said—"

"Hush," advised Mother Bear, "you have said enough!"

Mother Bear spoke severely, but a moment later when the little fellow went out and sat on the doorstep to think, she said to Father Bear, "Suppose we have a surprise party for Little Bear?"

"A good idea!" agreed Father Bear. "But there is snow in the air, and if there is to be a

party it had better be this afternoon. Whom do you wish to invite?"

Mother Bear smiled as she answered, "Let us invite the children of our hibernating friends. I think that will be pleasanter. We'll invite Auntie Cinnamon's children, and Uncle Brown Bear's family, and the Porcupine twins, and the Field Mice children, and the young Musk-rats. If you will do the inviting, I will make blackberry jam and honey cakes and get the house in order!"

Little Bear didn't even ask a question as Father Bear started out, looking rather proud of his new fur overcoat.

In the afternoon, as Father Bear and Mother Bear were happily waiting for Little Bear's company, there came a knock at the door, followed by the entrance of Auntie Cinnamon.

"I came to say," said she, "that my children cannot come to the party because they have gone to sleep for the winter. No, I cannot stay, I thank you, but I am glad to stop in a minute to say good night until spring."

"Sleepy heads!" exclaimed Little Bear when Auntie Cinnamon had gone on her way.

Next came Uncle Brown Bear. He was so plump he was out of breath from walking fast and had to rest a minute before he could say, "Our children are all asleep and cannot come to the party, but Auntie Brown sent me over to say we thank you, and good night until spring!" And away he went.

"The sleepy heads!" exclaimed Little Bear again, and how he laughed. "But where is the party, Mother Bear, and am I invited?"

Just then came another knock at the door, and Mother Porcupine walked in to say that the twins were tucked away in bed for the winter and so could not come to Little Bear's surprise party.

Little Bear was so delighted when he learned he was to have a surprise party that he wasn't disappointed when the laughing Blue Jay came with a message from the Field Mouse mother saying that the Field Mice children just couldn't keep their eyes open, they were so sleepy, and so of course they could not come to the party.

"I'll sit by the window and see who does come," said Little Bear, happy as he could be thinking of the party.

Now it happened that no one else had been invited to the party, so Mother Bear took Little Bear to the cupboard to show him the blackberry sandwiches and honey cakes, while Father Bear stepped out to ask the Blue Jay to please fly quickly away and invite the wildcat children and the young squirrels and chipmunks and foxes to come immediately to the party.

The Blue Jay flew to do this joyful errand, and soon came dozens of chattering, noisy wildwood children to the party.

But when they reached the house they found Little Bear sound asleep with a contented smile on his face, dreaming of the

party! The merry children could not awaken him, although they tried their best because they wished to share with him the blackberry jam and honey cakes.

Late that afternoon when the party was over and the frolicking children had gone, Father Bear took Little Bear in his arms, and Mother Bear closed the house. Then away went the Three Bears to Sleepy Cave.

When Little Bear was snugly tucked in his feathery moss bed, Mother Bear kissed him and said, "I am so glad the little fellow was happy when he went to sleep!"

And that very night it snowed, and snowed—and snowed!

