

Little Brown Bear Goes Networking!

by
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(Loosely inspired by Elizabeth Upham's children's book, "Little Brown Bear" ©1942)



Anticipation

Little Brown Bear turned to admire himself in the hallway mirror. "Oh, my," he thought, "my new blue suit makes me look *just like Papa!*" Lingering for just a moment more, he mentally counted *all of his pockets*. "Seven!" he told himself; "My new suit has *SEVEN* pockets! And I'm going to put my *very-important-looking*, new business cards in each and every one of them!"

With that, Little Brown Bear tromped and trotted down the stairs and into the kitchen, where Mama was making buttered teacakes. Mama Bear turned to look at Little Brown Bear and an endearing smile spread across her face.

"Well, well, well... don't you look *fine* in the new suit Popsy and Nona gave you?!"

"Do I?! Do I *really* look fine, Mama?"

"Just about as fine a little bear as I've ever *seen!*" Mama nodded proudly while Little Brown Bear basked in the warmth of her attention. "And what —" she added, "is the grand occasion that calls for such elegance?"

Little Brown Bear took a moment to make himself look as big as he possibly could. "I'M - going - *NETWORKING!*" he trumpeted.

Mama rested her wrists on the tops of her hips. "Networking! My, my, my... just like your very own Papa?!"

"Yes, Mama," said Little Brown Bear, proudly.

"So then — *you* — must have your very own business!"

"Yes I *do*; I sell *Bright Pink* Lemonade: the brightest and pinkest in the whole wide wood!"

"Mmm, mmm," said Mama Bear. "Well that *is* something?"

"And, Mama — I'm already late! Our Networking group is meeting at the Crooked Oak as soon as everyone's had lunch."

"Well, what about *you*?"

"I'm too excited for food, Mama. *Bye!*"

Mama Bear chuckled and turned back to her teacakes. "My word — such a sight," she cooed.



❧ An Inauspicious Start ❧

Little Brown Bear came over the ridge of the grassy road, and saw all his friends at the base of Crooked Oak. There was *Possum* and *White Rabbit*... *Porcupine* and *Chickadee*... *Li'l Fox* and *Muskrat*. There was also someone Little Brown Bear didn't even know. This was *Betsy Badger*. All of the networkers were so busy talking, Little Brown Bear almost felt unsure of himself as he approached. He shouted out a friendly, "Hi, folks!" but no one paid him much attention.

With excitement beating in his chest, Little Brown Bear walked up to his dear friend, Porcupine, who was asking all sorts of interesting questions of Chickadee:

"You mean to say that using the very same methods you use to make a nest, you can make *other things*?!"

"Almost anything you please, you please!" said Chickadee, proudly.

"Could you make me a *bed*?" inquired Porcupine. "Mine has so many holes in it I hardly know *what* to do."

"Of course I can; of course I can," said Chickadee. "You'd never get holes with a naturally vented bed; your quills would go right on through, right on through! 'It's *no* holes, cuz it's all holes' — I like to say!"

"My goodness, that sounds delightful!" exclaimed Porcupine.

Little Brown Bear could hold back no longer:

"*I sell Bright Pink Lemonade!* It's the brightest and the pinkest in the whole wide wood!"

"Is that a fact, is that a fact?" asked Chickadee.

"Why yes; it *is* a fact. And here... is my card," added Little Brown Bear.

"Oh, it's grand," said Chickadee. "A swell looking card!"

"And important-looking, too," offered Little Brown Bear. "Here's one for you, Porcupine."

"Oh, well... uh, thank you. It's true; I do *love* lemonade. Though... it's a bit brisk, these days — with autumn approaching, and all."

"It's NOT lemonade; it's *Bright Pink* Lemonade. And *I* like to drink it *ALL YEAR ROUND*," Little Brown Bear protested.

"Well, suit yourself, Little Brown Bear. If that's how you feel..." offered Porcupine.

"Wouldn't you like to buy some?" pressed Little Brown Bear.

"I would love to try some," answered Porcupine — "but perhaps not until it gets warmer, maybe come springtime."

"How about you, Chickadee? Would *you* like to order some of my Bright Pink Lemonade?"

"No, no. Not yet, not yet. Maybe later; not now." tweeted Chickadee.

"Well, you have my card," declared Little Brown Bear. "Please call me. I'm sure that if you tried my Bright Pink Lemonade — you'd want to buy it by the tubful!"

“Very well — very well, indeed...” chirped Chickadee, as she flitted over to engage Betsy Badger. In a like manner, Porcupine scurried up to Muskrat. Feeling a tad disgruntled, Little Brown Bear approached White Rabbit and Possum:

“I sell *Bright Pink Lemonade!* It’s the brightest and the pinkest in the whole wide wood!” he announced...



