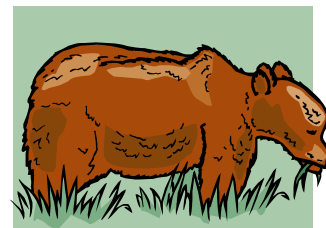


The Bear That Didn't Like Maple Syrup



All children know that there are two things that bears are famous for liking. Firstly, porridge, just like the family of bears in the tale of Goldilocks, and secondly, honey, as eaten in copious amounts by Winnie the Pooh. But not many children know that all Canadian bears love maple syrup. They just can't eat enough of it.

This story is about an ordinary family of bears, Mother bear, Father bear, the little bears Peanut and Posy, and their new arrival baby bear. This family of bears, just like all other Canadian bears, loved maple syrup. They had maple syrup on porridge, yum; maple syrup on pancakes, yummy; maple syrup on biscuits, scrummy; maple syrup on potatoes, yuk; in fact they had maple syrup on everything. They all thought it was delicious. That was until baby bear arrived.

Little baby bear, Bruno was lovely. He was a cuddly soft brown bear with the sweetest smile that anyone had ever seen. He was gorgeous, but there was a problem. He didn't like porridge, he didn't like honey, and most of all he wouldn't touch maple syrup. How could this be? He was a normal Canadian baby bear and he wouldn't eat maple syrup? Mother bear had tried all the usual things that baby bears love. She put maple syrup on his dummy to stop him crying. That made him cry even more until he spat it out, paaaah. He wouldn't have maple syrup in his bedtime milk like all the other baby bears. He threw the bottle across the room, splat. Now, all the bears loved to dip their paws into the bottom of the maple syrup jar, but not little Bruno. When his brother and sister sneaked the jar over as a treat, they were horrified when he threw the jar to the floor, crash, covering everywhere in maple syrup. They knew this meant trouble.

As baby bear grew he was an awkward bear. The first word he could say was no. He said no to everything.

"No, no, no, no,"

"Would you like to try my maple syrup biscuits?" asked his sister Posy.

"No, no like," shouted Bruno.

"Would you like some of my maple syrup ice-cream?" said his brother holding out his cone.

"No, no like," replied Bruno knocking the ice cream out of Peanut's paws.

Mother Bear just didn't know what to do with him. All the other baby bears were very well behaved and always looked perfectly groomed. Baby Bruno on the other hand was grumpy, badly behaved and very very untidy.

One day Mother Bear received a letter from Granny Brown saying that she was coming to stay and that she was really looking forward to seeing her new great grandson Bruno. She said that she was sure he would be as handsome and delightful as all her other great

grandchildren. She also said that she had been baking and had made her most wonderful, prize winning, maple syrup cake.

Mother Bear was beside herself. She didn't know what to do. Granny Brown would be arriving in exactly one week's time to inspect great grandson Bruno, and one thing was for sure, he would not meet with her approval. Both Posy and Peanuts told her not to worry and that they would help her. They set to work. First they tried to teach him to coo like other baby bears, but all he would do was shout "pooh" and laugh. Then they tried to get him to smile but he refused and would only pull faces. Finally, they tried to get him to growl like a fierce bear. Secretly, Posy thought that Bruno would be brilliant at this given that he was so grumpy, but no he refused. Posy and Peanuts sat down in dismay. They had promised to help their mother and they only had a few days until Granny Brown arrived. They had failed.

"What can we do now?" wailed poor Posy.

"I don't know. Wait a minute there is one thing we haven't tried. What about getting Bruno to crawl," suggested Peanuts.

So they set about the task with a new lease of enthusiasm. They managed to put Bruno onto all fours, and then Posy crawled like a mad bear across the floor hoping that Bruno would follow. But as she turned round she saw him nose-dive towards the floor, splat. Peanuts picked him up again, left front paw, right front paw, a bit shaky but still ok. Next, left back paw and then right back paw; Bruno was very wobbly now. Then as if in slow motion, the back left paw slid away from the right back paw and the front paws shot forward, splat. Again Bruno nose-dived to the floor. He was not happy now and let out an almighty growl.

"Well I think he's mastered the growling now, but his chances of crawling are zero," said Peanuts sitting down dejectedly.

"Come on let's keep at it," said Posy, not wanting to admit defeat.

They spent the best part of the day trying to get Bruno to crawl. First up on his front paws, and then a little shakily, onto his back paws as well. But this seemed to be as far as they could get. Bruno seemed to spend most of the time sniffing the floor with his nose pressed down. By the end of the day, Posy was concerned that Bruno's nose was looking decidedly flatter. They went off to bed that night very sad.

