



The snow had turned the forest into a winter wonderland; and as the bears worked hard to get their den prepared for the long winter ahead, the ice on the trees snapped aloud. The hard work made the bears very sleepy, and their yawns could be heard from far away. There was one bear amongst them, however, that had no intention of taking a long winter's nap; his name was Bipper, and he didn't understand the need to sleep for such a long time. It was Bipper's first winter, and instead of hibernating he wanted to explore the forest for the first time by himself. Bipper was the youngest and smallest bear in his family, and his older siblings never let him forget it. He was constantly teased about his size and age.

As the bears prepared to enter their den, Bipper stretched his legs and rested next to a pine tree.

"Are you going to fall asleep before we've even entered the den, Bipper?" asked one of the older brother bears.

"Just taking a little break, that's all," said Bipper.

"You haven't been doing much to help out," said Bipper's oldest sister. "What are you so tired from?"

"I'm not that tired, and if you ask me it's a waste of time to sleep for so long. I would rather be out having fun in the forest," said Bipper.

"Bipper, even though you're a bear try not to be such a bear to be around," said Bipper's Momma. All of Bipper's brothers and sisters laughed at Momma bear's comment.

"Bipper, in order to be rested for spring time we bears need to hibernate during the winter," said the Momma bear.

"Yes, Momma," replied Bipper.

Bipper kept to himself for the rest of the evening while the other bears prepared to settle down for their long winter nap. Bipper knew once the other bears fell asleep he could leave the den without being noticed. And that's exactly what Bipper did. After all the other bears began to snore, Bipper quietly sneaked out of the den and into the forest. At first, Bipper was happy with his new found freedom and loved being able to do whatever he wanted. He rolled around in the snow and repeatedly fell to the ground to make snow angels. But after some time passed, Bipper started to feel lonely and missed his family. The berries he was accustomed to eating off the trees were long gone, and he found himself growing very hungry. Bipper had also traveled a great distance, and even though he had a powerful sense of smell, he was finding it hard to find his way back to the den. One evening with nothing but the moonlight above, and a pesky owl repeatedly asking him who he was, Bipper decided it was time to go home for good.

Suddenly out of nowhere, a horrible creepy sound could be heard close by. The noise startled Bipper, so he looked around to see where it was coming from. He didn't see anything! The horrible creepy sound could be heard again, and this time Bipper knew it was getting closer.

"Who's there?" asked Bipper. "I'm a bear so you better watch out."

At that moment, a little dog peeked at Bipper from behind a tree. It was the little dog stepping on old fallen limbs that was causing the creepy noises. "Please don't hurt me, Mr. Bear. I'm just a little dog."

"Relax," said Bipper. "I'm not going to hurt you."

"Well, that's a relief to hear, but aren't bears meat eaters?" asked the little dog.

"Yeah, we're meat eaters all right, but I don't want to hurt anybody," said Bipper.

"Lucky me," said the little dog. "I have a family that no longer wants me, and I can't even get a bear in the middle of the forest to want me either."

"Do you want me to change my mind?" asked Bipper.

"Oh no," said the little dog sheepishly. "I was only joking."

"Me too," laughed Bipper. "I'm just teasing you."

"I appreciate your kindness," said the little dog.

"What on Earth is a little dog like you doing out in the forest anyway? This isn't a safe place for you to be you know. There really are a lot of animals out here who would hurt you."

"Couldn't the same be said for a little bear?" asked the little dog.

"Not you too," said Bipper. Bipper cupped his paw over his face and said, "Now, I have a dog the size of my arm calling me little."

"You appear to be a very young bear, so I am surprised to see you out here in the forest by yourself. That's all I meant!"

"Well, I am young. And yes, I am a little bear," said Bipper. "Until I get older there's nothing I can do about it. I can't wait until then."

"Why do you want to grow up so fast?" asked the little dog.

"I am tired of being teased about my age and size."

“As my grandmother used to say when I was a pup, “Don’t wish your time away. Enjoy thy youth,” said the little dog. You’ll be a big old bear before you know it. Years from now you’ll look back and wish you were still a little cub. Earlier you asked me why I am out here; do you still want to know why?”

“Yeah, I’m curious,” replied Bipper.

“Well, I am out here because I am an old dog that nobody loves anymore.”

“Why would you say such a thing?” asked Bipper.

“Well, tomorrow is Christmas day and as an early gift for Christmas my owners bought their children a new puppy. When the kids saw the puppy for the first time it was as if I didn’t even exist anymore,” said the little dog.

“I am sure they still love you just the same. My Momma always says she has no favorites. She says she loves me and my older siblings equally. Your age will never change how much your family loves you,” said Bipper.

The little dog nodded his head and said, “You know, you’re right. What was I thinking? They have loved me my entire life. I know they don’t love me any less than before. I guess I was just jealous about the puppy. You have great wisdom for being such a young bear. Listen to your own advice about family and you won’t be so frustrated about being teased. Take it from an old dog, being young is a wonderful thing so enjoy it and have fun. What’s your name by the way?”

“Bipper, what’s yours?”

“Wick’s my name,” said the little dog. Bipper and Wick shook paws, and promised to help one another find their way home.

To help ease the burden of such a long trek, Bipper and Wick laughed and played in the snow. Much to Bipper’s surprise, however, Wick started to bark out Christmas carols along the way. About a dozen rabbits popped their heads out of their holes to see what was going on. Wick’s singing made every rabbit flap their long ears downward to ease the strain on their eardrums. Since Wick was still engaged in song, one of the rabbits looked over at Bipper and said, “What is wrong with that dog? Why is it making so much racket?”

“Sorry, he’s just having a little festive fun by singing some Christmas carols,” said Bipper.

“That’s what you call that huh, singing?” asked the rabbit.

Bipper approached the rabbit and said, "Look, I know this dog can't sing in tune, but please just bear with me. We're on our way home and he just wants to spread a little holiday cheer."

The rabbit pointed at her hole in the ground and asked Bipper, "You hear that?"

Bipper leaned over the rabbit's hole and said, "Yeah, I hear Christmas music playing."

"That's right," said the rabbit. "I already have all the Christmas music I need, and I've got seven more carrot cakes to make before morning. Time's a wasting!"

"I understand. Sorry again about the disturbance and happy holidays to you. We'll be on our way now," said Bipper. The rabbit shook her head at Bipper and then dived back in her hole.

As Bipper and Wick continued their journey through the forest several more animals vented their frustrations to Bipper about Wick's singing. A squirrel even claimed Wick's singing caused her peanut cake to turn upside down. Enough was enough! The sound of Wick's singing was so bad Bipper thought it was going to wake every animal in the entire forest up. To get the point across to Wick that he needed to quit singing, Bipper reminded him that bears are meat eaters and he would appreciate it if he wouldn't sing another note. Wick was disappointed that no one appreciated his talent, so he just hummed Christmas carols the rest of the way home.

THE END