

**THE ADVENTURES OF
BUSTER BEAR**

BY

THORNTON W. BURGESS

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Buster blinked his greedy little eyes rapidly and looked again. *Frontispiece.*

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Buster Blinked His Greedy Little Eyes Rapidly and Looked Again

"Here's your trout, Mr. Otter," said he

"You take my advice, Little Joe Otter," continued Grandfather Frog

Reddy glared across the Smiling Pool at Peter

Buster Bear was running away too

Those who could fly, flew. Those who could climb, climbed

THE ADVENTURES OF BUSTER BEAR

I

BUSTER BEAR GOES FISHING

Buster Bear yawned as he lay on his comfortable bed of leaves and watched the first early morning sunbeams creeping through the Green Forest to chase out the Black Shadows. Once more he yawned, and slowly got to his feet and shook himself. Then he walked over to a big pine-tree, stood up on his hind legs, reached as high up on the trunk of the tree as he could, and scratched the bark with his great claws. After that he yawned until it seemed as if his jaws would crack, and then sat down to think what he wanted for breakfast.

While he sat there, trying to make up his mind what would taste best, he was listening to the sounds that told of the waking of all the little people who live in the Green Forest. He heard Sammy Jay way off in the distance screaming, "Thief! Thief!" and grinned. "I wonder," thought Buster, "if some one has stolen Sammy's breakfast, or if he has stolen the breakfast of some one else. Probably he is the thief himself."

He heard Chatterer the Red Squirrel scolding as fast as he could make his tongue go and working himself into a terrible rage. "Must be that Chatterer got out of bed the wrong way this morning," thought he.

He heard Blacky the Crow cawing at the top of his lungs, and he knew by the sound that Blacky was getting into mischief of some kind. He heard the sweet voices of happy little singers, and they were good to hear. But most of all he listened to a merry, low, silvery laugh that never stopped but went on and on, until he just felt as if he must laugh too. It was the voice of the Laughing Brook. And as Buster listened it suddenly came to him just what he wanted for breakfast.

"I'm going fishing," said he in his deep grumbly-rumbly voice to no one in particular. "Yes, Sir, I'm going fishing. I want some fat trout for my breakfast."

He shuffled along over to the Laughing Brook, and straight to a little pool of which he knew, and as he drew near he took the greatest care not to make the teeniest, weeniest bit of noise. Now it just happened that early as he was, some one was before Buster Bear. When he came in sight of the little pool, who should he see but another fisherman there, who had already caught a fine fat trout. Who was it? Why, Little Joe Otter to be sure. He was just climbing up the bank with the fat trout in his mouth. Buster Bear's own mouth watered as he saw it. Little Joe sat down on the bank and prepared to enjoy his breakfast. He hadn't seen Buster Bear, and he didn't know that he or any one else was anywhere near.

Buster Bear tiptoed up very softly until he was right behind Little Joe Otter. "Woof, woof!" said he in his deepest, most grumbly-rumbly voice. "That's a very fine looking trout. I wouldn't mind if I had it myself."

Little Joe Otter gave a frightened squeal and without even turning to see who was speaking dropped his fish and dived headfirst into the Laughing Brook. Buster Bear sprang forward and with one of his big paws caught the fat trout just as it was slipping back into the water.

"Here's your trout, Mr. Otter," said he, as Little Joe put his head out of water to see who had frightened him so. "Come and get it."



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**Here's your trout, Mr. Otter, said he.
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But Little Joe wouldn't. The fact is, he was afraid to. He snarled at Buster Bear and called him a thief and everything bad he could think of. Buster didn't seem to mind. He chuckled as if he thought it all a great joke and repeated his invitation to Little Joe to come and get his fish. But Little Joe just turned his back and went off down the Laughing Brook in a great rage.

"It's too bad to waste such a fine fish," said Buster thoughtfully. "I wonder what I'd better do with it." And while he was wondering, he ate it all up. Then he started down the Laughing Brook to try to catch some for himself.

