

## **Get Ready, Get Set ... Jump**

A Story for Lucy

I may not be a celebrity bear like Pooh and Rupert and Paddington and Pudsey, but I am a really, real bear. I know I am quite an important bear because I have lots of badges, and a well-known gentlemen's outfitters made my clothes. When I am not on adventures I am on display in a museum. Sometimes I do wonder what it would be like to live in a zoo, but you cannot believe everything you hear about zoos! The museum takes very good care of me—and all I have to do is to jump out of aeroplanes!

I am not showing off when I tell you I have done more than 400 jumps. GET READY, GET SET, JUMP—and that is me gone again!

I am only a little brown teddy bear, fourteen inches tall.

They call me Edward.

Up in sky I am often blown away from where I should land. My biggest fear is that one day when I should land in Devon I am blown onto a mountain in Wales, and gone forever. If I am lost I do not have a label like Paddington because what I do is SECRET—and in any case, not many people live in the mountains to look for me. The Army would send a helicopter, but I know what you are thinking—that would cost a lot of pocket-money just to find a little brown teddy bear! And I say to you: All bears are important to someone—and I am important to the Army.

Although I am a privileged bear and live in a museum, I am the same as other bears because people want to cuddle me.

I am what you call a LUCKY MASCOT. Everyone who jumps out of an aeroplane needs a lucky mascot, just in case ... the parachute does not open. Oh dear! As I am a lucky mascot I am in demand from all of the soldiers when they are jumping. I should not really tell you this, but soldiers put their trust in some very odd mascots as well. One has a rabbit's tail for a mascot. The butcher told him it belonged to the luckiest rabbit alive because the rest of it escaped down a rabbit hole. Another soldier carries a white mouse, another a clothes peg, and one a postcard from his grandmother. I am telling you this because with all these lucky mascots flying around I am not surprised all the soldiers land safely on the ground. Oh, and by the way there is a club named after me—The Edward Bear Club. Many soldiers want to join, but when they are told they have to jump out of an aeroplane one or two never seem quite so keen.

So, here is a tale especially for YOU about what can happen to quite an important little bear.

\*

I awoke on a lovely bright, sunny day. Outside the museum window the leaves in the trees were not moving. No wind, so a very good day for parachuting, I thought. Then I heard the tramp of army boots.

'It's JUMP day for you Edward,' said a soldier as he approached the museum display cabinet, which is where I live.

'I am so pleased. I would much rather be out and about on a fine day like this than stuck in here,' I said.

'Well, you are jumping with me today,' said the soldier.

And I thought: I am glad I am not jumping with the one with that rabbit's tail. It's their teeth that I find irritating about rabbits, and they

nibble. Of course, a rabbit does not have teeth in its tail, so I suppose if I have to sit close to any part of a rabbit next to its tail would be the best place. But rabbits are not at all like bears, are they? They are always running away. That is very unfriendly.

‘Where are we jumping today?’ I asked.

‘Dartmoor,’ replied the soldier.

The weather on Dartmoor can be very unkind to bears. One minute the weather is calm and sunny and the next windy and wet. But I do like flying over the lovely city of Plymouth. Soon after I see Plymouth I know that it’s GET READY, GET SET, JUMP—and that is me gone again.

Outside the museum an army lorry is waiting. The soldiers who are jumping are sitting in the back of the lorry. I am carried to the front cab where I sit next to the driver. I can see through the windscreen. I would like to tell you where we get on the aeroplane, but it is SECRET. I can tell you it is an airfield somewhere at the bottom of England,

Our plane is waiting. The soldiers put on their parachutes. They are careful to do this properly. They pretend they are not scared, but I know the signs. They laugh at things that are not funny.

My parachute is checked—to make sure it will open, and then we get onto the plane. The door closes. I am perched on the soldier’s lap, and am sitting next to the door. There is a roar of engines—and then its up and away. The soldier has to shout so I can hear him. These military planes are not like the ones you travel on when you go on holiday. No they are not! No frills here! No pretty air hostesses with honey sandwiches, for a start. And the engines are very noisy. We sit on canvas seats along the sides. At the back there is a bucket behind a screen—for you-know-what. Teddy bears are fortunate like that ... they don’t need to!

