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- ✧ The lady in the manor-house had a bear as pet.
- ✧ It was a most friendly bear, who loved vegetables, apples and honey.
- ✧ He roamed freely during the day, but was put on the chain at night.

THERE was once a lady who lived in an old manor-house on the border of a big forest. This lady had a pet bear she was very fond of. It had been found in the forest, half dead of hunger, so small and helpless that it had to be brought up on the bottle by the lady and the old cook. This was several years ago and now it had grown up to a big bear, so big and strong that he could have slain a cow and carried it away between his two paws if he had wanted to. But he did not want to; he was a most amiable bear who did not dream of harming anybody, man or beast. He used to sit outside his kennel and look with his small intelligent eyes most amicably at the cattle grazing in the field near by. The three shaggy mountain ponies in the stable knew him well and did not mind in the least when he shuffled into the stable with his mistress. The children used to ride on his back and had more than once been found asleep in his kennel between his two paws. The three dogs loved to play all sorts of games with him, pull his ears and his stump of a tail



and tease him in every way, but he did not mind it in the least. He had never tasted meat; he ate the same food as the dogs and often out of the same plate—bread, porridge, potato, cabbage, turnip. He had a fine appetite, and his friend, the cook, saw to it that he got his fill. Bears are vegetarians if they have a chance, and fruit is what they like best. In the autumn he used to sit and look with wistful eyes at the ripening apples in the orchard, and in his young days he had been sometimes unable to resist the temptation to climb the tree and help himself to a handful of them. Bears look clumsy and slow in their movements, but try a bear with an apple tree and you will soon find out that he can easily beat any school boy at that game. Now he had learnt that it was against the law, but he kept his small eyes wide open for any apples that fell to the ground. There had also been some difficulties about the beehives; he had been punished for this by being put on the chain for two days with a bleeding nose and he had never done it again. Otherwise he was never put on the chain except for the

night and quite rightly so, for a bear, like a dog, is apt to get somewhat ill-tempered if kept on the chain, and no wonder.

- ✧ The lady visited her sister every Sunday, leaving the bear on the chain the whole afternoon.
- ✧ One Sunday, while walking through the dense forest, she found him following her.
- ✧ She was so angry with the disobedient bear that she hit him on the nose with her umbrella. But the bear was really friendly...

He was also put on the chain on Sundays when his mistress went to spend the afternoon with her married sister who lived in a solitary house on the other side of the mountain-lake, a good hour's walk through the dense forest. It was not supposed to be good for him to wander about in the forest with all its temptations; it was better to be on the safe side. He was also a bad sailor and had once taken such a fright at a sudden gust of wind that he had upset the boat and he and his mistress had to swim to the shore. Now he knew quite well what it meant when his mistress put him on the chain on Sundays, with a friendly tap on his head and the promise of an apple on her return if he had been good during her absence. He was sorry but resigned, like a good dog, when his mistress tells him he cannot come with her for a walk.

One Sunday when the lady had chained him up as usual and was about half-way through the forest, she suddenly thought she heard the cracking of a tree-branch on the winding footpath behind her. She looked back and was horrified to see the bear coming along full speed. Bears look as if they move along quite slowly but they shuffle along much faster than a trotting horse. In a minute he had joined her, panting and sniffing, to take up his usual



place, dog-fashion, at her heels. The lady was very angry, she was already late for lunch, there was no time to take him back home, she did not want him to come with her, and, besides, it was very naughty of him to have disobeyed her. She told him in her severest voice to go back at once, menacing him with her parasol. He stopped a moment and looked at her with his cunning eyes, but did not want to go back and kept on sniffing at her. When the lady saw that he had even lost his new collar, she got still more angry and hit him on the nose with her parasol so hard that it broke in two. He stopped again, shook his head and opened his big mouth several times as if he wanted to say something. Then he turned round and began to shuffle



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The Bear Story



parasol: umbrella



back the way he had come stopping now and then to look at the lady till at last she lost sight of him.

When the lady came home in the evening, the bear was sitting in his usual place outside his kennel looking very sorry for himself. The lady was still very angry. She went up to him and began to scold him most severely and said he would have to be chained for two more days. The old cook who loved the bear as if he had been her son rushed out from the kitchen very angry.

“What are you scolding him for, missus,” said the cook; “he has been as good as gold the whole day, bless him! He has been sitting here quite still on his haunches as meek as an angel, looking the whole time towards the gate for you to come back.”

AXEL MUNTHE



Exercises

Answer the following questions.

1. Where did the lady find the bear cub? How did she bring it up?
2. The bear grew up but “he was a most amiable bear”. Give three examples to prove this.
3. What did the bear eat? There were two things he was not allowed to do. What were they?
4. When was the bear tied up with a chain? Why?
5. What happened one Sunday when the lady was going to her sister’s house? What did the lady do? What was the bear’s reaction?
6. Why was the bear looking sorry for himself in the evening? Why did the cook get angry with her mistress?

Discuss the following topics in groups.

1. Most people keep dogs and cats as pets. Can you think of some unusual pets that people keep?
2. The second bear did not attack the lady because he was afraid of her. Do you agree?

Whose Side?

Once during the American Civil War a woman said to Abraham Lincoln, “Oh, Mr President, I feel so sure God is on our side, don’t you?”

“Ma’ am,” said the President, “what should be of greater concern to us is whether we are on God’s side.”