❧ *Mr. Moon Shines Light On the Subject.* ❧

Little Brown Bear was so upset he could hardly sleep. He tossed and turned and turned and tossed — and before he knew it, he was even crying a little.

“Boo-hoo, boo-hoo... no one bought *any* of my Bright Pink Lemonade. This networking game is no fun at all!” he sniffed to himself. Burying his face in his pillow, he attempted to recall how Papa and Mama Bear had tried to soothe him during supper. Try as he might, however, he couldn’t remember a single thing they’d said in their efforts to cheer him up. He was able to visualize Mama and Papa’s kind and empathetic faces, but beyond that, there was *nothing*: just a whirling swirl of burrs and brambles.

He couldn’t even remember what they’d had to eat! (Can you imagine *that*, dear reader? Little Brown Bear’s favorite food in the whole wide wood is buttered teacakes, but in the midst of his despairing, he had no recollection they had even been *offered* to him at supper!)

“Oh, pumpernickel... I will *never* be any good at business! I can’t even get my thoughts straight!” he moaned. In the soft quiet that followed, he suddenly got an idea that cheered him right up!

“Bright Pink Mulberry Lemonade!” he said to himself — “Why didn’t I think of this before!?!”

But at that very moment, a powerful beam of moonlight pierced the window curtains and lit a small patch on Little Brown Bear’s face. Mr. Moon’s whispery voice soon filled the room:

*Tut-tut, little bear, your new product sounds grand,
Yet your problems don’t stem from your service or brand.
It’s your strategy, cub, that leaves your friends cold,
All that pressure and prodding won’t get your goods sold.
You were given ONE MOUTH, and one mouth should suffice,
But those EARS you were granted, are DOUBLY nice!*

Little Brown Bear popped up in bed. He scratched his chin and thought hard about what Mr. Moon had just said. He scratched and thought and thought and scratched.

“I am thinking, right now, of all you’ve just said, Mr. Moon. I have one mouth, yes I do — that I understand. And, of course, I would never need more than *that*. But, about my ears, I’m less sure... My ears are *always open* — I can’t close them. All

day long, from sun-up to sundown, I hear many strange and marvelous things, Mr. Moon, including your voice! What would you have me do differently?"

Mr. Moon beamed a little brighter, and continued:

*Hearing is one thing, and not a bad start,
But only by LISTENING will you hone your new art!*

Mr. Moon suddenly withdrew behind the clouds, and with him went all the natural light from outside. The curtains — no longer translucent — turned warm and yellow from the light of a tiny, bedside candle, which Little Brown Bear always slept with to fend off the darkness. He scratched his chin some more. "My new art? What could be meant by that, I wonder?" He scratched and scratched and scratched. Eventually, he grew tired and lay his head back down on his pillow.

"I love to draw, but I've a feeling Mr. Moon is referring to something else," he thought. He yawned a big yawn and rolled onto his side. His thoughts began to bend and bounce and drift: "I suppose he could have meant my networking... though that would be silly. Networking isn't an art; it's a game!"

