

“Read it Again!”: Storytelling to Imitate the Great Teacher

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Abstract

The student's mind is bent on stories, asking mothers around the world to 'read it again'. These stories preserve information and emotions for centuries. In the classroom, stories enliven motivation and empathy in ways that result in higher academic achievement and social awareness. Learning to use stories as a key instructional strategy will allow for more equitable opportunities in classrooms, encourage mental health and truth telling for the teacher and the student collectively, and allow the academic community to imitate Christ by contributing to the bigger story taking place across time. In application of using stories as teachers, this thesis includes a series of original stories and poems.

Keywords: storytelling, empathy, education, teaching strategies, classics, classical education, parables, mental health

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Teachers and curriculum developers propose a variety of issues using storytelling as an instructional method. Literature can be considered extraneous and secondary outside of the rigid standards that determine content. When planning for instruction, teachers are strongly advised to relate every type of work to a relevant lesson objective (Price & Nelson, 2018). With this direction, storytelling could seem like a waste of time. Content in tales can be inappropriate for a classroom setting or certain age. Jalongo and Creany (1991) found that the extensive research required to thoroughly review possible books can become an overwhelming task for teachers.

Even when an appropriate book matches the lesson objective, teacher inexperience—limited time management, classroom management, and familiarity with literature—and lack of student cooperation—inattentiveness and misbehavior in younger students—prevent an appropriate environment for the difficult topics that arise, even with the best kinds of stories. For those teachers who have experience and have researched appropriate instructional strategies, they would find that they should create flow in their classes by moving quickly from topic to topic to maintain the attention of their students (Prithishkumar & Michael, 2014). From controversial topics to limited attention spans to the strict requirements laid out in pedagogical expectations, many obstacles continue to discourage teachers from using storytelling as a daily effective strategy in their classrooms.

In light of these difficulties, this thesis presents the overwhelming evidence affirming storytelling as a practical, meaningful instructional method (Núñez & Río, 2018), by which we can tell true stories and imitate Christ with the purpose of better instruction, better personal reflection, and greater meaning in the big picture. Practically, storytelling assists teachers as they address hard topics in all areas of study, in all forms of a classroom, with all students, for now

and all times. Stories work to pass down truth and preserve culture when the stories are true, good, and beautiful, and shine light on the dichotomy when they are not. By telling our stories, we contribute to the greater message as we imitate Christ, the one who told the first and best stories, writing them on our hearts. Through the breaking down of existing research, Scriptures, and stories of my own, this article aims to remember the timeless teaching strategy of storytelling like the Great Teacher, and it aims to describe this phenomenon, our addiction to story (Frank, 2014). Why do we yearn for story, and why do stories stick in our minds like stones in our shoes? How can they be used to shape us to be more like Christ?

I have found not only the practical value of using stories in the classroom for a variety of reasons but the value of sharing our own stories as reflections of the bigger story. Standing on the shoulders of giants like J. R. R. Tolkien, Leo Tolstoy, and William Blake, telling our own stories, though they may be of sorrow, fear, and shame, is our way of truly being human and remembering the hope and joy we find in Christ (Frank, 2014). I will start with the beginning of my story.

The Beginning of My Story

Little Eeyore

The halls held their breath in a sleepy silence. Only the soft patter of Old Jeremy's bare feet against the cold tiles could be heard drifting from door to door, followed by his squeaky wheeled IV pole. The pat-patting and creak-squeaking of Jeremy joined a rapid clicking of the poor pen clasped in a nurse's hand at the desk by the elevators. Rubbing her eyes, she slipped past Jeremy into an adjacent room far louder than the hall.

She found a floppy, little Eeyore sobbing in another nurses' arms. No one could calm the child down or subdue her screams. They shook the child around anxiously, passing her amongst

themselves as a foreign and unpleasant hot potato. One held a towel to scratch her; another with a cup of cold water to bathe her; a third with a look more frightened and disgusted than the child's look herself.

The poor thing must have been simply wretched to cause such a commotion and inherit such a name, but only a whiff of the name and the child encouraged her sister to call that brawling, dark-skinned mass after a depressed, moody donkey. It seemed the perfect fit then and often after, but there was one in the room still anxious to meet her baby. Eventually, the child was thrust back into her arms for her to squish against her chest. With a great smile and a single tear, she held the little hand and squeezed it tenderly three times. "I love you, my little Eve." She leaned slowly to press her lips to the tiny forehead.

The Practical Values of Storytelling in the Classroom

Storytelling works as an efficient teaching strategy for all topics, content areas, classrooms, students, and times. Contrary to worries about inappropriate content, storytelling is a medium suitable for presenting potentially controversial topics in content areas of history, culture, and science for examples. Haigh and Hardy (2011) studied storytelling as an instructional method in healthcare education at the undergraduate and graduate levels, pointing to the effectiveness of storytelling when teaching complex and controversial topics. On the opposite end of the age spectrum, E. B. White famously refers to the delight of children when interacting with difficult texts if in a context that holds their attention (Plimpton & Crowther, 1969).

Captivating contexts, such as stories, offer an opportunity for students and teachers to grapple with learning to empathize. When speaking of controversial cross-cultural literature, Williams (2018) calls teachers to challenge their students to empathize through storytelling

across cultures. Another cross-cultural study of fifth-grade students in cultural studies in Columbia by Núñez and Río (2018) supports the value of storytelling when approaching difficult topics. Even with controversial, heavy-content material such as in a history class, literature often spurs to life old tales and helps “personalize events, bringing them down to the child’s scale and level of understanding” (Braxton, 2007, p. 52). When stories are incorporated in instruction, student interest and empathy heighten when interacting with complex and controversial material in a supervised setting.

