
How Bear Was Turned Over

— Nikolai Sladkov, Translated by Larisa Kuznetsova

It was a long, long winter. Every day there was a blizzard. Every night there was a frost. It seemed like it would never end.

All the birds and animals were suffering from the long winter. And only Bear was fast asleep in his den. He had forgotten, perhaps, that it was time to turn over onto his other side.

There is a saying in the forest that as Bear turns over to his other side, so the sun will turn towards summer. All the birds and animals had been waiting for a long time until finally they had completely lost their patience. They all came over to Bear's den to wake him up. The patience of all the birds and forest beasts had snapped, so they all went to Bear's den to wake him up!

"Bear. It's time to turn! Everyone is so tired of winter. We so miss the Sun! Flip onto your other side!"

Bear did not answer—not even a word. Bear did not even move. He just snored.

"I could tap on his head with all my might!" exclaimed Woodpecker. "He would immediately begin to move!"

"No-o-o," bellowed Moose. "It should be done respectfully, respectfully. Oh, dear Bear," Moose tearfully begged, "ple-e-e-ase hear us. We are begging and pleading with you. Turn over! Ple-e-e-ase! Life is so bitter. Everywhere in the woods there is snow up to our ears and we moose cannot run away from wolves."

Bear moved his ears and grumbled, "Why should I care? For me deep snow is good. It's warm in here . . . in my den . . . and quiet."

The White Partridge cried, "Shame on you, Bear! All the berries, all the bushes and all the buds are covered with snow. There is nothing to peck! Turn over, Bear!"

But Bear kept saying, "It's ridiculous! If you are tired of winter, why should I bother and turn over? Why should I care for buds and berries? I have enough fat under my skin!"

Squirrel could not bear it anymore and screeched, "A-a-a-ah, you are a lazy, woolly mattress! You would know how I feel if you ever tried to jump from branch to branch all covered with ice until your paws were bleeding! Flip, sluggard! I am counting—one, two, three!"

"Four, five, six," Bear taunted. "Shoo, shoo out of here! I am sleeping . . ."

All the birds and animals grew sad. And then all of a sudden, Mouse popped out of the snow and squeaked, "Hey, are you all frightened by Bear? I'll turn this short-tailed lazybones in the blink of an eye!"

"You? In a blink?" The animals and birds gasped. "With one left foot!" Mouse bragged.

The next moment, Mouse darted into the Bear's den and started to tickle Bear—running, scratching and biting Bear. And Bear began to twitch, jerking his feet and squealing like a piglet!

"Stop! Stop!" squealed Bear. "Stop tickling. I am turning over!"

And all of a sudden, a burst of warm air went out of Bear's den like smoke from a chimney.

Mouse popped out of Bear's den and squeaked, "I told you! I told you! Bear turned over! Hurray!"

And when Bear rolled over on his side, the Sun turned towards summer. With each day, the Sun got higher and warmer. With each day, spring came closer. With each day, it was lighter and happier in the woods. ♦