

9 Just Another Rainy Day

The next day it rained. My father asked me how I'd like to go to the movies.

"Just me?" I asked.

"No. All three of us," he said.

"Fudge is very young to go," I said. "Don't you think so?"

"Maybe. But I can't think of anything else to do with him. And that will take up a few hours."

"You could give him some socks," I suggested. "You know how he loves to play with your socks."

"Socks won't last the whole afternoon," my father said. "That's why I thought of the movies."

"What'll we see, Dad?"

My father checked his *New York* magazine. "A

Bear's Life is playing in the neighborhood. How does that sound?"

"What's it about?" I asked.

"A bear's life, I guess," my father said. "It's rated G."

I was thinking of a good Western with lots of action or else a picture rated R where you can't get in if you're under seventeen unless you're with your parents. But my father had made up his mind. *A Bear's Life* it was.

I suggested that my father get Fudge cleaned up. Because by then he was looking kind of messy. I don't think my father even put him into his pajamas last night. He's been wearing the same polo shirt ever since my mother left yesterday morning.

By one o'clock we were ready to go. All three of us wore our raincoats and rubbers and my father took his big, black umbrella. One thing about New York—it's hard to get a cab when it's raining. But the movie theater wasn't very far away. My father said the walk would do us all good. There were a lot of puddles. It was really pouring. I like to walk in the rain. Especially if it isn't too cold out. It feels nice when it wets your face.

I jumped over the puddles. My father avoided them too. But not Fudge. He jumped right into every one and splashed around like a little duck. By the time

we got to the movie theater the bottoms of his pants were soaked. My father took him into the men's room. He stuffed a bunch of paper towels up each pant leg so Fudge wouldn't have to sit around wet. At first Fudge complained. But when my father bought him a big box of popcorn he forgot about his stuffed pants.

Right after we got settled in our seats a big boy sat down in front of Fudge, so he had to change seats with my father. Now he was on the aisle, I was in the middle, and my father was on my other side.

When the lights dimmed Fudge said, "Ohhh . . . dark."

I told him, "Be quiet. You can't talk in the movies."

"Okay, Pee-tah," he said.

That's when he started throwing his popcorn. At first I didn't notice but I wondered why the people in front of us were turning around every second. Then I heard Fudge whisper, "Pow—pow—pow!" and I saw him throw a handful of popcorn.

I poked my father. "He's throwing his popcorn," I whispered.

My father reached across me and tapped Fudge on the leg. "If you throw one more piece I'm going to take it away from you."

"No throw!" Fudge said very loud.

"Shush. . . ." the people in front of us said.

"Shush!" Fudge said back to them.

"You see," I told my father, "he's too young for the movies. He doesn't understand."

But from the moment the first bear came on the screen Fudge sat still and watched. And after a while I forgot all about him and concentrated on the movie. It was much better than I thought it would be. It showed all these bear cubs and how they live.

I'm not sure when I realized Fudge was gone. I guess it was when I turned to ask him if he had any popcorn left. I had already finished mine and was still hungry. I was really surprised to see he wasn't there. I mean, one minute he was sitting right next to me and the next minute he was gone.

"Hey, Dad," I whispered to my father. "He's gone."

"What?" my father asked.

"Fudge isn't in his seat."

My father looked over. "Where did he go?"

"I don't know. I just noticed he was gone."

"Let me out, Peter. I'll find him."

"Should I come too?" I asked.

"No . . . you can sit here and watch the rest of the picture. He's probably wandering around by the candy counter."

I stood up to let my father out. I wondered what my mother would think if she knew Fudge was lost in the movies.

A few minutes later the picture stopped—right in

the middle of a scene. The sound track trailed off like a broken record. All the lights came on. The audience let out a groan. Some kids called, "Boo . . . boo!"

Then my father and two ushers and a man in a suit came over to me. "He was sitting right here," my father told them, pointing to the empty seat on the aisle.

"Well," the man in the suit said, "we've checked the rest rooms and the office. He's not behind the candy counter. We'll have to search the theater." He cupped his hands around his mouth and shouted, "Ladies and gentlemen . . . may I have your attention please. We'll continue with our film in one moment. But first we have to find a three-year-old boy answering to the name of Fudge."

Some people laughed when the man said his name. I guess *Fudge* does sound funny if you're not used to it. I thought, *Maybe he's been kidnapped! Would my mother be mad. That crazy kid! You can't even take him to the movies.* Then I thought, *Who'd want to kidnap him, anyway?*

"What should I do, Dad?" I said.

"Why don't you walk up and down this aisle and call him, Peter."

"Okay," I said.

"Here, Fudge," I called, starting down my aisle. I sounded like I was calling a dog. "Come on out, Fudge."

When I got down to the first row and called, "Here, Fudge," he popped out at me. He scared me so bad I yelled, "Ooooh. . . ."

"Hi, Pee-tah," he said.

"Hey . . . I found him," I called. "I found him . . . I found him . . . here he is!" Then I turned to my brother. "You dope! What are you doing way down here? And why are you sitting on the floor?"

"Wanted to touch the bears," Fudge said. "But bears are all gone." He spread out his arms and said, "All gone" again.

My father and the ushers and the man in the suit ran to us. "Fudge," my father said, scooping him up. "Are you all right?"