"Never mind," said mother bear "You were really kind trying to help. We will just have to let Granny Brown see Bruno as he is. Good night sleep tight, don't let the bed bugs bite."

Now Bruno bear hadn't really been playing fair. In fact the one thing he had learnt was to crawl. As soon as the others were tucked up in bed he pulled himself up and over the side of his cot. Got to the floor and practised his crawling. By the end of the evening he was very proficient indeed. Bruno had been thinking a lot about the visit from Granny Brown and had decided that considering the fuss that it was causing the rest of the family, and that he seemed to be the focus of attention, that it would be best not to be around. So he had been making a few plans of his own. It was true that he was an awkward bear and that he was grumpy and naughty most of the time, but he didn't mean to be, not really. He somehow felt he didn't belong, after all he hadn't come across any other bear that

didn't like maple syrup, or porridge or honey. Perhaps he wasn't really a bear. Perhaps he belonged to another family. So he decided to run away.

The next evening, Bruno hauled himself out of his cot, fell to the ground with a bump and sat up.

"Away horrid nappy," he said throwing his nappy across the room.

"Away nasty dummy," he said flinging the dummy high into the air, chuckling to himself. This was it, he was going to find his real family; he was excited.

He crawled out into the garden beyond the cave, a small silhouette against the night sky. He hadn't been out at night before and it was a little bit scary, but he couldn't stop now he had his family to find. He scuttled off into the edge of the woods and headed away from the houses of all the bears that he had ever known. It was very dark now in the woods and baby bear was feeling cold.

"WHOOO, WHOOO," came a loud call from the tree above.

"It's me baby bear, I'm looking for my real family. Are you my family?" asked Bruno looking up into the tree.

"WHOOO me?" said owl peering down at Bruno, "No, I am not your immediate family, I haven't got any fur or four legs and you don't have feathers or wings. We are brothers from the animal kingdom and you have backbone little one, which means we are related, both belonging to the vertebrates. But that is where our family ties end. I am from the class of Aves, birds. Look at my fine feathers, wings and beak. I also came into this world breaking my way through a shell unlike you,"

"Then who is my real family?" asked baby bear somewhat puzzled

"The clue is in your appearance little one, look for the ones that look like you then you will find your true family. Remember little one, look and listen and be wise like the old owl."

Bruno went away a little perplexed but full of hope of finding his real family. He was tired now and longed for his nice warm cot. Instead he buried himself in a pile of leaves at the base of a tall cedar tree. Soon he was fast asleep.

The next morning there was pandemonium at baby bear's house. Mother bear was running around with her head in her paws wailing softly.

"He's gone. Bruno, my baby has gone," she shrieked.

"Can't see what all the fuss is about, he was never that nice," muttered Peanuts.

"Oh, don't be like that he is your brother after all," said Posy.

"Calm down everyone, he can't be very far," said Father bear, getting everyone to sit down before continuing. "Now I will organise a search party, I am sure he has just gone off exploring in the woods."

"But Granny Brown will be over this morning, and I know that she won't leave until she has seen baby bear, and we have all eaten her maple syrup cake," said Mother bear anxiously.

"I've got it," said Father bear "She will see baby bear. Leave it to me."

Father bear rushed off and reappeared sometime later with a bear like bundle in his arms.

"Here we are, meet Bruno the second," said Father bear holding up a large cuddly toy bear dressed in Bruno's clothes.

"It will never work," groaned Mother bear holding the toy bear.

Suddenly there was a knock on the door and in marched Granny Brown

"Well, aren't you going to kiss your favourite granny?" she boomed.

Mother bear went over to kiss Granny Brown holding onto the toy bear firmly.

"What are you doing cuddling that toy at your age, and where is that new great grandson of mine?" said Granny Brown looking suspiciously at Mother bear.

"Oh, oh this is Bruno's favourite toy he is just having a nap, so we can see him later. Well in fact I think he may be ill. Yes, yes he is ill and it is very serious and terribly contagious I am not sure that you should see him. Actually, you should not be in the house we ought to be in quarantine." And with that, Mother bear tried to push Granny Brown back out of the house.

"Nonsense girl, the only illness around here seems to be you. Have you lost your marbles? Put the kettle on and make me a nice cup of strong sweet tea, then once the baby is awake I can share some maple syrup cake with him," said Granny Brown firmly and sat down on the comfy chair with its back to the window. Mother bear didn't know what to do now. Father bear, Posy and Peanuts had vanished into thin air, it seemed, when the door had started to open. There was nothing for it. Mother bear went obediently over to the stove and put the kettle on. She would have to tell Granny Brown all about it.

