

# The Story of Sleepy Bear

by Maureen Speerly

One cold winter's night three little bear cubs came to be with Momma and Papa Bear who oohed and aahed as they decided on names for them. Right away Momma Bear said the little girl would be named Flora for all the beautiful flowers in the spring. Papa named the next one Peter, as that had been his father's name. This left one small, sleepy bear. After much discussion, they named him Sleepy, as all he seemed to do was sleep.

Over the next few years the young bears grew (as children do) and left home to find mates of their own. It took Sleepy one cold winter alone to know he too needed a mate.

That next summer he met her. It was love at first sight. She was solid white with the most adorable black nose. Her name was Snow. That summer Snow and Sleepy went everywhere together: long walks in the woods, swimming under the waterfall, and picnics with naps in the sun.

Fall was fast approaching, and they both knew that they must get a blessing from the Oldest Father Bear in the Land if they were to live together that winter. So they did.

The first winter passed in blissful peace, and Snow and Sleepy were very happy. Only one thing made them sad: no cubs had been blessed to them.

Sleepy saw that this made Snow wistful, so he asked his mother to crochet her a baby stuffed bear to practice with. Snow was delighted with her gift. She called him Sleepy Teddy (Teddy was her father's name).

Their second fall together was fast approaching, and Sleepy told Snow to be careful and stay very close to their cave. Her snow-white coat made her an excellent target for hunters.

Now Snow, being a lady bear, had a mind of her own. She decided she would visit her ailing granny. She packed a hamper with herbal tea and fresh blueberry muffins, gently tucked little Teddy in the crook of her arm, and happily shut the door.

Sleepy was near their cave and saw Snow head out. "Silly bear," he thought, when suddenly a

shot rang out through the forest. Sleepy ran down the hill and was beside Snow in an instant.

He knelt beside her and gently lifted her head onto his lap. He ran his large paw softly down the side of her beloved face. Blood stained her snow-white fur a crimson red.

She was trying to speak to him so he leaned closer. Snow told him she would love him forever and that he was to find another mate and have many sleepy bears. With that, she closed her eyes and crossed the Rainbow Bridge into the great land beyond.

Sleepy was heartbroken. Snow had been his first love, and he vowed there would be no other.

During the long, lonely winter nights he thought of Snow and her parting words. He longed for the sleepy-eyed bears they had dreamed of.

Hoping to help ease the pain in his heart, Sleepy went to visit Momma Bear for her wise advice. Momma Bear, rocking slowly in her chair, said for him to keep his paws busy. He watched her as she quietly crocheted yet another blanket. He thought, "If I could only do what Momma is doing." Without even thinking, he said, "Teach me," and she did.

Night after lonely night, and day after snowy day he practiced. He made mistakes but he learned. One day he made a little bear. Then he made another and another. The room gradually filled with bears in all sizes and colors.

He wondered what he would do with all the bears and thought of Snow and her giving heart. Then he knew what he should do. When spring came, he left the cave with a sack full of little, stuffed bears over his shoulder.

He gave them to the sick, to the lonely, to the young, and to the old. He left them in campsites for the children and at the doors of the deserving. Bears were everywhere. Each time Sleepy gave a bear, his longing eased and his heart felt lighter. For each one he gave, a part of Snow and himself went with it and he didn't feel so lonely anymore.

And everyone who ever received a Sleepy Bear knew they had a friend and were loved.