

WHY BUSTER BEAR APPEARS TO HAVE NO TAIL

Peter Rabbit had something new to bother his bump of curiosity. And it did bother it a lot. He had just seen Buster Bear for the first time, and what do you think had impressed him most? Well, it wasn't Buster's great size, or wonderful strength, or big claws, or deep, grumbly-rumbly voice. No, Sir, it wasn't one of these. It was the fact that Buster Bear seemed to have no tail! Peter couldn't get over that. He almost pitied Buster Bear. You see, Peter has a great admiration for fine tails. He has always been rather ashamed of the funny little one he has himself. Still, it is a real tail, and he has often comforted himself with that thought.

So the first thing Peter did when he saw Buster Bear was to look to see what kind of a tail he had. Just imagine how surprised he was when he couldn't make sure that Buster had any tail at all. There was something that might, just might, be meant for a tail, and Peter wasn't even sure of that. If it was, it was so ridiculously small that Peter felt that he had no reason to be ashamed of his own tail.

He was still thinking about this when he started for home. Half way there, he paused, saw that the way to the Smiling Pool was clear, and suddenly made up his mind to ask Grandfather Frog about Buster Bear's tail. Off he started, lipperty-lipperty-lip.

"Oh, Grandfather Frog," he panted, as soon as he reached the edge of the Smiling Pool, "has Buster Bear got a tail?"

Grandfather Frog regarded Peter in silence for a minute or two.

Then very slowly he asked: "What are your eyes for, Peter Rabbit? Couldn't you see whether or not he has a tail?"

"No, Grandfather Frog. I really couldn't tell whether he has a tail or not," replied Peter quite truthfully. "At first I thought he hadn't, and then I thought he might have. If he has, it doesn't seem to me that it is enough to call a really truly tail."

"Well, it is a really truly tail, even if you don't think so," retorted Grandfather Frog, "and he has it for a reminder."

"A reminder!" exclaimed Peter, looking very much puzzled. "A reminder of what?"

Grandfather Frog cleared his throat two or three times. "Sit down, Peter, and learn a lesson from the tale of the tail of Old King Bear," said he very seriously.

"You remember that once upon a time, long ago, when the world was young, Old King Bear ruled in the Green Forest, and everybody brought tribute to him."

Peter nodded and Grandfather Frog went on.

"Now Old King Bear was the great-great-ever-so-great grandfather of Buster Bear, and he looked very much as Buster does, except that he didn't have any tail at all, not the least sign of a tail. At first, before he was made king of the Green Forest, he didn't mind this at all. In fact, he was rather pleased that he didn't have a tail. You see, he couldn't think of any earthly use he would have for a tail, and so he was glad that he hadn't got one to bother with.

"This was just Old Mother Nature's view of the matter. She had done her very best to give everybody everything that they really needed, and not to give them things which they didn't need. She couldn't see that Mr. Bear had the least need of a tail, and so she hadn't given him one. Mr. Bear was perfectly happy without one, and was so busy getting enough to eat that he didn't have time for silly thoughts or vain wishes.

"Then he was made king over all the people of the Green Forest, and his word was law. It was a very great honor, and for a while he felt it so and did his best to rule wisely. He went about just as before, hunting for his living, and had no more time than before for foolish thoughts or vain wishes. But after a little, the little people over whom he ruled began to bring him tribute, so that he no longer had to hunt for enough to eat. Indeed, he had so much brought to him, that he couldn't begin to eat all of it, and he grew very dainty and fussy about what he did eat. Having nothing to do but eat and sleep, he grew very fat and lazy, as is the case with most people who have nothing to do. He grew so fat that when he walked, he puffed and wheezed. He grew so lazy that he wanted to be waited on all the time.

"It happened about this time that he overheard Mr. Fox talking to Mr. Wolf when they both thought him asleep. 'A pretty kind of a king, he is!' sneered Mr. Fox. 'The idea of a king without a tail!'

"'That's so,' assented Mr. Wolf. 'Why, even that little upstart, Mr. Rabbit, has got a make-believe tail.'"

Grandfather Frog's eyes twinkled as he said this, and Peter looked very much embarrassed. But he didn't say anything, so Grandfather Frog went on.

"Old King Bear pretended to wake up just then, and right away Mr. Fox and Mr. Wolf were as polite and smiling as you please and began to flatter him. They told him how proud they were of their king, and how handsome he was, and a lot of other nice things, all of which he had heard often before and had believed. He pretended to believe them now, but after they were through paying their respects and had gone away, he kept turning over and over in his mind what he had overheard them say when they thought he was asleep.

"After that he couldn't think of anything but the fact that he hadn't any tail. He took particular notice of all who came to pay him tribute, and he saw that every one of them had a tail. Some had long tails; some had short tails; some had handsome tails and some had homely tails; but everybody had a tail of some kind. The more he tried not to think of these tails, the more he did think of them. The more he thought of them, the more discontented he grew because he had none. He didn't stop to think that probably all of them had use for their tails. No, Sir, he didn't think of that. Everybody else had a tail, and he hadn't. He felt that it was a disgrace that he, the king, should have no tail. He brooded over it so much that he lost his appetite and grew cross and peevish.

"Then along came Old Mother Nature to see how things were going in the Green Forest. Of course she saw right away that something was wrong with Old King Bear. When she asked him what the matter was, he was ashamed to tell her at first. But after a little he told her that he wanted a tail; that he could never again be happy unless he had a tail. She told him that he hadn't the least use in the world for a tail, and that he wouldn't be any happier if he had one. Nothing that she could say made any difference—he wanted a tail. Finally she gave him one.

"For a few days Old King Bear was perfectly happy. He spent all his spare time admiring his new tail. He called the attention of all his subjects to it, and they all told him that it was a very wonderful tail and was very becoming to him. But it wasn't long before he found that his new tail was very much in the way. It bothered him when he walked. It was in the way when he sat down. It was a nuisance when he climbed a tree. He didn't have a single use for it, and yet he had to carry it with him wherever he went. Worse still, he overheard little Mr. Squirrel and Mr. Possum making fun of it. And then he discovered that the very ones who admired his tail so to his face were laughing at him and poking fun at him behind his back.

"And then Old King Bear wished that he *hadn't* a tail more than ever he wished that he *did* have a tail. Again he lost his appetite and grew cross and peevish, so that no one dared come near him. So matters went from bad to worse, until once more Old Mother Nature visited the Green Forest to see how things were. Very humbly Old King Bear went down on his knees and begged her to take away his tail. At first

Old Mother Nature refused, but he begged so hard and promised so faithfully never again to be discontented, that finally she relented and took away his tail, all but just a wee little bit. That she left as a reminder lest he should forget the lesson he had learned and should again grow envious.

"And every bear since that long-ago day has carried about with him a reminder—you can hardly call it a real tail—of the silly, foolish discontent of Old King Bear," concluded Grandfather Frog.

Peter Rabbit scratched one long ear thoughtfully as he replied: "Thank you, Grandfather Frog. I think that hereafter I will be quite content with what I've got and never want things it is not meant that I should have."

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