At the same time deep in the woods, baby bear was still searching for his real family. He had woken up from under the tree and felt excited at the prospect of meeting his family at last. He knew that they, like him, wouldn't like maple syrup. Actually, thinking of maple syrup, he started to feel his tummy rumbling. He was really quite hungry and went off to look for something to eat. He was just rummaging around under the bushes when a voice called out

"Hey chill out man, can't a snake get a little shut eye around here?" hissed the snake, uncoiling himself from his sleep.

"Sorry," said baby bear looking down at the beautiful markings on the snake.

"I'm looking for my family, are you my family," asked baby bear doubtfully.

"Have you ever seen a snake wearing a fur coat?" asked the snake

"Well, no," answered baby bear.

"Well there you have it, I am smooth and you are furry. Mind you, I think I would look cool in a fur coat," the snake mused "Might be a bit warm in the summer. I think I'll stick to my scaly coat all the same. Still, we are brothers from the animal kingdom and you have backbone little one, which means we are related, both belonging to the vertebrates. But that is where our family ties end. I am from the class of Reptilia, along with my fellow snakes, alligators, turtles and crocodiles. We all have beautiful dry scaly skins and all came into this world breaking our way through shell."

"How will I know my family when I meet them?" asked baby bear.

“Well look for those exactly like you,” suggested the snake, and with that he slowly slithered back to where he was sleeping in the sun.

“But remember little furry one, chill out, relax a little....sssssssss,” said the snake falling into a deep sleep.

Baby bear decided to go further into the woods. The sun was at its fiercest at midday and its hot rays were making baby bear very warm indeed. He wandered off looking for some shade and some cool water to drink. Just as baby bear bent down low a voice shouted “Hey, big fella, mind where you’re putting those large hairy paws, you almost squashed me.” A small green frog hopped up and down in front of Bruno.

“If I hadn’t been quick-witted and nimble on my feet I would have been history,” croaked the frog.

“Sorry, I was just feeling thirsty and wanted a cool drink,” said baby bear

“Well, have some respect for your fellow creatures. You can’t just barge in and take what you want, you must wait your turn,” said the frog staring at Bruno with his big bulgy eyes.

“I, I won’t do it again, I promise,” said Baby bear thinking what a grumpy creature this was. He knew that everyone said he was grumpy maybe he had found his family at last.

“I am looking for my family. Are you my family?” asked baby bear

The frog fell off his lily pad with laughter and then swam up to the surface of the water still giggling.

“I would have problems swimming with your fur, look at my beautiful sleek green skin and see how well I swim,” and the frog dived back into the water to show off his swimming skills. As he surfaced he could see that the baby bear looked sad. He continued more kindly, “Look, we are brothers from the animal kingdom and you have backbone little one, which means we are related, both belonging to the vertebrates. But that is where our family ties end. I am from the class of Amphibia. We have beautiful moist skin, started our lives in eggs in the water, developed gills for breathing underwater when we were young and then as adults had a fine set of lungs for breathing air,”

“How will I know my family when I meet them?” asked baby bear.

“Obvious, of course, they will be just like you. But remember what I said. Show respect to your fellow creatures, no barging in now,” said the frog diving into the water and swimming off. Bruno finished his drink and then decided to go for a nap under the shade of a tall tree. He thought of all the different creatures he had met and the advice they had given him. He hadn’t found his immediate family yet but he was learning a lot from his distant cousins.

Things were not quite so relaxed back at Bruno’s house. Just as mother bear was putting the kettle on and wondering how to tell Granny Brown about Bruno’s disappearance, something caught her eye. It was father bear at the window, behind Granny Brown’s chair, waving his paws furiously. What on earth was he trying to do, now was not a time for silly games thought Mother bear. She then caught a glimpse of what appeared to be a

rather large baby. Then they were gone. The next minute Father bear burst into the room with Posy.

“Well I’ve given Peanuts a lift to his friends house where he is staying for the night. Shame you won’t get to see him this trip granny. Never mind, at least you will get to see our Bruno. He’s a big lad for his age,” said Father bear, all rather too quickly. Mother bear quickly managed to hide her amazement. What was going on, had Father bear gone completely mad? Granny Brown got out of her chair.

“Let’s have the tea and my special maple syrup cake in a minute with little Bruno. I assume he has made a full recovery from his dreadful illness,” said Granny Brown suspiciously. Father bear looked puzzled.

