

# Buster and the Toboggan

By Sandra Beswetherick • Illustrated by Les Gray

"Why don't you go on over? Join the fun." Grandad points to the kids we're watching through the kitchen window. They're sliding down the snow-covered hill next to his house.

"I'm not in the mood, Grandad." Didn't I tell Dad I was old enough to stay alone while he was away on business? He brought me to Grandad's anyway. "Besides, I don't have my Snow Skimmer." There wasn't enough room in the car to fit my brand-new sled with the ski runner and steering handle.



"Snow Skimmer? Who needs one of those?" Before I know what's happening, Grandad is down in the basement and back up again. He's carrying—oh no! Not the toboggan!

The toboggan must be a hundred years old, at least. I think it belonged to Dad. It's covered with dents and scratches, with most of the varnish worn off.

"Look." Grandad thumps the bottom with his fist. "Not a warped board anywhere."

"But, Grandad . . ."

"You can take Buster with you."

If the toboggan is a hundred years old, Buster has to be a thousand. He doesn't even lift his chin off the floor as he shifts his eyes from Grandad to me.

"Buster just loves tobogganing, don't you, boy?" says Grandad.

Buster thumps his tail once, which is the most action I've seen from him since I arrived.

"Go along," Grandad says to me. "No use poking around here. Might as well make some friends. Have a good time."

Take Buster? Have a good time? Buster's legs will probably collapse, and I'll end up hauling him around on that beat-up old toboggan. All the other kids will fall over laughing.

The toboggan bangs against my heels as I trudge toward the hill. Buster plods along behind. Grandad never takes no for an answer.

Kids scoot over the snow on plastic sleds, saucers, and snow tubes. I'm the only one with a four-seater wooden toboggan. Maybe if I slide down just once for Grandad to see, I can sneak back to the house. I line up the toboggan, kneel down fast, and . . .

Buster goes weird! He starts dancing on his toes, his tail wagging his whole body. Then he turns tight little twisters all around the toboggan.

"Buster! What's wrong with you?"

He piles onto the toboggan, pushing us off down the hill. I don't even have time to hang on. "H-e-e-e-y!" Halfway down, Buster jumps off, sending the back end sideways, spinning me out of control. "Aaaaaah!" I yell.

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## Buster and the Toboggan *continued*

The toboggan hits a bump, rolling me off one way while it keeps going the other. Buster's all over me, licking my face, as if saying he's sorry.

"No, you're not. You did that on purpose."

He takes after the toboggan, grabs the rope in his teeth, and hauls it back up the slope. I can't believe this dog! Grandad said he loved tobogganing. But this much?

At our takeoff point, there's a kid my age standing and watching us. I wait for him to say something smart.

"Can I get on?" he asks.

That's when I notice he doesn't even have a piece of cardboard to slide on. "OK. If you want," I say.

I take the front again, explaining how to steer from his place in the middle. "To turn us right, you drag your right hand. To turn us left, you drag your left hand."

"Are you coming?" says the kid. I turn around to see him patting the place behind him and looking at Buster.

"I don't think that's such a good ide—a."

Buster's already on board, laughing his doggy laugh.

Two pairs of hands dig into the snow to build up speed. Buster doesn't wait for halfway before he bales out, sending us crooked. "Steer left. Steer left!" I yell. But the kid must not remember which hand, because we head right, aiming dead center for the bump. Whump! The toboggan sails over, bouncing me out, with the other kid tumbling right behind. Buster can't make up his mind which kid to rescue first, so he races after the runaway toboggan. "Wow!" says the other kid. "That was some ride." I don't tell him he dragged the wrong hand.

At the top of the hill is another kid, with a blue plastic saucer that has as many dents and nicks as the toboggan. "That looks like fun," she says. "Can I try it?"

"I guess." I shrug my shoulders. But this time I sit at the back to steer. Buster decides to run alongside as three pairs of hands dig in.

Whoosh!

"Left!" the front kid yells, so I drag my left hand. This time we don't need to worry about Buster jumping off halfway down. Halfway down is when he decides to get on! He lands right in my arms. "L-e-e-f-f-t!" yells the front kid again. But my arms are full of wagging dog. Cruuunch! We somersault through the air like human cannonballs. Buster lands nose first in the deep snow.

"Wow! What happened?" says the new kid.

In no time flat, we're back at the top, where there's a third kid, sitting on one of the slickest Snow Skimmers I've ever seen.

"OK if I get on?" he asks, and he isn't joking.

"Sure," I say, because with four of us on board, I know this old toboggan is going to make warp speed.

I wait to be last on. "Buster, there isn't any room for you," I tell him. He just barks for us to get going. Before taking my place, I turn toward Grandad's window and give a two-arm wave. Then four pairs of hands dig deep, and we're off, skidding, sliding, flying toward the bottom.



"L-e-e-f-f-t!"