

The Bear's Tale

By Anne O'Brien

Teddy is my name. My name is boringly common apparently. If I was another bear I would have the same name. Most of us are named Teddy after the former United States president, Theodore Roosevelt, whose nickname was Teddy. He hated the nickname but his supporters called him that. Apparently he had gone on a hunting trip in Mississippi; a guide had caught a bear, stunned it and tied it to a tree and suggested that the president shoot it. Roosevelt felt that was unsportsmanlike and refused, sparing the bear. Manufacturers produced a well stuffed bear and called it Teddy. It became a best seller, brought the president's popularity up greatly, and the company made a fortune.

I am a rather mature bear having been manufactured in the 1950s in the UK. I was bought by a toy shop in Manchester. I was very lucky; I was purchased as a gift for a grandchild. Life was quite happy for a number of years and I was treated quite well, cuddled quite a bit by the grandchild, even getting an occasional washing. I didn't like it much but I suppose I came out clean, if wet. My owner would put me out in the sun if it was shining; if not I got a rub with a towel. I did prefer the sun rather than being rubbed dry.

The child was called Chloe and was from a wealthy family. One summer we went on a seaside trip, and on the beach one day there was a storm and I was blown away. When the storm calmed down I could hear Chloe crying out for me. I had been blown into the dunes and was lost and alone for the first time. Unfortunately despite the parents and other people searching for me I was not found. As the days passed I became very

lonely and was desperate for company and I had sand in my eyes. OK, I had a fur coat so wasn't very cold. But I remembered years when it had rained and snowed so the wish for an owner was in my mind.

One day a group with a dog came up to the dunes and the dog found me and picked me up in his teeth and brought me over to the family. When one of the little girls saw me she tried to grab me. The dog resisted and drew back holding me by my right ear when the girl pulled again. She succeeded in taking me but a small part of my ear was torn off. I survived and was taken home by the family.

They expressed their delight at acquiring a big Teddy since we were so expensive. They were a middle-class type, not too rich or poor. I had some good times and they avoided leaving me alone with the dog, after that first unfortunate incident.

We lived in a lower-middle-class part of town. (They considered it to be middle-class but who was I to contradict them?) There was a father and mother, one boy and two girls. The girl that claimed me was 9-years-old and was called Cleo, close enough to my first owner, Chloe. She was kind to me and I slept in her bed at night where she gave me a kiss before going to sleep.

They didn't go on holidays a lot. That year, when they found me, was their first holiday in three years. Money wasn't too plentiful; the father worked in a car assembly factory; the mother did occasional days' cleaning in larger-sized houses where she would bring her two girls, if they were holidaying from school. So we saw how the other half lived -- swimming pool and four cars.

Oh, it was very pleasant to live in luxury with no money worries. Life was quite simple apart from the father getting drunk on payday and shouting at the children sometimes. Once I did hear him shout at his wife, but the next day they were kissing and all was forgiven. The family also had a cat which left me alone even though I think he was jealous of the girl's attention. I quite like cats, but it was probably safer to leave them alone. This one rubbed up against me once and I could feel how soft and warm her fur was.

One day, we went to the posh house and, unfortunately, a gang of three men broke in whilst the owners were out, to allow my family's mum to do the cleaning. The men put us into the kitchen, and disconnected the phone line. With the door locked, we could hear them ransacking the rooms up and downstairs. Fortunately, at least, we could have some tea and biscuits whilst we were waiting.

When they had finished, after what seemed like several hours (it was actually only an hour), they came to the kitchen, unlocked the door, and advised they were leaving. One of the younger of them spotted me and said he was taking the bear which might be worth a few bob. Cleo, the little girl, was shocked and started crying. He threw over five pounds and told her to buy a doll. I suppose I was lucky to be taken with no force being exerted. I kept quiet, as was my usual reaction. The thieves packed a lot of electrical goods and boxes of jewellery, some silver trophies and some art into their car. A short distance away, we pulled into another garage where they disembarked. The three of them went inside a small house not dissimilar to the house we had left earlier in the day.