With difficult content to teach come a variety of content areas and subject matters outside of English classes, where storytelling is still an effective teaching strategy. At all levels, storytelling aids the science teacher, who seeks deep understanding in content areas. In preschool, Kalogiannakis, Nirgianaki, and Papadakis (2018) used picture books to teach students about magnetism, finding this strategy beneficial. Cross (2017) found similar results in an undergraduate biology class, noting that “students developed deeper understanding of the content knowledge when an art-based instructional method (storytelling) was included as part of the inquiry-based instruction” (p. 628). In regard to informational texts and teaching literacy, “textbooks cannot treat subject matter with the breadth and depth necessary to develop ideas and concepts fully” (Vacca et al., 2018, p. 289). Vacca (2018) and others goes on to mention the potential of literature to encourage the imagination and interest of students and the deep understanding needed for maintaining extended study. In all content areas, including sciences and arts, the teaching strategy of storytelling, helps students understand and enjoy material.

In every classroom, storytelling serves as an effective method for creating a positive learning environment where content is retained. Despite ever changing technology and learning standards, Bowman (2018) calls storytelling “one of the few human traits that are truly universal

across culture and through all human history” (p. 98). From classroom to classroom, storytelling provides a consistent support to classroom management that connects with student interest, providing for positive relations and consistent encounters between teacher and students (Joussemet et al., 2018). Though the instructional method of storytelling remains effective in every classroom, not all stories are appropriate and effective in every academic setting (Bowman, 2018). Because of potential discrepancies in choosing stories and guaranteeing effectiveness in a specific classroom across cultures and peoples, it may seem difficult to integrate stories in an academic setting; however, in every classroom, storytelling provides support for diverse learners with specific needs or minority cultures.

Storytelling inherently supports and differentiates for all learners. As a culturally responsive strategy, Larke (2013) supports storytelling to provide equitable outcomes for all students. Diverse learners benefit most from both differentiated curriculum and differentiated intervention (Khalifa et al., 2016). As “conduits of teaching,” stories bring together cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of minority students (Larke, 2013, p. 40). They allow all students to interact with different voices “from the different worlds we are living in” in collective and challenging encounters facilitated by a teacher (Facer, 2019, p. 11). In this way, students find a community in the many stories and storytellers they have an opportunity to interact with in the classroom (Spires et al., 2019).

For learners with specific learning needs, Liu (2018) and others found English Language Learners benefit in motivation and performance when stories are used heavily in the classroom. Learners who struggle to pay attention and behave, such as students with ADHD or frustrated struggling readers, will focus for a dramatically longer time on material that interests them or is presented in an interesting way, based on Ross’s study (1997) on the prolonged attention spans

of readers of Nancy Drew. Students of minority cultures and specific learning needs benefit from storytelling in the classroom as a strategy that increases interest, motivation, and empathy in positive reading experiences (Liu et al., 2018).

Storytelling has an immediate impact on the characters of students through increasing interest and motivation and encouraging empathy. Dewey (1916/2008) said learning should be close to play. Texts today maintain the same perspective that “writing leads to a more satisfying life” (Tompkins, 2019, p. 119). Something about good literature is enjoyable and hints at a more tolerable life. For students, good literature contributes to more interesting and dynamic classes (Núñez & Río, 2018). Robb (2015) attributed student success to increased interest and engagement, as with the student who could pay more attention to Nancy Drew (Ross, 1997). Good stories have a way of “drawing attention to the richness of the meanwhile,” increasing student attentiveness and excitement (Facer, 2019, p. 10).

With the increase in interest and motivation, students proceed in the civil education of empathy. According to Valle (2019), “by the most selfish act, [reading], we learn empathy” (from Children’s Literature Lecture, p. 1). Núñez and Río (2018) considered the central benefit of stories in the power to “develop more positive and accepting perceptions of different cultures” (p. 170). The reading and writing of stories involve developing shared interests as a type of reciprocity between cultures and peoples (Stevenson, 2019). Through heightened interest and motivation, storytelling connects with our essential desire to be heard and known and ultimately, to empathize.

In a more academic sense, stories increase receptiveness, retention, problem-solving skills, and probability of later academic success. With stories as the medium for information, Bowman (2018) proves an advanced receptiveness to information when the social brain is

activated. Through an application to pathos, stories “stick in our minds and help us remember ideas and concepts in a way that a PowerPoint crammed with bar graphs never can” (Snow & Lazauskas, 2018, p. 18). When spoken aloud in stories, Icht and Mama (2015) found information to be more easily and more often remembered due to the production effect in memory.

Encouraged retention and receptiveness have inspired teachers and curriculum developers, according to Van de Walle (2018) and others, to use more children’s literature—picture books, poems, media, and chapter books—across subject areas as rich sources of problems. These problems demand high cognitive thinking through relational thinking in classroom community (Whitacre et al., 2016). Receptiveness, retention, and problem-solving skills surmise key indicators of later academic achievements, according to McClelland (2013) and others’ study relating attention spans in preschool to academic achievements by age 25. McClelland (2013) and others warn educators of the severity of neglecting to develop listening skills and attention spans even at an early age. Storytelling ensures the development of these essential skills at an early age and support of skills crucial to academia later on.

