

KATHY AND THE BEAR

By Leo Szilard

This is a beautiful spot to stay in the summer. The hotel is well run. The food is good. Only the service at meals is too slow for my taste; it is intolerably slow for a child of four.

Kathy and her mother spent the weekend here. At lunch Kathy sat next to me.

"you want some sugar in your milk, Kathy"? I asked.

"She never takes any sugar", her mother said.

"Yes, please, I want sugar", said Kathy.

I gave her lots of sugar and she started to drink her milk. Half way through she put her glass down.

"Mother," she said, "Can I go to see the bear?"

"What bear?", I asked.

"She means that huge bear skin on the wall in the lobby." the mother said. "Would you like to take her there? I shall get you when the meat comes".

Kathy led me to the bear, but stopped at a respectful distance.

"He is dead", she said. "He was shot. You can put your hand into his mouth, he can't do anything to you". And after a moment of silence: "I won't put my hand into his mouth; I am scared". She stood there fascinated and looked at the bear, but she kept her distance.

"Alright", I said after a while. "You have seen him now. Let us go back to lunch",

The meat was not there yet, when we got back to our table and Kathy's mother was across the dining room talking to some friends.

"Does a bear like to be shot?" Kathy asked.

"I don't know, Kathy," I said.

"Doesn't a bear go to heaven when he dies?" Kathy wanted to know. I wasn't going to compromise with truth, not even for the sake of a girl four years old.

"I do not know Kathy", I said, "But I am sure your mother can tell you. Why don't you ask her after lunch when she puts you to bed?" I ought to be able to do better than that, I thought.

"Why don't you drink your milk, Kathy", I said. "It isn't too sweet for you, or is it?"

"It is too sweet", Kathy said. And there was a moment of silence.

"But I like it too sweet", said Kathy, and with that she picked up her glass and started to drink.

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The next day at lunch we had again to wait for the meat.

"May I go to see bearsy-wearsy?" said Kathy.

"Alright, Kathy", I said, "Come along". When we got into the lobby, Kathy said:

"He was a bad bear. He killed all the chickens. And the farmer took his gun and shot him. And then they saw that he was beautiful, and they put him on the wall so that people can look at him." With that she started to stroke tenderly the one paw that she was able to reach.

"Lift me up please", she said, "I want to put my hand into his mouth". I lifted her up and she had her wish.

"You want to come back to the dining room with me now?", I asked.

"No", she said, "I want to stay with bear".

"Alright," I said, "But don't stay too long". Kathy settled down on the couch and began to pet the beast. I went back to the dining room. After a while Kathy appeared and sat down in her chair.

"Honeybear", she murmured and picked up her milk.

March 30, 1949

B (looking around) "This does not look like atomic energy work here. . . no guards."

S - "No guards here."

B - "So you too are out of it; you of all people! But why?!"

S - "I don't know. Probably not for any one simple reason. Hiroshima may have something to do with it. It was an atrocity. Most of us, deep down in our hearts, know that, but many won't admit it, even to themselves."

B - "The government deliberated for a long time before they reached a decision to use ~~the~~ bomb."

S - "Yes. But God did not sit in on that council. *He could not!* ~~Army~~ Intelligence would have questioned his undivided loyalty to the United States."

B - "Could you not work on the peacetime applications of atomic energy?"

S - "You know, on the day the war ended one of our men barged into my office and said 'We have thought enough of the bomb - let us work now on peacetime applications - let's build a reactor for driving warships.'"

B - (Grins) "Aren't there other peacetime applications?"

S - "Certainly; and I would like to work on them -- in peacetime."

B - "Isn't this peace time? Does the atomic bomb not make war impossible?"

S - "Impossible - yes. But not improbable."

B - "Now be serious. Tell me what you are doing here."

S - (Points to microscope.) "Look for yourself."

B - (Leans over microscope, close-up - bacteria in dark field, swimming through the field. B looks up.) ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ "Bacterium coli. I am pleased to see them. They are an old acquaintance of mine."

S - "They are pleased to see you too, I am sure."

B - (Picks up a plate and holds it against the light. With puzzled expression) - "What this?"

S (Points to the viewer) "Use the viewer."

B (Leans over viewer - closeup showing field of plaques on plates) "Bacteria viruses! What are you doing with bacteria phage?" "What do you want to find out about micro-organisms?"

S - "I am just collecting useless information."

B - "Wouldn't you like to find a cure for cancer, rid the world of virus infection, or solve the problem of heart diseases? Wouldn't that be important?"

S - "Oh, I would like to do that, all right. But, tell me, what is the most important and deadly diseases of the human heart? Nationalism, isn't it. And it is infectious too, isn't it. But its virus can't be seen with this microscope, or any other microscope."

B - "Infectious nationalism - yes - that's not for you physicists to cure, nor for us doctors. I have found that out."

S - "Of course it is for us to cure. For you and me and everybody else who can think, here in America and elsewhere."

B - "What can we do?"

S - "Well, you can do something, and you are doing it already; but me, I find it difficult to see what I could do just now."

B - "What is your difficulty?"

S - "You want me to be frank? Look - if I saw what to do, I would have to do it, and I would have to drop all this - (pointing) and this is really what I ~~would~~ like to do."

B - "At least you do not fool yourself, ^{and you} ~~and~~ speak the truth; that's what I like about you."

S - "All my friends like me for the sake of my vices. That is as it should be. But tell me, what is it that you want to know. I ~~can~~ can tell you anything that you might ~~want to~~ find out in the Encyclopaedia Britannica. I just bought ^{it} ~~it~~ and it is full of secrets."

B - "Tell me --"

(Ins) B - "Are you sure it is useless?"
S - "Well, you never can tell."

August 14, 1949

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"I do not know Kathy", I said, "But I am sure your mother can tell you. Why don't you ask her after lunch when she puts you to bed?"

"My grandfather is dead and he is in heaven", said Kathy. "And my grandmother is dead and she is in heaven. God is in heaven too, and he is not dead. How is that?" asked Kathy. This was beginning to get difficult.

"Why don't you drink your milk, Kathy", I said. "It isn't too sweet for you, or is it?"

"It is too sweet", said Kathy. I accepted the verdict in silence.

"But I like it too sweet", said Kathy, and with that she picked up her glass and started to drink.

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