“Oh you remember how ill Bruno was, don’t you Posy. I really thought he was not up to visitors but I think he must have improved today,” stammered Mother bear nervously. They all moved through into Bruno’s bedroom and there in the cot was Peanuts, wearing Bruno’s nappy and sucking a dummy. He looked huge in the cot and just a little bit ridiculous. Posy had to stifle a laugh and Mother bear looked horrified.

“I said he was a big chap, didn’t I,” said Father bear breaking the stunned silence.

“He certainly is. Are you sure he is all right? Have you had his growth checked? I must say he is very like his brother Peanuts,” said Granny Brown staring intently at Peanuts in the cot. Peanuts tried to make gurgling noises and look sweetly at granny Brown. Mother bear just sensed that this was all going to go horribly wrong.

Bruno waking up from his midday snooze was totally unaware of the havoc that he had caused at home. Though he was aware that he hadn’t been very nice to those who had been looking after him, but that would change. From now on he would be nice and good for his real family. He remembered how hungry he was when his tummy growled at him. He had to find his family soon otherwise he would starve. He set off again deeper into the woods. Soon he was hopelessly lost and feeling very sorry for himself. He sat down against a tree trunk and cried. He wanted his Mummy and Daddy, someone to look after him and care for him. Large fat tears fell down.

“Who’s throwing water around? I don’t need a shower I bathed this morning thank you very much, and besides I have just dried my fur into glossy perfection. I won’t know what to do with it if it gets wet again, it will be all over the place,” squeaked an agitated little mouse peering up at baby bear.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to wet your fur,” said baby bear in between sobs.

“Didn’t mean to, didn’t mean to. It’s easy to say, but really you should think before you do things, think about the consequences,” said the mouse.

Baby bear thought about wetting the mouse’s fur. He had fur just like Bruno: perhaps he was his family.

“I am sad because I am looking for my real family. You have fur like me, are you my family?” asked baby bear.

“We are brothers from the animal kingdom and you have backbone little one, which means we are related, both belonging to the vertebrates. You are right we both do have

fur and belong to the class of Mammalia. You and I, like our fellow brothers, were born alive and fed on our mothers' milk. But that is where our family ties end. I am from the order Rodentia, together with my fellow mice, rats and squirrels. See my long incisor teeth for gnawing with," said the mouse proudly showing Bruno his big strong teeth.

"So even though I am much bigger than you we are closely related, but you are not my immediate family?" asked Bruno.

"That is correct," said the little mouse.

"How will I find my true family?" continued Bruno.

"You must look for those who are like you in both appearance and ways. But remember, you are responsible for your actions. Think about the consequences of anything you do before you do it. Then you will be a valued member of any family," said the little mouse looking up at Bruno. "Oh, and one more thing, I think that Old Mother Wolf, who lives over by the rocky caves on the far side of the wood, may be able to help you find your family."

Bruno set off following the little mouse's directions. Soon the landscape became rocky and Bruno clambered up and over them towards the caves above. He was just nearing the top when he heard a howl: suddenly four wolves surrounded him.

"Well looky here, we have a baby bear," said the first.

"Not much meat on him," said the second.

"OOOOhhh do you think he's come to scare us?" said the third in mock fright

"Look stop it you three, you are making him scared," said the fourth, a female wolf. She turned and looked at Bruno kindly "What are you doing up here little bear?" she asked.

"I'm looking for my real family and little mouse said that Old Mother Wolf might be able to help," Bruno replied a little nervously.

"That would be my grandmother, she is the wisest of wolves. Come, follow me and I will take you," said the female wolf "My name is Silver Cloud, what is yours?"

"My name is Bruno," said baby bear following closely behind Silver Cloud. He was still a little afraid of the three other wolves standing there watching them go. At last they came to the entrance of a dark cave. Silver Cloud stepped inside and called softly. A gentle voice replied, bidding her to enter with her visitor. Silver Cloud gently pushed Bruno in front of her and they went deeper into the cave before stopping in a large atrium. It took a while for baby bear's eyesight to adjust to the darkness of the cave. At first he could only make out a shadowy figure lying down at the far side of the atrium. He then could see that it was a beautiful silver grey wolf with the most extraordinary bright eyes. She was clearly old, but still very striking.

"Come closer, little one, to where I can see you properly," said Old Mother Wolf. Bruno hesitantly took a few steps closer.

"That's better, I can see you now. So little bear, why has one so young come to seek the help of Old Mother Wolf?" she asked Bruno kindly.

