

# *Little Bear Visits the Zoo*

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It was a bright and sunny morning, and New Year's Day. Little Bear was tired after Christmas, and Daddy Bear said that they should all go out to get some fresh air and stretch their legs before it started raining again. Mummy Bear said she wanted to go to the zoo, and Little Bear started to jump up and down and cry "Please, daddy, please let's go to the zoo!" so, after thinking for a minute or two (for he was a slow old bear, and liked to look as though he was in charge of the family), he agreed and they set off.

The zoo was down a long country road, but was clearly marked with signs showing an elephant picture, and it didn't take long to get there. Despite the sun, there was a fresh cold wind and Little Bear was well wrapped up with a new hat and a thick jersey his mummy had knitted. They went through the entrance and reached the first enclosure. Suddenly, there was a fearful howling, and Little Bear almost jumped out of his jersey. He turned to see a huge animal running towards him. "What's that?" he cried in fright.

"It's a wolf," Mummy Bear said. "Don't worry, it won't hurt you. It's behind a fence." Sure enough, the wolf turned away from them and went to join a lot of other wolves which Little Bear noticed in the distance. They were huge animals, and Mummy explained the sign which read 'Canadian Prairie Wolves', and mentioned they were the biggest wolves anywhere in the world.

Little Bear said goodbye to the wolves and ran ahead to see what was next. "Quick," he called, "it's the tigers." The tigers were pacing back and forth in a large enclosure, looking very fierce, and Little Bear was glad to see the thickness of the bars, for they looked quite hungry. "What do they eat?" he asked nervously, and Mummy explained that the keeper brought them their dinner each day.

They walked on a bit further, and rounded a corner to where a group of people were standing looking at the next animals. Little Bear had to push past them to see what was there, and then leapt with excitement. "It's the elephants, mummy. Look!" he called, "just like on the signs we saw." Sure enough, there were five elephants standing around, huddled together from the wind and busy eating what looked like huge thick sticks. Suddenly, Little Bear noticed another elephant stood by itself, and underneath it was the tiniest and most wonderful baby elephant, not much bigger than Little Bear himself, and looking very cold. Little Bear stared through the railings at the baby elephant, and the baby elephant seemed to be staring right back at him. Then a strange thing happened. The little elephant wobbled out from underneath its mummy, and walked right over to the bars and put its trunk through to touch Little Bear's arm. Little Bear looked in wonder at the elephant, and stroked his trunk, which was cold and rough. "He's cold mummy. Why doesn't his mummy knit him a jersey like you did for me?"

Mummy smiled. "Elephants can't knit," she explained. "They have a warm house to go into if they get too cold." Little Bear believed his mummy, but the elephant did look so sad and cold, he wished he could do something. Reluctantly, he moved away from the elephants and they looked at a lot more animals before finally coming to the gorilla cage. The gorillas were fun.

They had babies too, and they clutched tightly to their mothers' backs as they swung round the ropes and jumped in the pool and slid down the long slide. It looked great fun, and Little Bear wished he could be in there with them enjoying the toys, but he didn't think he would be able to climb up like they could. Also, there was one huge gorilla who sat by himself, with thick silver hair across his back, and looked really fierce. When Little Bear saw him, he was pleased that the bars were in place, and thought perhaps it wouldn't be such a good idea to share their playground.

Finally, they went into the cafe for a welcome hot meal of sausages and chips and a cup of tea. Half way through, mummy slipped into the shop at the side and wouldn't let Little Bear or Daddy come with her. She came back carrying a large brown parcel under her arm, and with a secret smile on her face. Both Daddy and Little Bear wanted to know what she'd bought, and if it was a present for them, but she wouldn't tell them. "It's a secret," she said. "You'll find out soon."

They wandered back along a different path, seeing snakes and bison and all manner of creatures, until suddenly they ended up in front of the elephant house again. The baby elephant seemed to recognise Little Bear, for he came over at once and pushed his trunk through to touch his friend again. Then mummy smiled and said, "here, give him this," and she handed Little Bear the brown paper parcel she had bought. Little Bear passed it to the little elephant who pulled it through the bars. His mummy came over to see what was happening and helped him to pull the paper off with her trunk. It was a jersey; a large, loose jersey which Mummy Bear had bought in the shop. The mummy elephant helped baby elephant to pull it over his head, and he managed to fit his front legs into the arm holes. The jersey was so big it pulled right back to baby elephant's bottom, and he immediately looked much warmer, and began to smile and his eyes lit up with pleasure. Then a strange thing happened. Mummy elephant leant over the bars and wrapped her trunk round Little Bear and hoisted him high into the air and over the fence. Then she sat him down as gently as anything on baby elephant's back, and Little Bear hung on just as he'd seen the baby gorillas doing while baby elephant took him for a ride right round the compound. It was so exciting, Little Bear didn't want to get off again, but finally mummy elephant lifted him up and carefully carried him back over the fence.

They walked slowly away back to the car, and Little Bear waved and waved to his new friends, until he couldn't see them anymore. But he knew he would never forget them, and his wonderful day at the zoo.