

## **Buster Tries to Escape and is Discovered**

by George Ethelbert Walsh

When the men left the room and closed the window after them, Buster and the little girl felt greatly relieved. Satisfied that the bear had not climbed in the open window, the searching party turned their attention elsewhere. But the danger wasn't over yet, and Nell knew it. She patted the top of the bed-clothes, and whispered:

“Keep quiet a little longer, Buster. Here comes some one up the stairs.”

Buster grunted and lay as still as a mouse. There was a knocking on the door, and when the little girl opened it her father appeared. He was very white and trembling.

“A bear that escaped from the railroad wreck is roaming around here, Nell,” he said. “I was terribly afraid he had climbed up the shed to your room. I'm so glad you're safe.”

He kissed her and seemed greatly relieved to find his daughter safe. He crossed the room and looked out of the window. Then he returned to her.

“Perhaps you're safer here until they find him,” he added. “Stay right here in your room, and keep the door and window locked. I'll come and tell you when they find him.”

The little girl could have laughed in her glee, for this was just what she wanted. She was terribly afraid Buster would smother under all those clothes and make a noise. She couldn't get her father out of the room quick enough.

When he was gone, and the door locked, she ran to the bed, and threw back the clothes. Buster was all curled up just as she had left him. But he was fast asleep! It was a warm, comfortable bed, and after his long run and heavy breakfast of pies, rolls, bread and milk it had seemed impossible to keep his eyes open for long. And the moment he closed them he was sound asleep.

The little girl sat down on the floor, and laughed until the tears streamed down her cheeks. Buster woke with a start and blinked at her. He couldn't for several minutes imagine where he was.

“Oh, Buster,” she exclaimed finally, “I thought you were being smothered to death, and you were so comfortable you fell asleep.”

Buster struggled to his feet and began chuckling. It made him happy to see the merriment of the little girl. She pulled the clothes up and flung them back on the bed. She was a very prim little housekeeper, for she was not satisfied until the pillows were brushed off and patted in position and the sheets and covers carefully smoothed out.

Buster watched her in silence, and then in his clumsy way offered to help, but he pulled the clothes so hard, and made such a general mess of it, that he stopped when the girl sat down and laughed again at him.

“I never saw anybody so clumsy, Buster,” she said. “No, you can't help any more. You sit down

there in the middle of the floor until I'm through. Then we'll have breakfast together."

The moment she uttered these words she stopped. Have breakfast together? How could she arrange that? How, in fact, could she manage to get Buster any breakfast without somebody discovering him in her room?

What did bears eat anyway? And how much? Goodness, from the size of him, he might eat her father out of house and home! The little girl felt terribly distressed all of a sudden. She had saved Buster from his pursuers, but now that she had him what was she going to do with him?

You couldn't keep bears in a bed-room or closet, nor could you chain them up in the back yard like a dog? Everybody would be afraid to visit the house, and all the servants would leave. What could she do?

"Buster, haven't you any home you can go to?" she asked suddenly, turning to him. Then she remembered what her father had told her. The train carrying the circus animals had been wrecked, and some of the people and animals killed. Of course, the circus people would like Buster back again, but was he happy there? Or did he run away because they treated him cruelly?

"Buster, do you want to go back to the circus?" she added after a pause. "For if you do I'll have to tell them you're here, and if they want you they'll call for you."

Now Buster had no desire just then to return to the circus. He thought it would be much nicer to live with the little girl and play with her. So he shook his head vigorously, which made the girl sigh, and say solemnly: "Then you won't have to go back! I'll keep you here!"

She cleaned up things in the room, and dressed herself. Her breakfast was waiting for her downstairs, and if she didn't go soon her father would be up after her.

"Buster," she said once more, laying a hand on his head, "I'm going down now to get my breakfast, and then I'll bring you something to eat—some sugar and coffee, and jam and—and—what do you like to eat?"

Buster only grinned and shook his head. The little girl was puzzled. "I know what I'll do," she added, smiling. "I'll ask my father. He's wise and knows everything, and he'll tell me what bears eat. I know he'll like you, Buster."

Of course, Buster wasn't quite so sure of this, but he had no way to express his doubts. He heard the little girl running down the stairs, and then for a long time he was left alone. It was a queer situation for him. He walked across the room, and the floor squeaked with every tread. Then he looked out of the window and immediately ducked his head, for there was a man and dog below on guard.

He waited a long time for the little girl to return, and then grew restless. He tried the door, and finding it unlocked opened it and stuck his head out. All was quiet in the house. He couldn't hear any one around.

A great fear that something had happened to the little girl suddenly made him very anxious. Perhaps the men and dogs had captured her, and were holding her because she had hid him in her bed-room. This thought made him angry. If she was in trouble and needed him, he would go to her

assistance.

Buster closed the door softly behind him and started down the stairs. Now that he was going to the little girl's assistance he wasn't afraid of anything. He hadn't been afraid to attack all the animals in the big cage when Chiquita was in danger. Then why should he be afraid now!

Down, down the stairs he clumped, his great weight making each step squeak and groan. Nobody was in the hall below, and the whole house seemed quiet and deserted. Had the men taken the little girl away with them? Buster uttered an angry growl and took another step down.

Then directly in front of him appeared a man. He stepped out of a doorway so suddenly that both bear and man were surprised. Buster recognized him immediately as the gentleman who held the little girl's hands that day she fed him a stick of candy.

The man started suddenly, stared at the bear on the stairs, and backed slowly away. "Nell! Nell!" he called. "Keep away! Go back! The bear is in the house! Run for your life and tell the men!"

But little Nell, instead of running away, pushed past her father and surprised him so that he nearly dropped down with fright. She ran straight up to Buster and hugged him. Then laughing she turned to her father.

"It's only Buster, and he wouldn't hurt me. Why, he's been in my bed-room all the time!"

What they decided to do with Buster after that will be told in the next story.

Source:

Walsh, George Ethelbert. "Buster Bear Tries to Escape and is Discovered." *Buster the Big Brown Bear*. Chicago: The John C. Winston Company, 1922. 111 – 118. Electronic.