II

LITTLE JOE OTTER GETS EVEN WITH BUSTER BEAR

Little Joe Otter was in a terrible rage. It was a bad beginning for a beautiful day and Little Joe knew it. But who wouldn't be in a rage if his breakfast was taken from him just as he was about to eat it? Anyway, that is what Little Joe told Billy Mink. Perhaps he didn't tell it quite exactly as it was, but you know he was very badly frightened at the time.

"I was sitting on the bank of the Laughing Brook beside one of the little pools," he told Billy Mink, "and was just going to eat a fat trout I had caught, when who should come along but that great big bully, Buster Bear. He took that fat trout away from me and ate it just as if it belonged to him! I hate him! If I live long enough I'm going to get even with him!"

Of course that wasn't nice talk and anything but a nice spirit, but Little Joe Otter's temper is sometimes pretty short, especially when he is hungry, and this time he had had no breakfast, you know.

Buster Bear hadn't actually taken the fish away from Little Joe. But looking at the matter as Little Joe did, it amounted to the same thing. You see, Buster knew perfectly well when he invited Little Joe to come back and get it that Little Joe wouldn't dare do anything of the kind.

"Where is he now?" asked Billy Mink.

"He's somewhere up the Laughing Brook. I wish he'd fall in and get drowned!" snapped Little Joe.

Billy Mink just had to laugh. The idea of great big Buster Bear getting drowned in the Laughing Brook was too funny. There wasn't water enough in it anywhere except down in the Smiling Pool, and that was on the Green Meadows, where Buster had never been known to go. "Let's go see what he is doing," said Billy Mink.

At first Little Joe didn't want to, but at last his curiosity got the better of his fear, and he agreed. So the two little brown-coated scamps turned down the Laughing Brook, taking the greatest care to keep out of sight themselves. They had gone only a little way when Billy Mink whispered: "Sh-h! There he is."

Sure enough, there was Buster Bear sitting close beside a little pool and looking into it very intently.

"What's he doing?" asked Little Joe Otter, as Buster Bear sat for the longest time without moving.

Just then one of Buster's big paws went into the water as quick as a flash and scooped out a trout that had ventured too near.

"He's fishing!" exclaimed Billy Mink.

And that is just what Buster Bear was doing, and it was very plain to see that he was having great fun. When he had eaten the trout he had caught, he moved along to the next little pool.

"They are *our* fish!" said Little Joe fiercely. "He has no business catching *our* fish!"

"I don't see how we are going to stop him," said Billy Mink.

"I do!" cried Little Joe, into whose head an idea had just popped. "I'm going to drive all the fish out of the little pools and muddy the water all up. Then we'll see how many fish he will get! Just you watch me get even with Buster Bear."

Little Joe slipped swiftly into the water and swam straight to the little pool that Buster Bear would try next. He frightened the fish so that they fled in every direction. Then he stirred up the mud until the water was so dirty that Buster couldn't have seen a fish right under his nose. He did the same thing in the next pool and the next. Buster Bear's fishing was spoiled for that day.

III

BUSTER BEAR IS GREATLY PUZZLED

Buster Bear hadn't enjoyed himself so much since he came to the Green Forest to live. His fun began when he surprised Little Joe Otter on the bank of a little pool in the Laughing Brook and Little Joe was so frightened that he dropped a fat trout he had just caught. It had seemed like a great joke to Buster Bear, and he had chuckled over it all the time he was eating the fat trout. When he had finished it, he started on to do some fishing himself.

Presently he came to another little pool. He stole up to it very, very softly, so as not to frighten the fish. Then he sat down close to the edge of it and didn't move. Buster learned a long time ago that a fisherman must be patient unless, like Little Joe Otter, he is just as much at home in the water as the fish themselves, and can swim fast enough to catch them by chasing them. So he didn't move so much as an eye lash. He was so still that he looked almost like the stump of an old tree. Perhaps that is what the fish thought he was, for pretty soon, two or three swam right in close to where he was sitting. Now Buster Bear may be big and clumsy looking, but there isn't anything that can move much quicker than one of those big paws of his when he wants it to. One of them moved now, and quicker than a wink had scooped one of those foolish fish out on to the bank.