From academia to a personal level, the knowledge and understanding interpreted through stories allows for the more important development of one’s imagination. Stories have an immediate impact on students’ knowledge and understanding of life around them and within them (Núñez & Río, 2018). Beyond academia, Huck (1992) says stories have the “far greater power to develop one’s sensibilities and compassion, to stretch one’s imagination” (p. 524). As students imitate their teachers by the Sociocultural theory, they need an example embellished by the many stories their teacher incorporates into his or her instruction. For students and teachers alike, storytelling is:

to have one's imagination carried soaring on the wings of another's imagination, to be made more aware of the possibilities of one's mind, to be thrilled, amazed, awed, elevated – in worlds unknown until discovered through the medium of language, and to find in those worlds one's petty horizon growing wider and wider. (Hunter, 1978, p. 435)

The opportunity to vicariously float up in the cloud towns and grovel in the deepest depths of earth and soul remains in stories. To Bowman (2018), stories do more than provide information; “resonant stories teach, inspire, and motivate students by engaging them emotionally and intellectually” (p. 98). They remind us of the poetry of passed peoples with repetition and lyricism, predictability and relatability. Where does the power in good literature lie? This question still remains to be answered. From classrooms, subjects, and students to interest and empathy, we, now, move on to the teachers, themselves. Teachers have the unique opportunity to set an example for their students by telling different true stories from their lives. Here is another story from mine.

Another Story

The Great Edge of All Things

There comes a time in one's life, as I know came in Eeyore's life, when it takes every fiber of one's being to resist the hope of passing away through the medicine cabinet or slipping from a very high hotel balcony into the busy streets below, swimming a little too far out into the ocean never to be found again, or even to rack one's self about the head or pull very suddenly into traffic or over a cliff that one somehow desperately avoids. In these times, every small and helpless object becomes a potential and dangerous tool to achieve this purpose. In states of blatant fear, one laughs at the bear or the storm, hoping it might come a little closer or rage a little stronger until all the thoughts in one's head feel justified and the hope of going away

approaches to a frightening proximity. Then, in that moment, where one could die a martyr and be remembered fondly, she stays safely within the lines on the road and runs for her life from the great bear, though it might have been all too easy and accidental to waver a moment longer and blame the passing on some impossible element. Suddenly the most aggravating characteristic one possesses is the stubborn will to persist, to go on living despite everything.

Upon further thought, she remembers the friend that called her yesterday or her parents' car beneath her feet. To plunge into the air and over the rocks below, she is not so much taking her own life but pulling others dangerously close to all these benign and deadly threats. How could she choose even accidentally such a selfish act? Instead, she makes every effort to continue living though leaning over large heights and diving deep until her lungs burst. So close she is to relief at every moment and yet, somehow, she clings, shaking, to the great edge of all things, pressed from every side.

It was in one of these times that our little Eeyore sat out in the snow in November.

~

My hair caught in the bark of the tree I lay awkwardly forward against. My thoughts drifted along as slowly as the frozen flurries that came to rest on my hands and in my hair. I imagined smashing my forehead against the great tree, but that would be too obvious. The snow sunk into my pants, bringing a chill that did not bother me. Remember the old man in the barn at Little House on the Prairie? Maybe I would go with him very soon. What a lovely thought.

I released my hair from the tree rather apathetically to reach my eyes up and hug my legs to my chest. I quivered looking at the grand, old tree that swayed viciously in the wind. Trees cracked all around me as though singing and waving to a cursed song, a chant in the night. I let out a breath I had been holding. Please, O tree, fall! Fall and crush me! Their howl rose to a

frightening whistle and whirl, though I was not afraid. If only a single branch might fall to press me into the ground not to be found 'till morning.

I shook as viciously as the trees for many hours. Only angry at whatever kept me alive, I untucked my head from my arms to find the stars. Piercing through the swaying and quivering and even the blur of cold coming across my eyes, the stars sat unhindered. Gently they blinked.

I found myself stumbling towards my cabin and fumbling through the door, collapsing in the warmth to thaw, somehow escaping the frozen depths and somehow relieved despite my disappointment.

The Value of True Stories

As the next step for using storytelling in the classroom, telling nonfiction stories and those written by students and teachers can help those in the classroom cope with their experiences. According to Khalifa (2016) and others, being able to sufficiently articulate honest dreams and griefs requires a high level of critical self-awareness and preparation. When first asked of prayers or passions, most relate to Plath (1982) when she wrote that:

when at last you find someone to whom you feel you can pour out your soul, you stop in shock at the words you utter—they are so rusty, so ugly, so meaningless and feeble from being kept in the small cramped dark inside you so long. (p. 143)

In some part, it remains the teacher's responsibility to attempt to encourage students in all areas of their lives. According to Vacca (2018) and others on the Sociocultural theory, setting an example as the teacher can be the most powerful tool in the classroom; this is why it is crucial for teachers to learn to tell their own stories so that their students might also learn to speak the truth when the time comes.