They were not as wealthy as the first people I lived with; probably about the same as the second: lower-middle-class. There was a lot of suspect activity late in the evenings. There were a lot of people coming and going, probably buying and selling goods on the black-market. There appeared to be a lot of cash exchanged. Presumably, they were a group of small-time crooks. The young lad brought me to his bedroom and placed me on his pillow; another bed - another owner.

A few years passed. I think he first liked me, then grew tired of me. And, one day, his mother said she was going to the charity shop if anybody had any goods they wanted to dispose of, she would take them to donate. Whilst the young lad had expected to get some extra money for me, all his endeavours failed, so he told her to take me - which she did - and put me in the bundle of goods to donate.

When I - and the other abandoned goods - were brought to the charity shop, we were unpacked and displayed on shelves. Since some of the other goods were a little tatty, I was not impressed with my companions. I felt a little superior even though I knew it was wrong. Being left for the night, I heard strange, scurrying noises and assumed mice or - perish the thought - rats. I was a little concerned. The shop was cold at night and dark. But, the next morning, a lady started to put us in an orderly fashion. The manager said that there were two students coming, on work experience, so they should be left to organise and price us.

The girls were doing a sales and marketing course so the work experience was to show them the real world. When the students arrived, I was astounded. One was called Chloe and I recognised her gentle voice. We were put into groups and my

group was given to the other girl, Lily. I heard Lily calling Chloe to take the group that I wasn't in. I was so disappointed that I wasn't in Chloe's group since she may have recognised me. I thought long and hard about how I was going to attract her attention. I decided to preserve my energy and wait until the girls were going home before trying to launch myself onto the floor. I was keeping an ear on their discussions and found that Chloe still lived at home. How was I going to get her to look at me, and remember the lovely times we had together?

Unfortunately, the girls left by the back door that evening. So my second plan was to try and launch myself, the next morning, when she arrived for training.

I heard the girls coming into the shop and used all my energy to launch, unfortunately too soon. I landed on the floor, about 10 feet in front of her, and was swept up by the manager who was really surprised at my appearance. He started to look at my body, thinking there must be a spring or something to have propelled me. A little surprised to find nothing, he made a mental note to keep an eye on me. (Teddies can often hear mental notes.) He mentioned the incident to the two work experience students. He had placed me back on the shelf where I had been. The girls thought he was hallucinating and suggested that he have a cup of tea to relax. I was angry at him; why didn't he mind his own business and leave me to Chloe to retrieve?

Anyway, the students got on with their chores and broke for lunch at the appropriate time. There was a small canteen where they had sandwiches and a cup or two of tea. They left the door open and I could hear their conversation. The girl that had me in her group, started talking about the bear (that was me). She

suggested that Chloe have a look at me, just to see if she found anything different about me.

Chloe came to check me, to establish if there was anything odd about me. (Did I say that Chloe had embroidered a flower motif on me?) When she looked at me more closely, she noticed the motif and couldn't believe it was her handiwork as a child. She said to her workmate that I was a teddy that she had lost many years ago. She went to the manager and asked if it was possible to buy me. The manager said it wasn't company policy to allow staff to buy goods, but then he saw the tears filling Chloe's eyes. He said he would check with head-office to see if there were any exceptions. "Leave it with me until the next day."

Chloe came back to me and asked if I'd missed her and explained to me the arrangement. I, of course, had heard the conversation so knew the details. That was the longest night I could remember; I was trembling with anticipation and I knew Chloe was excited too. When we heard, in the morning, that it was possible for Chloe to buy me, I was so glad and looked forward to going back to the old house and seeing all the people I had known, years before.

When Chloe finished the training, the manager told the two girls to leave a little early. I was happy to leave the charity shop and go to my old home. Chloe gave me a big kiss and told me that everything would be alright and I had confidence in her. She brought me home to her bedroom, which had had a change of colour since I lived there. Chloe told me, that evening, that she'd had a few boyfriends since my departure; some had been OK, others not so. She had no boyfriend, at the moment, but

said she was glad to have me back to share her bed. As an old saying goes, “Everything comes to him that waits”.