

Winter's Day

Within the den there stirred and twisted
In troubled sleep one Bruin Bear.
His empty belly now insisted
That he awake, get up, find fare
To feed himself; and so he grumbled,
And grunted, yawned, arose and stumbled
Towards the cave mouth; there he stood
And blinked and stared. Was that his wood?
Were those strange shapes so white that glistened
The trees he'd known before he slept?
He heard no sound. Did all except
For him still sleep? He stood and listened.
"Where shall I go for food? Which way?"
Thought Bear at dawn one winter's day.

A lone bird chirped and startled Bruin.
"What ho!" cried Robin. "Bear, what ho!"
"This whiteness," Bear said, "all this ruin –
What means it all?" "Tis only snow,"
Young Robin laughed, "Tis nothing fearful.
"Come on, Old Bear, come on; be cheerful."
"But why the silence? Why no sound?"
Asked Bear, "Is none but you around?"
So Robin told our Bear the reason
That sounds were dulled, and how beneath
The snow lay woodland, brake and heath,
Protected till the Springtide season.
"But oh," said Bruin, "tell me, pray,
"Where food is found this winter's day?"

"For sure," said Robin, "in the village."
"So come with me. Come on! Make haste!"
"No, no," cried Bear, "for if I pillage
"They'll kill me – trust in you's misplaced!"
"Do you not know," young Robin chuckled,
"What babe was born, what babe was suckled
"By Virgin Mother long ago
"This very day? Do you not know?"
Then Robin told how God Creator
Of heav'n and earth had not disdained
To come into a world all stained
And marred and be its vindicator.
And Bear in wonder made his way
As Robin sang that winter's day.

And Bruin heard how angels bringing
Glad tidings of great joy and peace,
Once filled the sky with heav'nly singing
While fear and death that day did cease.
"So evermore all down the ages
"On this one day are stilled all rages.
"On Christmas Day all fears subside
"And wolf and lamb live side by side,
"And kid lies down beside the leopard,
"And calf with lion cub will walk
"While beasts with men that day can talk;
"For once again the Babe is shepherd.
"So, Bruin, put all fears away,"
Sang Robin on that winter's day.

As bird and bear left woodland clearing
They caught the strains of joy and mirth
Of women, men and children cheering
In song the blessèd Baby's birth.
The smell of cooking and of baking
Led Bear towards the merry making.
And soon they saw the village green
And marveled at the festive scene.
"Ho bear!" men cried, "we bid you greeting!
"We've food enough for man and beast
"So come and join our Yuletide feast!
"This is indeed a merry meeting."
So bear and bird with no delay
Did join the throng that winter's day.

Thus Bear did feast and join the singing
Of Christmas songs and Yuletide lays;
Their music set the valley ringing
On this most joyful day of days.
And Bear joined in the games and dancing
And children laughed to see him prancing;
For none thought evil, none felt fear
And peace filled all with Christmas cheer.
With pies and puddings Bear was sated –
His belly full and heart at peace.
He wished such joy would never cease,
That love continue unabated.
But Robin said they must away
At eventide that winter's day.

And all were sad as Bear departed;
Each hugged and kissed him as they said:
"God bless you, Bear, so gentle-hearted,
"May angels tend you where you tread."
So Bear and Robin left the village,
And passed its fields and folds and tillage,
All hidden neath the winter snow.
With bellies full and hearts aglow,
The pair in silence slowly wandered
Along the path they'd come that morn
And thought of joy and peace reborn
Each year on Christmas day, and pondered:
"Why cannot peace and love hold sway
"For aye as on that winter's day?"

Then from his rev'rie Bear was shaken
When he beheld the tracks they made.
"To dogs and wolves 'tis unmistakable
"The path we've left," he cried, dismayed.
"Oh Bear," said Robin, "Flakes are falling
"To cover tracks so naught appalling
"Will harm you. Angels tend you where
"You tread and keep you in their care."
Then Bruin gazed in awe, astounded,
As flakes fell fast and swirled around
In flurries, covering all the ground.
The tracks were hid, his fears unfounded;
For nothing would his steps betray
As Bear returned that winter's day.

The pair, by angel guides protected,
Returned once more to Bruin's den,
So Bear might slumber undetected
Till Spring awoke the woods again.
"Farewell, dear Robin," Bear said sadly,
"This day has bless'd us both, and gladly
"Did I the Yuletide message learn;
"But to my rest must I return."
"Sleep now, dear Bear" said Robin, "Cherish
"The Christmas news of love and joy;
"And let not evil thoughts destroy
"Our blessings. May they never perish!"
Oh would we all such love display
As Bruin found that winter's day.