The process of first observing and remembering and then recording experiences has been prominent in all civilizations as a method for coping with trauma. Rather than fabricating characters and worlds to teach morals or provide a taste of excitement, imagination can be used instead as a way to process the present and the past (Stevenson, 2019). By taking “lots of troubles” and writing “jolly tales” according to Louisa May Alcott (1889, p. 13), we, as teachers, accidentally fall upon the memories that make us human, those that brought us through the moments at the edge of all things and those that relentlessly made us stronger. We fulfill our purpose by creating safe places where students can share their stories, even stories of faith (Mulder, 2021). It has become widely popular among psychology research and practice to promote “Scriptotherapy”—a process of journaling or writing down memories—as a method to tackle interactions with trauma and ongoing mental illnesses (Riordan, 1996; Pennebaker, 1997; Hunt, 2010). From King David’s Psalms and the Catholic Sacrament of Confession to today’s Scriptotherapy, we, as a civilization, have found hope, faith, and community in writing true stories.

Beyond our singularity, writing true stories connects all people on a common level of relationship. The collective component of literature helps educators develop themselves and their students in self-reflexivity, hospitality, intercultural dialogue, and transaction of perspectives (Spires et al., 2019). Bowman (2018) shows how literature allows for effective communication, which, in an instructional setting, is “a shared activity resulting in a transfer of information across brains” (p. 97). As more practiced storytellers, we come alongside our students, encouraging them:

to name and understand the troubles we are facing, to think with hope and with rigour about the sorts of futures that are being made today and to enable them to care for, imagine

and make livable futures in collective dialogue with others whose futures are also at stake.

(Facer, 2019, p. 4)

Looking into the past and the present as a place to learn from, students and teachers reflect on each other's experiences (Stevenson, 2019) and practice identifying and articulating desires, hopes, fears, and dreams for the future while engaging "with rich complexities of the present" (Facer, 2019, p. 3) so that when the edge of all things slips suddenly and terrifyingly close, we remember the truth that protected us the last times and will protect us again today.

There is much to add on the fickleness of memory, how easily it can be altered and how circumstances can lose their hold of fear or grief (Loftus & Palmer, 1974). It might also be worthwhile to analyze the plasticity of the brain and the experiments of Merzenich's monkeys and others remapping their brains. Additionally, an elementary psychology paper might include the potential chemical effects of simple actions like smiling or frowning on delight, etc. All these are worth developing further though not in this paper.

The Value of Contributing to a Bigger Story

By telling true stories, we as teachers contribute to something bigger and greater than ourselves; we follow the examples of David and Jesus using storytelling to teach, to grieve, and to praise. This section will inform on storytelling through poetry and parables to pass on truth, culture, and emotions that go beyond the individual and the present.

Starting with "the man after God's own heart," we see in the Psalms the language David uses to interact with a variety of emotions. David moves from the dust of death (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001, Psalm 22:15) as one who cannot keep himself alive (Psalm 22:29) to the sanctuaries in the heights (Psalm 102:19) sometimes in the same chapters. Passage by passage, he describes peace and betrayal, praise and doubt, joy and devastation. Using little

lyrics, he pens verses that have encouraged thousands beyond what he might have imagined.

David set the example of writing out his dreams, fears, and hopes.

So often, throughout the Psalms, David uses the phrase “as for me” or “but as for me” followed by a conviction: “as for me, I will praise the Lord,” “as for me, I will take hope in the Lord,” and “as for me, it is good to be near the Lord.” David lays out for himself his grieves and doubts but more enduring than these his convictions. By acknowledging both, he can set aside the anguish of the present for he knows, with determined resolution, that all will soon pass away into a life more abundantly (John 10:10). Through poetry, David took part in the bigger story by ensuring that his soul was preserved, by setting an example that others might preserve their souls, and by paving a way for the Preserver of Souls; in the same way, I wrote four poems, found in the Appendix, as examples of using poetry like David to grieve and share grief in *Where I Cannot Go* written after my childhood dog died, to wrestle with anger and self-control in *The Knife* referencing the tongue’s nature like a double-edged sword frequently used by David and Jesus, and to share hope despite doubts in *The Last April Shower of May*—where struggles seem to never cease—and *Little Light*—where a gentle light resembling the light of life, of goodness, or of faith might go out forever. Other types of stories and poems will be more useful to achieving different goals as seen in Jesus’ use of these in his ministries.

Throughout Jesus’ time on earth and specifically his time teaching, he captivated diverse audiences with stories and parables. He kept the attention of many more learned and respected than he from his time in Jerusalem as a twelve-year-old to his latter sermons. In fact, Jesus is most often remembered using stories and metaphors to communicate his message. Time and time again, Jesus used stories of fields and treasures (Matt 13:44), trees, seeds, and vines (Mark 4), shepherds and wolves (John 10), gates and narrow paths (Matt 7:13-14), prodigal sons and the

wealthy (Luke 16), and salt, fish, and wine (Matt 5:13-16). At times, Jesus *only* used parables as his method of teaching (Matt 13:34). Though some were not meant to understand the teaching, Jesus' words remained in the hearts and altered the lives of many who heard them, reaching thousands at a time and lasting thousands of years.

Besides the example of Jesus and testimony of his accounts, the major form of revelation chosen by God is literally a collection of stories, the Bible (Steffen, 2005). God esteemed this method of instruction and love superior to so many others that he wrote the greatest story of his son for us to remember and write on our own hearts (Haven, 2007). This practice of living, remembering, praying, telling began with each account in Scripture. Today, the Bible is still remembered as one of the most astounding masterpieces of literature even only from a literary standpoint (Dinsmore, 1931; Chen, 2017). The Great Plot of sacrificial savior and gentle judge comes back year after year as a literary device unmatched by Romeo and Juliet or Cinderella stories. Booker's (2006) seven basic plots existed in the Bible long before Shakespeare and Dickens.

