

THE BEAR

By ROLAND BURNHAM MOLINEUX,
Author of "The Room with the Little Door" and
"The Vice Admiral of the Blue."

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THE old man bent over his work in the twilight, his deft fingers busy with the fashioning of strange bits of wood which were lying about him. Patches of fur and smears of glue added to the mystery of his occupation. The old fingers trembled, but they were skilful still. He fitted the parts together, and behold! Old Pete had made a bear.

A wonderful fellow, a bear, with joints, every one of which could move. It could stand, or kneel, or lie down. It could strike all kinds of attitudes. It was a bear the like of which no forest had ever seen. It was a Teddy Bear. It was more than all this, it was a labor of love—a gift for the only friend Pete had in the whole world. What a contrast they made—old Pete and this friend!

Pete, in the evening of life, was bent and gray. His face was seamed with deep lines, his eyes were weak and watery and his step had lost its springiness.

Pete was 70 years old. His friend was a veteran of four. A big red apple of a boy with blue eyes.

It was not strange that these two should be such friends. Pete was an old-time crook who had erred against

chances around the warden's house and once, in spring and summer he worked in madam's flower garden. All the year he, figuratively speaking, ran errands even outside the prison gate, and even alone.

There was no fear that Pete would run away. Where could he go? What could he do even should he escape? There was another reason why he should not run away. The thrill of unselfish devotion had come to this man very late in life, but he had found it. He did not know that it was unselfish—he never analyzed it. For the first time in his life affection had crept into and warmed his heart.

Paul adored old Pete and Pete worshipped the little fellow. Each supplemented what the other lacked. They were the future and the past.

Paul was all action and anticipation. Pete was memory and caution. Paul thought about the things he would like to do. Pete thought about the things he had done and wished he hadn't.

They were playmates. The old, worn out criminal enchanted the little fellow with his stories and the games which he invented. Paul looked upon Pete with profound respect. He gloried in the tales the Lifer told him—wild, hairbreadth stories of impossible happenings. No, not impossible! The eyes of childhood see so many things which are hidden from us—see them in imagination, and believe. Surely what one sees is real, and what is real is true.

The dexterity he had learned in the days of active crime—the skill he had acquired in making tools that could not be bought, and in opening safes with them—could be utilized now.

But would it please his friend? Could the Teddy Bear compete with the expensive presents?

It was a sunny day when Pete, with the Teddy Bear, went up to the nursery where Paul was busy with a nutritious array of red toy soldiers and surrounded with other gifts.

Pete presented the bear. The other playthings were all forgotten, the soldiers brushed aside.

Pete was overjoyed. The reception of his gift brought the light to his weak old eyes and added springiness to his weary feet.

It would not do to let a bear roam about and frighten other people. So they went hunting. What a day's sport! Was it only make believe? Was it only in imagination that Paul no longer wore a blue checked pinafore? Had it not really changed into a hunting costume of Lincoln green? Were not the little white socks high leather boots just like those pictures in the picture books? Pete made a paper hat and placed a saucy feather in it from the feather duster. Surely that was real. Then, so was the hunting!

Paul and Pete pursued the bear relentlessly over the endless plains and through the dark green forests of the nursery. Paul scurried on in advance,



SO PETE WENT AND FOUND HIM
CURLED UP IN THE CORNER
PLAYING "POSSUM"...

up—that strong cell from which nothing could get away. Paul, with his flushed face and bright eyes, enjoyed all the delights of a well earned rear and a supper of bread and milk. He told his mother all about his adventures. She understood everything. She admired his bravery. Was he not afraid? Afraid? Not he.

But almost before Paul's last mouthful was swallowed the little head had nodded, the brave huntsman was very tired.

They carried him away tenderly and put him to bed in the nursery. The much hunted bear lay in the further corner. They left the little hunter and went away. Paul should have gone right to sleep, but he was too excited. It was very dark in the nursery, dark and quiet. Then by and by the rain began to patter outside against the window panes. Paul remembered how so eagerly he had played his mind. It was very dark in the nursery, dark and quiet. Then the wind sighed and moaned in the trees outside—

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dark, when there is no one near—especially a bear that you have beaten and insulted. Paul struggled with his anguish for a moment, and then—

Paul howled.