Buster's little eyes twinkled, and he smacked his lips as he moved on to the next little pool, for he knew that it was of no use to stay longer at the first one. The fish were so frightened that they wouldn't come back for a long, long time. At the next little pool the same thing happened. By this time Buster Bear was in fine spirits. It was fun to catch the fish, and it was still more fun to eat them. What finer breakfast could any one have than fresh-caught trout? No wonder he felt good! But it takes more than three trout to fill Buster Bear's stomach, so he kept on to the next little pool.

But this little pool, instead of being beautiful and clear so that Buster could see right to the bottom of it and so tell if there were any fish there, was so

muddy that he couldn't see into it at all. It looked as if some one had just stirred up all the mud at the bottom.

"Huh!" said Buster Bear. "It's of no use to try to fish here. I would just waste my time. I'll try the next pool."

So he went on to the next little pool. He found this just as muddy as the other. Then he went on to another, and this was no better. Buster sat down and scratched his head. It was puzzling. Yes, Sir, it was puzzling. He looked this way and he looked that way suspiciously, but there was no one to be seen. Everything was still save for the laughter of the Laughing Brook. Somehow, it seemed to Buster as if the Brook were laughing at him.

"It's very curious," muttered Buster, "very curious indeed. It looks as if my fishing is spoiled for to-day. I don't understand it at all. It's lucky I caught what I did. It looks as if somebody is trying to—ha!" A sudden thought had popped into his head. Then he began to chuckle and finally to laugh. "I do believe that scamp Joe Otter is trying to get even with me for eating that fat trout!"

And then, because Buster Bear always enjoys a good joke even when it is on himself, he laughed until he had to hold his sides, which is a whole lot better than going off in a rage as Little Joe Otter had done. "You're pretty smart, Mr. Otter! You're pretty smart, but there are other people who are smart too," said Buster Bear, and still chuckling, he went off to think up a plan to get the best of Little Joe Otter.

IV

LITTLE JOE OTTER SUPPLIES BUSTER BEAR WITH A BREAKFAST

Getting even just for spite
Doesn't always pay.
Fact is, it is very apt
To work the other way.

That is just how it came about that Little Joe Otter furnished Buster Bear with the best breakfast he had had for a long time. He didn't mean to do it. Oh, my, no! The truth is, he thought all the time that he was preventing Buster Bear from getting a breakfast. You see he wasn't well enough acquainted with Buster to know that Buster is quite as smart as he is, and perhaps a little bit smarter. Spite and selfishness were at the bottom of it. You see Little Joe and Billy Mink had had all the fishing in the Laughing Brook to themselves so long that they thought no one else had any right to fish there. To be sure Bobby Coon caught a few little fish there, but they didn't mind Bobby. Farmer Brown's boy fished there too, sometimes, and this always made Little Joe and Billy Mink very angry, but they were so afraid of him that they didn't dare do anything about it. But when they discovered that Buster Bear was a fisherman, they made up their minds that something had got to be done. At least, Little Joe did.

"He'll try it again to-morrow morning," said Little Joe. "I'll keep watch, and as soon as I see him coming, I'll drive out all the fish, just as I did to-day. I guess that'll teach him to let our fish alone."

So the next morning Little Joe hid before daylight close by the little pool where Buster Bear had given him such a fright. Sure enough, just as the Jolly Sunbeams began to creep through the Green Forest, he saw Buster Bear coming straight over to the little pool. Little Joe slipped into the water and chased all the fish out of the little pool, and stirred up the mud on the bottom so that the water was so muddy that the bottom couldn't be seen at all. Then he hurried down to the next little pool and did the same thing.