With resilient themes and foreshadowing, the Bible demonstrates nearly every genre of literature from poetry and prose in Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Songs of Solomon, adventure and "fantasy"-like literature, though real, in Genesis and Revelations, and letters and primary accounts in the Old Testament prophets and New Testament (Hagan, 2019). The Bible holds the greatest battles and cruelest kings, the sweetest reunions and most devastating disasters, the gentle brothers, and even faithful prostitutes. Each story exists to encourage, to warn, to give hope, to clarify, to provide context and history, and to introduce resilience just like Jesus' parables and teachings. If understood, the reader might walk away a wiser man or woman more inclined to hope, to love, and to endure.

With the aim of imitating Christ—the teller of parables, God—the creator of events who delighted to also record them that more could be delighted, and David—our chief Psalmist, I wrote the following children’s poem in an attempt to share an emotion and sound like Shel Silverstein.

I Have 10 Whole Things Today

I have ten whole things today,
Each one worse than the one before.
I have more than ten to say,
But my brain is too full for more.

Ten whole things for me to do
Plus ten whole things for me to know.
Most of these are very new
And make me feel I’m not so old.

I have ten whole things today,
But all I want to do is sleep.
I cannot sleep or even play,
But always, back to work I creep.

Ten whole things that start with one.
The first is hardest of them all;
It’s toughest but soonest done,
And from it, the rest will fall.

The second and third are tests,
And fourth and fifth are assessments.
They say I should do my best,
But can’t I do that in a tent?¹

The sixth and seventh are huge,
And eighth and ninth are quite bizarre.
Ten, I don’t know how to do,

¹ This verse demonstrates the distractibility of the narrator, writing this poem at a cottage or “tent” up North when school was moved online.

But I don't think I'll get that far.

Now, you've seen my things to do

And know I only have one day.

Now, I came to talk to you.

Please will you help me if you may?

Unlike *I Have 10 Whole Things Today* which has a fairly broad audience, *It's Government*, found in the Appendix, follows more closely with the parables that only some would understand. It aims to comment on the political leaning of Canada in relation to early education and warn against increasing socialism. *It's Government* demonstrates how a student might grapple with complex ideas, like the disconnect between leaders' characters and the simple values taught in preschool, to draw attention to social issues and bring to light suppressed perspectives. Using poetry for reflection will help students take part in the bigger story as they reflect on society and humanity and determine behaviors and values that they believe are essential to good life.

For students and teachers alike, recording perspective becomes a way of taking part in history. By recording and reading stories and poems, we preserve certain aspects of culture that we find beautiful or meaningful. Like in *It's Government*, poetry can be used to enliven a spirit of respect for defenders of a country, encouraging young people to look back on history and literature as guides for the future. See *This Valley*, another poem about legacy and thankfulness, in the Appendix.

Referring to the lives and views of children, Jesus says the pure in heart will see God (Matt 5:8) and we must receive the kingdom of God like little children (Luke 18:17). In these verses, Jesus seems to hold the pure and innocent of high repute. Their stories and ours might be a window into the winsome and gentle. Little tales of simpler times, like the parables of Jesus,

may be the secret to playing parts in the bigger story. Thus, the final value of stories to teachers and students taking part in a bigger story is in testimonies. To demonstrate the use of poetry to share my testimony and contribute to a greater story, I wrote *Many Names and Those of Mine* and a couple chapters continuing from *Little Eeyore* before *The Great Edge of All Things*. The poem follows my life until I came to Christ, using the theme of different names to illustrate my development and change in perspective. Writing this poem, I was shocked to see the names that I could and could not claim in the end.

Many Names and Those of Mine

Many call me many names.
Some wish to call me just the same.
I go by many names, you see.
You'll find it hard to call for me.

Now, what name will I respond to?
Today, what title should I choose?
Sarah, Sally, Susie, or Sue?
Tara, Carrie, Ruthie, or Rue?

Why can they call me many names?
Come close to know the names I claim.
These names I heard when first I came,
But never were they quite the same.

At first, I laughed at Baby Boo.
And then, I cried at Stupid You.
Soon, others called me Little One.
Then, others said the Winner's won.

My brother tried out Idiot,
While others used Oblivious.
I answered each and every call,
And even those not mine at all.

For once, I turned to 'Excuse Me!'
To see if it referred to me.
And sure enough, he beckoned me
Closer to him, his book to see.

As I grew, my names were different;
Some were yelled, but some were written.²
They called me Fast or Smart or Fat.
Some tried to call me Slow or Sad.

Still worse, they got as I grew more.
They called me Lonely and a Bore.
And then, they called me Lesbian,
Because of my sweet, lady friends.

These names were cruel and mean and wrong,
But I was taught to play along.
The names still came up every year,³
For me to hope I wouldn't hear.

But soon they chose more solemn names,
Of dwelling sickness in my brain.
"Depressed, Suicidal," they said.
Broken and Tired I went to bed.

Just then, a whole new set came in.
They said my life would now begin.
They called me Grown, Adult, Person.
They called me Worker, Aunt, Certain.

'Student' held a different meaning.
'Growing' turned to grown and beaming.
They said I worked so very hard.
Still, my new names seemed somehow marred.