"He wanted to pet the bears," I said. "Can you beat that?"

"Well, I guess we can continue the picture now," the man in the suit said. He cupped his hands around his mouth again. "Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. Our young man has been found safe and sound. Now we return to the conclusion of *A Bear's Life*."

My father carried Fudge back to our seats. He held him on his lap for the rest of the show. I guess he wasn't taking any more chances!

Later, when we got home, my father explained to Fudge that movies are like TV. "It's just a picture. There's nothing to touch."

Fudge listened, but I don't know whether he believed my father. I had the feeling he still thought those bears were in the theater somewhere. I made up my mind that I would never take my little brother to the movies. Never! At least not until he was nine or ten.

My father said he was going to cook us something special for dinner. To celebrate Finding Fudge in the Movies. I thought that was really strange. Because as far as I know my father can't cook anything. He doesn't even know where my mother keeps the peanut butter, the dishes, or the pots and pans. Lucky for him I was there to show him. "What are you going to cook, Dad?"

"A super-duper omelet," he said.

"Omelet? I'm not sure me and Fudge like omelets."

"You'll like this one," my father said, humming as he gathered his ingredients together. "Get me a big frying pan, Peter."

"Okay," I said. I gave it to him. He melted some butter in it.

"What's going in the super-duper omelet?" I asked while Fudge sat on the floor banging two pot covers together.

"Well, the eggs, of course," my father said. "Omelets are made of eggs."

"And what else?" I asked.

"Oh . . . I think I'll make a mushroom omelet."

"Eggs and mushrooms?" I said.

"Yes, you'll love it!"

"I'm not so sure."

"You'll see, Peter," my father said.

I set up the table while my father cooked. I even put Fudge in his booster chair.

When the omelet was done my father brought it to us. He was still humming.

"That's some big omelet!" I said, when I saw it. It filled up the whole frying pan. "How many eggs did you use?"

"About a dozen," my father said.

"Mom only cooks one at a time," I told him.

"When you taste this you'll know why I used them all up."

"You mean it's that good?" I asked.

"Go on," my father said as he served me. "Taste it."

I took a bite. It was awful! The worst thing I ever ate in my life. But my father was standing there grinning at me. I didn't want to hurt his feelings.

"Well?" he said.

"It's nice," I told him, swallowing a chunk whole. I washed it down with a glass of milk.

"You see . . . your mother ought to experiment more. Then you'd learn to eat a lot of different things."

"I don't think Mom ever made me a mushroom omelet," I said.

My father put some on Fudge's plate. Then he served himself. Fudge shoved a lot into his mouth at once. I waited, figuring he'd choke on it. Instead he said, "Oh . . . good!"

My father beamed. Fudge wasn't smart enough to fool my father. So he must have really liked it. But a kid that can eat flowers and swallow teeth wouldn't know much about omelets anyway.

Then my father sat down and tasted his super-duper concoction. *He* not only choked on it. *He* spit it out! "Oh no," he said. "This is awful. Something went wrong. Maybe the eggs are rotten."

"Mom just bought them on Thursday," I said.

"Maybe it's the mushrooms, then," my father said.

"Maybe it's how you cooked it," I suggested.

My father jumped up from the table and threw the mushroom omelet into the garbage. Fudge started to cry. "Want more . . . MORE!"

"No," my father told him. "It wasn't any good."

Fudge screamed, "EAT IT OR WEAR IT . . . EAT IT OR WEAR IT!" He flung his spoon across the room. It hit my mother's favorite plant. The dirt spilled all over the kitchen floor.

"Now you stop that!" my father yelled at Fudge.

"I'm going to make us nice peanut butter sandwiches. Then *you're* going to have a bath! Your mommy's coming home tomorrow and we're going to show her how well Daddy managed all by himself! Peter . . . where does your mother hide the peanut butter?"

After supper my father bathed Fudge. The only thing he decided not to do were the dishes. He stacked them in the sink and left them for my mother.

On Sunday afternoon we drove out to the airport to meet my mother's plane. On the way there my father said wouldn't it be fun if we kept all the things we did over the weekend a secret—just between the three of us—kind of a man's secret. I agreed not to say a word. And my mother was so glad to see us that she didn't even mention the dirty dishes in the sink.

Six weeks later we were watching TV one night when the new Toddle-Bike commercial came on.

"That's me," Fudge said.

My mother looked up from the book she was reading. "He does look like you, Fudge, but that's not really you."

"Oh yes," Fudge said. "That's me . . . see. . ."

My mother squinted and looked harder. "You know, Warren," she told my father, "he really does look like Fudge." Then she laughed. "Imagine another little boy like Fudgie!"

"It's Fudge all right!" I said.

"It's Fudge all right!" my brother repeated.

"We didn't tell you, dear," my father said. "We thought you'd like to be surprised. But that is Fudge."

"WHAT?" my mother said, like she couldn't believe it.

"You see, Mom," I began. "Remember that weekend you went to visit Aunt Linda?" Then I stopped and thought about all the things my mother didn't know—

Like the puddles Fudge splashed in.

And the paper towels up his pants.

And how he wanted to touch the bears.

And the mushroom omelet.

And Mr. Vincent and his big cigar.

And Janet and her goldfish crackers.

And I looked at my father and I started to laugh. So did he.