"I am looking for my real family and little mouse thought that you would be able to help. Are you my family?" asked Bruno.

"No little one, we are not your family here. Of course we are related. We are brothers and sisters from the animal kingdom and you have backbone little one, which means we are

related, both belonging to the vertebrates. We all have fur and belong to the class of Mammalia. You were born alive, like my granddaughter here and fed on your mother's milk. You too were raised on meat like my family members and we are of the order Carnivora. But that is where our family ties end. Look at yourself little one and look at me. We are not the same. I am a wolf and you are a bear. Your rightful family are bears, just like you," said Old Mother Wolf kindly but firmly.

"But I am different, I can't be a bear. All bears eat maple syrup and I don't like it," said Bruno quietly.

"Who has raised and cared for you? Who has loved you since you were born? Fed you, sheltered you and kept you warm? That is your true family," said Old Mother Wolf. Bruno thought of his cosy warm house, his mother and father, his brother and sister. He thought of how they had cared for him, how they always tried to help even though he wasn't very nice. He realised that he had missed them. He remembered all the advice he had been given while searching for his true family. The owl had told him to look and listen and be wise. Well he hadn't been very good at listening, in particular at home. Snake had told him to chill out and relax. It was true he was always very grumpy and frustrated when things didn't go his way. Frog had told him to respect others and he certainly hadn't managed that very well. Finally, mouse had told him that he needed to take responsibility for his actions. He was now beginning to see how selfish he had been and that he loved his family. He realised that he had probably hurt them very much by his actions. He shouldn't have run away, he didn't need to find his family; he had one already, he just hadn't appreciated it. He would go home, say he was sorry and change his ways. Though he didn't think he could bring himself to eat maple syrup! Bruno looked up at Old Mother Wolf sadly.

"I have been foolish and selfish, I hadn't realised until now. I have a wonderful family and I need to get back to them before I hurt them any more."

Old Mother Wolf smiled.

"You have learnt a valuable lesson little one, please remember it. Families are very precious and their love irreplaceable. I know where the bears' den is. Silver Cloud will guide you back and you will be reunited before nightfall."

Silver Cloud led Bruno out from the cave, over the rocks and down into the woods. Soon they were winding a trail back to home. Eventually, the surroundings became familiar as Bruno recognised the areas he played in. Silver Cloud stopped on the edge and bade Bruno goodbye. Bruno hurried quickly down to his home.

Mother bear had been right, nothing but trouble could come of this strange charade. The cot started to creak under the weight of Peanuts. Then as if in slow motion the whole thing collapsed.

"Help," shrieked Peanuts jumping up and running over to the side of the room. The nappy fell to his knees causing him to fall heavily. He slid to a halt at the feet of Granny Brown.

"Well I never," exclaimed Granny Brown peering over her glasses at Peanuts.

"Sorry, granny," stammered Peanuts.

Posy, Father bear and mother bear burst into laughter. Peanuts did look rather ridiculous. Even Granny Brown managed a smile.

"Well I think there is some explaining to do," said Granny Brown.

They all went back to the kitchen and Mother bear set about making tea for all of them.

Mother bear was just starting to explain that actually baby bear was rather grumpy, badly behaved and had run away when the door burst open. In bounded baby bear. He ran up to Mother bear and threw his arms round her in a hug.

"I'm sorry Mummy and I do love you all lots," said Bruno.

The whole bear family looked on in astonishment. This was certainly a day for surprises and strange happenings.

The whole family sat down to tea and Bruno explained all about his adventure. He told them that he had been silly and selfish and that he really would change. Granny Brown was delighted and said that they should all celebrate with her famous maple syrup cake. "Oh yes," chorused the bears, except for baby bear. What could he do, he didn't like maple syrup cake but he didn't want to upset Granny Brown or embarrass his family any more.

"I'm not very hungry, perhaps I could have a small piece please," asked Bruno

Posy and Peanuts stared in amazement, this was not their grumpy old baby brother anymore; he really had changed. Mother bear just smiled as Bruno took the cake, feeling very proud.

"Do you know what?" said Granny Brown, " while we're all making confessions, I may make an award winning maple syrup cake, but I really hate maple syrup and have never touched a drop since I was a baby."

The whole family fell about laughing. Granny Brown really didn't know what she had said that was so funny, so Mother bear explained.

"I really do belong to this family and it is the best a baby bear could ever have," said Bruno, passing his piece of cake to Peanuts and giving Granny Brown the biggest hug she had ever had.