If they had used those names so long,

² "Written names" refers to report cards and other assessments which seemed more official than just name calling names.

³ Every year refers to the new school years that brought new classmates or new schools.

Why did they now call them so wrong?
Which ones should I accustom to?
To Smart and Sweet or Mean and Rude?

My mother told me they were wrong
To call me cruelly for so long.
But still, these names crept in my heart
To tease me and tear me apart.

Very soon, I began to see
These names did not pertain to me.
Instead, they showed the dwelling rot
Within the tongue the Devil's caught.

Although I'm called by many names,
I know the ones from which I came.
Sometimes I think I'm Kind or Sweet,
But even these aren't mine to keep.

The ones that still remain today
Are those I was first taught to say.
He called me His and called me Loved.
He calls me Home; I'm His Beloved.

Those other names mean little now.
His names for me I am more proud.
He calls me Daughter of a King.
Now, I can do nothing but sing.

He calls me Heir and Safe and Known.
He says of greater names He's shown.
His names for me are what He sees,
But best of all, He says He's Pleased.

Those other names disgust me now
When they escape from other mouths.
Can they not hear His sweeter names?
Do they not know from where they came?

Through this poem and others, I learned to tell more accurate stories about myself. In high school, I wrote a nonfiction story about my life that was rather exaggerated and distorted. With a couple more years, I began to learn how to tell more truthful stories about my life, not neglecting the grief but also not revelling in it as I had before. I learned the power of telling stories and remembering the simple moments. Writing this article introduced me to the sheer power of a simple story for teachers and students in the classroom, for souls attempting to mature and reflect, and for Christ to preserve every wonderful moment that might encourage his children. The first chapters of my new book were simpler and more truthful. Let us read a few of them together.

A Few More Stories

The Playful Tower

As a plump two-year-old, our little Eeyore journeyed to many a foreign place. Attached to the arm of her mother and sister, Samantha, she gawked at wispy, wonderful clouds at one point painted upon the low ceilings way up near her mother's large hat. With great pounding steps, she listened closely to the history of this place according to her four-year-old sister in which a lovely, old man once had a granddaughter, "about your age, little Eeyore," who was quite blind when she was born, but this grandfather loved the child so dearly that he wanted to try to help her see. He took her in an airplane, "for they had already been invented," and let her stick her soft hand out the window when they were very high up. Though she could not see anything, "because she was blind, you know," she knew that she was in a cloud castle in the sky by the damp smell and general "*splendorousness*, that's like a better word for beauty or peace," and she...

"She fell out?" Eeyore was always quick to offer some adventure into these stories.

“No, no. Her grandfather would never have let her fall, because he was holding her tight and he loved her so.” Sammy gave Eeyore a kind but direct look to mind what she said. “She knew she was in the cloud castles, and she never forgot her castles in the sky even when she was one hundred years old.”

“She was one hundred years old?” Eeyore gasped.

“Yes, but the grandfather helped her remember by giving her a magical gift.” Sammy nodded for effect. “He painted the great globby clouds on the bottom of the top bunk of her bunk bed and every night, just before she went to bed, she reached up her hand and ran her little finger along those wisps of paint and remembered her cloud town.”

Eeyore and Sammy sighed.

“Then, after the grandfather died because he was very old, the little girl grew up into an infamous painter; that means she was really, really good and everybody knew it. When she was an infamous painter, she traveled all around the world, painting clouds on all the ceilings and through the years they even started to make cloud wallpaper to put on ceilings because of the little girl and her grandfather. Mom says that this ceiling is just wallpaper,” she lowered her voice to a whisper, “but I think it is one of the original ceilings that the little girl painted when she was infamous.” Whether believing the story or pretending to--for these are much the same, the sisters trotted behind their mother under the peeling wallpaper as though they were *infamous* as well, with noses raised high to watch the ceiling not caring how they tripped and stumbled with hands held in each other’s, tight with delight.

Mother brought the sisters to a little room where they might wait for their father. The sun slipped away outside the window to cloak the city and room in jumping shadows and twinkling lights. Leaning up against each other, Sammy and Eeyore drifted slowly into their own little

cloud towns until a swish and click let Father into the room. He lunged onto the bed, sending the girls clearly into the air from where he had to snatch them lest the warning glare from Mother become more severe. In a great hug of bewildered sleepiness and delight, father and daughters collapsed together on the bed.

“Girls! Do you think magic is real?” Father smiled, not daring a glance at Mother.

“Yes!” replied Sammy without hesitation, though Eeyore sat with her mouth open as though having spoken also though not wishing to affirm so quickly.

“Would you like to see some magic?” Again the same responses of affirmation and only patient hope. “Come, come, I’ll show you.” The girls rolled off the bed after their father, plopping on the ground and reaching to be lifted to the window. Pressed against the glass, they waited with tiny noses and her tongue, in Eeyore’s case, smushed to the cold pane, while eyes searched for what Father called *magic*. Suddenly a great spray of water and lights exploded in front of them. Blues and purples danced along, while glimmering pearls of water dripped into the air like tiny fairies before joining again in pools at the foot of a shining tower. With wee gasps, the girls followed the spotlights that shot up into the clouds before falling down beneath the water with splashes of wet color. The tower seemed to bounce and sway under the lights, as though making fun of its reflection in the pools below.

“I just knew it was real; it had to be.” Sammy clasped her hands in delight as Eeyore started to snore beside her. “Magic can make even a cold, old tower playful, right Dad?”