But before even one more minute had gone by, Little Brown Bear was fast asleep.



~~~~~ If At First You Don't Succeed... ~~~~~

"How do you do?" said Little Brown Bear to Betsy Badger.
"I'm pleased to meet you," she answered.

Once again, all of Little Brown Bear's friends from the wood had assembled at the base of Crooked Oak, and in his eagerness to give this networking game another try, Little Brown Bear had been among the first to arrive. While waiting for the others, he'd chatted briefly with Muskrat and White Rabbit about the bright yellow and orange leaves *Mr. Wind* was blowing about in the treetops, overhead. A few moments later, the rest of the gang had all arrived, and Li'l Fox gave some welcoming remarks. And just like that, they began Day 2 of their networking, in earnest.

"Have you recently moved into this part of the wood?" asked Little Brown Bear, trying ever so hard to listen with both ears.

"Yes, that's exactly right," said Betsy Badger. "My family comes from all the way over in the Acorn Valley."

"My goodness, that *IS* a long way!" exclaimed Little Brown Bear.

"Oh, yes, it is. And if I may be honest with you, I do dearly miss my old home," confessed Betsy Badger.

"I don't blame you. I would be terribly homesick, if I were you," added Little Brown Bear.

"I was," continued Betsy Badger, "but when my mother told me there were some young friends starting a networking group, I thought it sounded like great fun. And then I thought of a business that would make me feel even *more* at home!"

"Oh? And what business is that?" inquired Little Brown Bear, as he inwardly told himself he was doing an excellent job of listening.

"I'm going to sell *Acorn Salties!*" said an exuberant Betsy Badger.

"Acorn Salties? What's that?" asked Little Brown Bear.

Betsy Badger eyes grew big: "Oh, they're the most scrumptious, delectable, tenderest, salty snack you've ever had!"

At that moment, the tiny gears inside of Little Brown Bear's head clicked into motion. He leaned in closer.

"They sound delicious. I should very much like to try some," he offered.

"Of course you should! That's what I'm hoping everyone will want to do. But I've got some problems I can't solve — due to my being unfamiliar with these parts, and all..."

But the mechanisms in the brain of Little Brown Bear kept turning to the point where — they were turning *so* fast that his conscious mind could no longer hear what Betsy Badger was saying. And here's the interesting thing: because he was so enamored with these sounds his own thoughts were making, he was *completely unaware* that this had even happened. And so — as Betsy Badger carefully explained how she needed to find a local grove of hale, hearty, and productive oaks — Little Brown Bear only heard his own mind tell him that Bright Pink Lemonade would be the perfect accompaniment to her salty concoction.

"You should sell Bright Pink Lemonade!" Little Brown Bear blurted out.

"I'm sorry... What did you say?" asked Betsy Badger.

"Bright Pink Lemonade would help wash down those snacks of yours. That's what *I* sell: Bright Pink Lemonade!" he practically shouted.

"Oh, that sounds nice," Betsy Badger said, somewhat half-heartedly, "but Acorn Salties don't really need to be 'washed down'. They're really more... of a... a *treat*... that you savor."

But Little Brown Bear was now fully impassioned. In his head, he told himself, "My word, Mr. Moon's suggestion to use my ears was just splendid!" And make no mistake about it, dear reader — because he was so convinced that he was following Mr. Moon's advice — he was all the more confident in his actions.

"What I think you should do is sell my Bright Pink lemonade at your store," suggested Little Brown Bear.

"My store..? But I don't even have a stor—"

"You might even package them, together!" he insisted.

Betsy Badger started to look uncomfortable. "I just don't know," she said. "I like to think small, you know? Get my feet wet... I'm not even sure where to get good acorns around here—"

Little Brown Bear didn't wait for her to finish: "Think *SMALL*?!!? Betsy Badger, my new friend and business partner, why on earth would we want to think small when the potential for your business is so BIG?" he grinned.



❧ Bitter Aftertaste; Part II ❧

Mama and Papa Bear watched Little Brown Bear eat his food in silence. Papa Bear looked over to Mama Bear with a questioning face. Mama Bear soon cleared her throat.

"Well, Little Brown Bear, how are things going with this fun, new group of yours?" she asked.

"Oh, I don't know, Mama," answered Little Brown Bear. "I'm thinking I might not do it anymore. Networking isn't so very much fun."

"Not much fun?" Mama injected, "well... sometimes things that are *new* don't feel like they're very fun."

"But, Mama — do you remember when you taught me how to fish last spring? *Fishing* was new to me, but it was always fun!"

"Sure, sure, Little Brown Bear... I know *just* what you mean. But don't forget, son, fishing comes easy to bears. But I don't know *anyone* who's a natural-born networker."

"Well, if you want to know the truth, I *was* having fun, today. You see Mr. Moon had helped me understand how to use my ears, and that *REALLY* changed the way I was able to network. At least for a time..."

Papa Bear took a thoughtful sip of his tea. "Sounds like Mr. Moon gave you good advice. What happened?"

"I don't know. One minute, Betsy Badger was telling me all about *Acorn Salties*; the next minute, I was all alone for the second straight day."

"Who is Betsy Badger?" asked Mama Bear.

"She's new. Her family moved here from Acorn Valley."

"Boy, that's a big change," added Papa. "How's she getting along?"

Little Brown Bear thought for a time. "I don't know. I *think* she's okay... I'm not sure I like her, though. She wasn't too keen on pairing up my Bright Pink Lemonade with her Acorn Salties."