‘I expect the weather will stay fine. The forecast is good,’ said the soldier cheerfully, trying to be brave.

‘I am not too keen on Dartmoor,’ I shout in his ear. ‘I have had some pretty HAIRY (soldiers’ word for dangerous) experiences there.’

‘What sort of HAIRY experiences?’ shouts the soldier.

‘WIND and WATER,’ I shout.

The soldier sitting opposite me is reading his grandmother’s postcard. I expect it says: GOOD LUCK.

The door of the aeroplane opens. The noise from the engines becomes louder. We are approaching Plymouth. The soldier arranges me inside his uniform so my head sticks out. We stand up and move to the door. We will be the first to jump. I look out, and down there I can see the city of Plymouth. All those houses! I like to think Plymouth has lots of teddy bears, and that I am just like them—except a thousand feet higher up. The RED light above the door is on. When the GREEN light comes on it is: JUMP.

Soon the houses of Plymouth have been left behind. Below is Dartmoor.

I am watching the RED light. Any moment now.

I can feel the soldier’s heart beating.

The GREEN light comes on.

We leap out of the aeroplane.

We are tossed about in the sky before the soldier’s parachute opens.

He takes me out of his uniform, dangles me over Dartmoor by the top of my parachute, and says:

‘Now it is your turn Edward ... GET READY, GET SET, JUMP.’

He let’s go and—that is me gone again!

The first thing I notice, it is WINDY.

I am being blown away. A solitary little bear over Dartmoor. I am still in the air when all the soldiers have landed. I can see them on the ground below me. The wind is blowing me further and further away from them.

I look down. At last the ground gets closer. That is a good sign. Then I notice lots and lots of those very large puddles for which Dartmoor is well-known. Teddy bears are not fond of WATER.

A soggy bear is not a happy bear.

‘Please let me land on the nice soft heather and not in a puddle,’ I call out to any angels who might be watching out for tiny teddy bears being blown over Dartmoor.

Then, up comes the ground and I land with a SPLASH in the middle of a large, deep puddle.

So there I am, sitting in this puddle. The WIND is blowing. The WATER is cold. I am a very soggy bear.

‘HELP, HELP ... I am over here, in this puddle,’ I call out.

I know I am too far away for the soldiers to hear.

It begins to drizzle, as it always does on Dartmoor.

I think of all those warm teddy bears cuddled up to their owners in Plymouth.

I wait.

I shiver.

I wait.

And shiver again.

Then I hear someone calling:

‘Edward, where are you?’

‘Over here,’ I call back. ‘In this large puddle.’

A soldier appears.

When he sees me sitting in this puddle, he laughs a hearty laugh.

‘With all your experience I would have thought you would have known how to avoid a puddle.’

The other soldiers gather around and they, too, laugh in a friendly manner. I am not a happy bear, and I must seem a rather pathetic bear.

The soldier whose mascot is a rabbit’s tail wraps me in a towel.

‘Did you bring that towel especially for me?’ I ask him.

‘Goodness me, no! For my lucky rabbit’s tail, in case we landed in a puddle. But we landed on the nice soft heather so we are both lovely and dry,’ he teased.

He took the rabbit’s tail from his pocket and showed me.

‘Feel how soft and dry it is.’

‘I’d rather not!’

I was very annoyed. To think that a tail end of a rabbit is nice and dry, and all of me is a soggy bear!

I am allowed to be very annoyed, sometimes, because I am quite an important bear.

‘That will be the day when all of a rabbit is brave enough to do the: GET READY, GET SET, JUMP,’ I said angrily to the soldiers.

Here is another SECRET, so do not tell your pet rabbit.

The day will NEVER come when the Edward Bear Club allows a rabbit to join. You really do have to be brave to jump out of an aeroplane, and I just do not think a rabbit is brave enough, do you? But I am told they are quite cuddly, if you can ever get them to keep still!

*All rights reserved*

*© Julian Thomas 2012*