“Yes, Sammy, even a cold, old tower.” He held her closer to him before slipping Eeyore back under the covers where she kept up her snoring for the greater portion of the night.

s-u-n

An exceedingly pleasant day began, one full of peaceful dreams and hearty sighs. It was the sort of day when the sun might take over an hour to set for the elderly neighbors sitting on their porch or make sure not to burn the two naked children squirming around their kiddie pool next door. Soon, their mother drew them inside wrapped together in a thick shower towel. Sucking soggy fingers or dripping hair, the two cuddled under a serenade of soft sweetness and gentle kindness from their homeschool teacher.

Before them, she held a card quite overcome by the sun that seeped through the door behind her. Eeyore knew from Sammy that the card said, “Sun,” but how it told her so, she could not understand. She wished only to continue blinking in the gentle beams that colored her cheeks and warmed her heart. Delicate wisps made a halo of Mother’s hair, which reflected in Sammy’s eyes. She knew then that Mother was an angel, despite her trying to teach dyslexic Eeyore to read. Eeyore hated reading. You may hate reading too, but to have gotten this far in my book, I dare say you like it a great deal more than poor Eeyore.

From the floor to the couch, the girls followed Mother and squished into her lap. She pulled out Anne of Green Gables, though Eeyore maintained the distinct impression that Mother made the stories up from her head like Sammy always did, only pretending to understand all those obscure scribbles on the pages. Nevertheless, the sweet tales of L. M. Montgomery drifted into the sisters’ cloud towns where the ‘White Way of Delight’ took form and smell for Sammy and Eeyore to roll through the apple blossoms, suck in the deep earthy, sweet smells, and giggle with the wind in the trees. Such lovely times the girls had within those books, not reading for that was detestable to Eeyore, but only guided by the sweeping form of their gentle Mother closer to the sun and the s-u-n, quite separate things in Eeyore’s mind.

Around a Pear Tree

As toddlers, Eeyore, henceforth called Ee until we need to remember her name, and Sammy found many days' worth of amusement in the dust of Grandma Ann's backyard. Sprawled under a miniature pear tree, the girls soaked in the sun as the dirt licked up the water from the hose. With rolled-up jeans and muddied T-shirts, Ee and Sammy sloshed and patted their clay into little pies to show Grandma Ann.

Wiping the back of her filthy hand across her face, Ee leapt to spray her feet and hands. With cupped hands under the hose, she filled her tiny palms before racing back to her pie where she deposited the little wetness left in her hands. Sammy waved wildly at Ee from across the wetting dirt patch. She pointed to a line of ants that she guided across a miniature bridge made of two stones and a leaf.

"We must protect them from the floods." Sammy sent Ee to collect the few dry, bridge making materials left. After they set a variety of dams around the yard, Sammy led Ee into the miniature pear tree in the middle of the yard. "When I was making bridges, I saw a little family of ants trying to escape from the middle of a puddle over there, see?" Sammy waited a moment for affirmation as Ee listened dumbly. "Ants usually live in colonies, but this family had been trapped away from their colony for decades in ant years that they had forgotten all about their colony." Ee surveyed the little lawn of dust and puddles; she saw the little pie she had forsaken, and as she stared at it imagining all it could have been, a wee ladybug crawled onto her finger. Fascinated by the little orange shell, Ee gazed piercingly at it, as the bug prepared to take a nice chunk out of Ee's finger. "I knew the ants should probably go back to their colony, even if they had forgotten all about it." Ee frowned as the tiny bug chomped into her finger. Shaking the beetle quickly, she tried to free herself, with no success. "So, I asked Grandma Ann for a little

cup from the cupboard, and I used it to take some of the water out of the moat that surrounded the ant family.” Ee struggled to decide what to do. Should she shake harder or give up? “Then, since the ground was very soggy, like quicksand for an ant, I put down two sticks on top of four rocks with a leaf on top, and I had to coax, that means make sure something moves, the ants across.” In a final move of desperation, Ee stuck her finger and the bug into her mouth, which to her surprise was a very effective way to dispose of the little biter. “So the ants got back to their colony.” Ee nodded in congratulations, whether to the ants or herself you will have to decide.

Grandma Ann called the two sopping girls to show her what they had made. Guided around her yard, Grandma Ann, followed by Ee, stepped carefully where Sammy directed as she heard all the tales to be known about the tiny yard. Finding the exhibition very satisfying indeed, Grandma Ann invited the girls to the porch to enjoy popsicles while their clothes were washed and dried. The popsicles were quickly replaced with cold lemonade after Mother read the label on them, which revealed something rather remarkable to her. Sipping her lemonade, Ee watched Sammy drop some from her finger for the caterpillar on the wall.

“He must have been so thirsty to climb up so high.” She exclaimed after flopping back on the floor beside Ee.

Her Best Friend Forever

Little Ee tumbled around a corner to flop upon the stairs. Something in her grin showed she meant to be solemn, but her little body would not comply. She flapped her legs about and nearly clapped her hands with glee. Soon, Mother joined her by the stairs. Mother asked Ee if she was sure about the decision. Eeyore beamed back with clasped hands and hysteric giggles. More dignified as Mother always was, she nodded deeply, despite the jumping of her heart.

“What do you think it all means?” Mother paused.

“Well, it means that Jesus will be my best friend forever, and He will come live with me, in my heart,” she said, folding her tiny hands across her chest. Seeing in Mother’s eyes that this answer was quite satisfactory, Ee’s little grin broadened to her ears.