Now Buster Bear is very smart. You know he had guessed the day before who had spoiled his fishing. So this morning he only went far enough to make sure that if Little Joe were watching for him, as he was sure he would be, he would see him coming. Then, instead of keeping on to the little pool, he hurried to a place way down the Laughing Brook, where the water was very shallow, hardly over his feet, and there he sat chuckling to himself. Things happened just as he had expected. The frightened fish Little Joe chased out of the little pools up above swam down the Laughing Brook, because, you know, Little Joe was behind them, and there was nowhere else for them to go. When they came to the place where Buster was waiting, all he had to do was to scoop them out on to the bank. It was great fun. It didn't take Buster long to catch all the fish he could eat. Then he saved a nice fat trout and waited.

By and by along came Little Joe Otter, chuckling to think how he had spoiled Buster Bear's fishing. He was so intent on looking behind him to see if Buster was coming that he didn't see Buster waiting there until he spoke.

"I'm much obliged for the fine breakfast you have given me," said Buster in his deepest, most grumbly-rumbly voice. "I've saved a fat trout for you to make up for the one I ate yesterday. I hope we'll go fishing together often."

Then he went off laughing fit to kill himself. Little Joe couldn't find a word to say. He was so surprised and angry that he went off by himself and sulked. And Billy Mink, who had been watching, ate the fat trout.

V

GRANDFATHER FROG'S COMMON-SENSE

There is nothing quite like common sense to smooth out troubles. People who have plenty of just plain common sense are often thought to be very wise. Their neighbors look up to them and are forever running to them for advice, and they are very much respected. That is the way with Grandfather Frog. He is very old and very wise. Anyway, that is what his neighbors think. The truth is, he simply has a lot of common sense, which after all is the very best kind of wisdom.

Now when Little Joe Otter found that Buster Bear had been too smart for him and that instead of spoiling Buster's fishing in the Laughing Brook he had really made it easier for Buster to catch all the fish he wanted, Little Joe went off down to the Smiling Pool in a great rage.

Billy Mink stopped long enough to eat the fat fish Buster had left on the bank and then he too went down to the Smiling Pool.

When Little Joe Otter and Billy Mink reached the Smiling Pool, they climbed up on the Big Rock, and there Little Joe sulked and sulked, until finally Grandfather Frog asked what the matter was. Little Joe wouldn't tell, but Billy Mink told the whole story. When he told how Buster had been too smart for Little Joe, it tickled him so that Billy had to laugh in spite of himself. So did Grandfather Frog. So did Jerry Muskrat, who had been listening. Of course this made Little Joe angrier than ever. He said a lot of unkind things about Buster Bear and about Billy Mink and Grandfather Frog and Jerry Muskrat, because they had laughed at the smartness of Buster.

"He's nothing but a great big bully and thief!" declared Little Joe.

"Chug-a-rum! He may be a bully, because great big people are very apt to be bullies, and though I haven't seen him, I guess Buster Bear is big enough from all I have heard, but I don't see how he is a thief," said Grandfather Frog.

"Didn't he catch my fish and eat them?" snapped Little Joe. "Doesn't that make him a thief?"

"They were no more your fish than mine," protested Billy Mink.

"Well, *our* fish, then! He stole *our* fish, if you like that any better. That makes him just as much a thief, doesn't it?" growled Little Joe.

Grandfather Frog looked up at jolly, round, bright Mr. Sun and slowly winked one of his great, goggly eyes. "There comes a foolish green fly," said he. "Who does he belong to?"

"Nobody!" snapped Little Joe. "What have foolish green flies got to do with my—I mean *our* fish?"

"Nothing, nothing at all," replied Grandfather Frog mildly. "I was just hoping that he would come near enough for me to snap him up; then he would belong to me. As long as he doesn't, he doesn't belong to any one. I suppose that if Buster Bear should happen along and catch him, he would be stealing from me, according to Little Joe."

"Of course not! What a silly idea! You're getting foolish in your old age," retorted Little Joe.

"Can you tell me the difference between the fish that you haven't caught and the foolish green flies that I haven't caught?" asked Grandfather Frog.

Little Joe couldn't find a word to say.

"You take my advice, Little Joe Otter," continued Grandfather Frog, "and always make friends with those who are bigger and stronger and smarter than you are. You'll find it pays."

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