Paul cried louder and louder. His mother came and tried to quiet him, but Paul remembered how he had slapped the bear's face and refused to be comforted.

Then he sent for his father, the warden. He came. They could not understand what Paul was trying to tell them. It was something about the bear. So they brought it to him.

But he only screamed the louder. They took it away again, but even then he would not stop. How could he tell what it was doing? They could do nothing with him. He screamed for Pete.

They then brought the old Lifer. Pete understood. He lifted Paul high up in his arms. Paul carried his small feet so that the bear, who lurked somewhere upon the floor, could not snap them off. There was a light now, of course, but Paul knew that the bear was somewhere just beyond the circle of light in the darkness—growling!

It was a cowardly beast. He dared not come out in the light where Pete could see him. So Pete went and found him curled up in the corner playing "possum"—makes a note of that, students of natural history. He was a very wary and deceitful bear. Paul did not believe in him and cried on.

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THE OTHER PLAYTHINGS
WERE ALL FORGOTTEN.

the dictates of society so many times that he was destined to spend the remainder of his days inside the great prison gates.

Pete wore stripes, Paul a white pinafore and kilt. Pete was a "Lifer." Paul was the warden's little boy.

Paul lived in the big executive mansion just inside the prison gate; he lived there with his dear father and mother.

Pete lived all alone in a little cell, in which he was locked up every night, and from which no one could possibly get out—without the key. Paul knew this. Had not Pete himself affirmed it? Old Pete was a "trusty." He did

A great event was about to happen. Paul was to have a birthday. Birthdays had formerly been things quite out of the pale of the Lifer's interest. The only anniversaries he remembered were those that marked the years of his incarceration. This was changed now. Birthdays had become realities of importance.

But what could he give to Paul, who had everything the heart could wish for? Paul was a capitalist in toys. Loving hearts would fill the nursery with gifts. What, then, could the old Lifer offer? Pete thought long and hard. Then joy filled his being. He flew to the wood carving shop. Ah, yes!

Pete followed rather painfully, because of certain rheumatic twinges, but both were filled with pure enjoyment.

Paul, because of the excited flutter of the warm little heart that responded so eagerly to the play of his mind. Pete, because the child was happy, because he had made him so.

How careful one must be in the pursuit of bears! How brave, how persistent! Over and over again Paul's little gun went "bang!" and the Teddy Bear was pronounced dead, for nothing could live before that fatal little red broom along which Paul sighted with dancing eyes.

When Paul said "bang!" a sure enough bullet from it pierced the heart of anything at which Paul aimed. To be sure, the bullet was only a rubber ball which old Pete threw with more or less accuracy.

How the bear growled and snapped and bit! How delicious and dangerous he was! It fought back, stood up and tried to claw every one. How brave was Paul!

They pursued the bear to the tops of the trees (the top of the trees was the bureau)—of course bears climb trees; they tracked him through the snow up to the loftiest peaks of the mountains, among the clouds (the clouds were on the mantelpiece), far above where balloons can go. No bears there? That only proves how little is known about bears and their habits. Paul could tell that bears were everywhere, wherever they decided to hunt them.

It was strange that although Pete was so much larger he never could kill the bear. It was only Paul's shot that ever really wounded the vicious animal, and the fact that Paul had to push him over only shows how deadly was the shot, since he must have died before he had time to fall.

It was strange, too, that as the day wore on the bear, which would not die, even though he was killed so many times, grew larger and larger, until an elephant was a mere pigmy beside it.

It became cold on the mountain top, so Pete and Paul built a camp and rested under their tent. Paul's mother served a cake with four milk candies. The candles were the camp fire.

Alas! While they tarried the bear escaped down the other side of the mountain into an impenetrable jungle, a tangle of chairs and tables. It began to devour the native children. The king of that unhappy country offered hundreds of hundreds of pennies to the brave hunter who dared to enter the jungle and destroy the dreadful invader, who had now grown to monstrous size, larger than three large elephants.

Alone Paul followed the bear through the gloomy cavern—under the bed. With the king, his queen and a beautiful princess looking on, Paul killed the mammoth bear by beating him to death with his own two hands. It was a wonderful capture! As a reward the princess offered Paul her undying love and candy. Paul took the candy.

Then the sunlight began to fade out of the nursery and the strenuous day was over. Pete bade Paul goodby and went back to his little cell to be locked



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