"Poor thing," sympathized Mama Bear. "She's probably got enough new things on her plate without having to add Bright Pink Lemonade to the mix."

"I hadn't thought of it that way," admitted Little Brown Bear.

"Your mother's is very wise, son," said Papa Bear. "Mr. Moon is right about how being a good listener is a critical skill to any networker, but the *REASON* you listen is to learn about the other person."

"To learn and to CARE," added Mama Bear.

Little Brown Bear didn't say anything else. He just sat and thought about all Mama and Papa had said.



Mr. Owl Adds Another 'Layer' to the 'Cake'

Although Little Brown Bear had been soothed by the dinner conversation, he nevertheless found himself wide-awake in his bed. There was so much to think about, he just couldn't pack all his thoughts away for the night. He looked up at the shadows of the tree branches dancing on the ceiling. "Maybe Betsy Badger's not so bad after all," he said out loud. "Maybe, if I *cared* more about her Acorn Salties, she would care more about my Bright Pink Lemonade."

Just then, Little Brown Bear heard a familiar old voice outside his window.

Tu-whit tu-whoo! Tu-whit tu-whoo!
Networking is hard for any bear to do!

Little Brown Bear rolled back his bed sheets and went to his window. He pushed open the sash and all the sounds of the night gently entered in.

"Yes, Mr. Owl. Networking is awfully hard. But I'm learning each and every day!"

*I think it's good; I think it's grand,
That you let others take your hand!
Old Mr. Moon is as bright as can be.
He helps you learn, which helps you see!
And how lucky you are that your mom and your dad,
Are right by your side, through the good and the bad!
What wonderful gifts for a Little Brown Bear,
Why, the world is your oyster, if only you'd dare!*

Little Brown Bear smiled. "And let's not forget you, Mr. Owl! You help me, too!" Mr. Owl stutter-stepped happily on his branch.

Indeed I do! Tu-whit tu-whoo!
Tu-whit tu-whoo! Indeed I do!

"Yes, I must tell you, Mr. Owl, I'm feeling much better now than I was this afternoon," said Little Brown Bear. Mama and Papa told me all about *caring*. You see: it's not enough to *listen* to others... It's not enough to *learn* about others... You've got to *care* about others, as well."

Caring is lovely. I won't ever DENY it!
But there's one step beyond... and I urge you to TRY it!

Little Brown Bear cocked his head. "One step beyond..?" he puzzled. "Whatever do you mean, Mr. Owl?"

As if to emphasize the importance of what he was about to say, Mr. Owl flew up to Little Brown Bear's windowsill and lighted down, softly.

*Caring for others is certainly nice.
But if that's ALL you did, some might call it a vice.
Yes — for caring to count, and be more than mere chatter,
You've got to DO SOMETHING to make your cares matter.
Behaviors speak louder than thoughts — that's a fact,
So to make caring meaningful, first, you must ACT!!!*

And with that, Mr. Owl flew off into the night, leaving Little Brown Bear to ponder his parting words. Slowly, Little Brown Bear lowered his window sash until his reflection quietly presented itself on the inside of the window glass. He stared deeply into his own eyes for a long time before, finally, he saw in them the confident glimmer of true understanding.



Try, Try Again!

Little Brown Bear had been the very first to arrive at the base of Crooked Oak on this, the third day of the networking game. Before long, Muskrat and Betsy Badger arrived, with Possum and Porcupine not far behind. A few minutes later, Chickadee, L'il Fox, and White Rabbit made the gathering complete.

After L'il Fox welcomed them all, as he always did, Betsy Badger turned her back to Little Brown Bear and started having an animated discussion with White Rabbit. Little Brown Bear approached them and waited for the appropriate time to step into the conversation. At long last, the opportunity arrived; Little Brown Bear angled himself to face Betsy Badger, directly:

"Betsy," he began, "I have been wanting to apologize to you from the moment I woke up this morning."

Betsy Badger appeared somewhat surprised. "Apologize..? To *me*?"

"Yes, to you. Absolutely! I was so selfish to think only of myself when you were sharing with me all the interesting challenges you're facing," said Little Brown Bear. "If you can forgive me, I would love to show you a magnificent grove of oak trees I know about. My Papa used to take me there when I was a cub, and I can assure you that the acorns they produce might make you a little less homesick."

Betsy Badger smiled the biggest smile she'd smiled since her family had moved from Acorn Valley. Her eyes were sparkling, and when she spoke, her voice was tinged with excitement.

"I can't think of anything I'd rather see!" she exclaimed. "Is it far away?"

"It's not anywhere near as far as Acorn Valley," answered Little Brown Bear, "but we *will* have to pack a picnic as we will be gone for almost half a day."

"Oh, I love long hikes. And maybe you could bring some of your Bright Pink Lemonade!" suggested Betsy Badger. "I love lemonade when I'm thirsty!"

“Me, too!” said Little Brown Bear. “But tell me more about your Acorn Salties; they sound so delicious! How did you learn to make such a treat?”



Success!

As Betsy Badger and Little Brown Bear continued to talk and talk and talk... and plan and plan and plan... Mr. Wind began to blow through the treetops, again. And if you listened very carefully, you might have heard something that sounded a little like this:

*So now ends the story of Little Brown Bear,
Whose networking lessons made him more aware.
No more does self-interest lead him to attack!
Today, he just wisely works hard to attract!*

The End