“Ok, close your eyes. I’ll pray for you, and you can pray when I’m done.” Desperately determined, Ee followed these directions, snapping her lips shut as well. Mother’s sweet voice reached up to heaven as Little Ee’s best friend came into her heart. When the prayer was done, Mother squeezed her little girl with one shining tear. Breaking from this embrace, Ee barrelled through the house to find Father, jumping on his lap to tell him all about sweet Mother and dear Jesus.

A few days passed before Ee prayed again with Sammy in the bathtub upstairs. She needed Friend Jesus back in her heart again, but soon, she would find him there safe and strong, when all other lights went out.

Please see my start of other chapters in the Appendix.

The End

Through stories like these, teachers and students might learn to dwell on beautiful things. True stories become a way of preserving and passing down values, pointing to people and things that last forever, and coping with everything else in the meantime, for “even when the body goes to sleep, the mind stays up all night telling itself stories” (Frank, 2014, p. 221). In the end, storytelling remains the most powerful way to hope—having survived stories of the past, living to tell stories later on, and pressing on to the end of the ultimate story. To teach, to love, and to endure, stories allow us to partake in our classrooms and communities in memorable ways. As teachers hoping to bring up new generations who are discerning and loving, storytelling might be the one thing worth preserving through the ages and through it, preserve everything else.

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Appendix*Poem Samples*

September 12, 2020

Where I Cannot Go

Just last week I took you for a ride upon the lake,
And paddled very slowly across the bay for your sake.
You loved to watch the water rise and fall beneath your nose.
I wrapped you in my jacket to warm your little toes.

Just last week I sat with you and hummed upon the lawn;
You never minded sitting there and lis'ning to my songs.
You loved to smell the gentle breeze that swept over the hills
And hear my tales of the skies, the people, and their ills.

Just last week I held you close to watch a mighty storm;
I tried to tell sweet things to you, like "You won't come to harm."
By me, you whimpered quietly, afraid to go outside,
And in my bed and covers, you found a place to hide.

Just last week you came with me to run and fetch the mail,
As though you loved to run with me without a single ail.
You even smiled a little when I shared my lunch with you.
How much I'd love to go back to when I never knew!

Just last week you left us for a place I cannot go;
You never even told me before you left alone
That soon I'd have to leave you too in that dark, cold hole.
Now, you've gone before me to the place I cannot go.

Just last week I walked with you from lake to lonely hole,
Last week I went with you from lawn and song to thunder roll.
Just last week I held you close and talked of other's sorrows,
Just last week I laid you in the place I cannot go.

(to grieve)

September 17, 2020

I Have 10 Whole Things Today

I have ten whole things today,
Each one worse than the one before.
I have more than ten to say,
But my brain is too full for more.

Ten whole things for me to do
Plus ten whole things for me to know.
Most of these are very new
And make me feel I'm not so old.

I have ten whole things today,
But all I want to do is sleep.
I cannot sleep or even play,
But always, back to work I creep.

Ten whole things that start with one.
The first is hardest of them all.
It's toughest but soonest done,
And from it, the rest will fall.

The second and third are tests,
And fourth and fifth are assessments.
They say I should do my best,
But can't I do that in a tent?

The sixth and seventh are huge,
And eighth and ninth are quite bizarre.
Ten, I don't know how to do,
But I don't think I'll get that far.

Now, you've seen my things to do
And know I only have one day.
Now, I came to talk to you.
Please will you help me if you may?

(to share an emotion)

June 24, 2020

The Knife

I hide a knife beneath my tongue,
A shiv to stab a friend.
It hurts and hides; bow strung, hands wrung.
A cut that never mends.

A pain to wield and shame to use,
A desperate argument,
That slices tongue and friendly muse,
Destroying what was meant.

The wielder bleeds, their target screams,
A rage beneath the tongue.
The great battle of shivs and seems,
Many words and cold guns.

A foreign threat to her culture;
She's raised to hold a gun.
Though she'd never pull the trigger,
She's raised it just for fun.

I know the bite of her dagger,
The sting of my defence.
I know the taste of her anger,
Though she calls me a friend.

So with her gun pressed to my head,
She pleads for my support.
Remembering the times I've bled,
I pray, "Abort, abort!"

But then the knife I've safely hid,
It festers in my mouth.
It cannot bear to stay within.
The filth comes tumbling out.

(to teach a moral)

May 2, 2020

The Last April Shower of May⁴

Rain slips down our window sills.
Puddles form at every door,
Near the barn and under hills,
Quickly filling evermore.

Clouds press close to every pane.
Mists encompass house and road,
Near the lights and o'r the train,
Tightly wrapping all that showed.

Now, it's pounding; now, it's soft.
Soon, we'll need a dryer mop.
Here, it's stronger; there, it's not.
How I wish the rain would stop!

When all is hidden, all is stopped,
All awaits a distant warm,
Rain falls down ker-plip, ker-plop
Turning to a mighty storm.

Frightful thunder, pouring rain,
Pressing mists, and lightning streaks,
I doubt the sun will shine again.
I fear the roof will always leak.⁵

Now, at last more solemnly,
The rains relieve and weaken.
The storm retreats to shouts of glee
And praise up to our beacon.

Grasses grow and bunnies bath.
All begin to sigh and sing.
Grasses glow and bunnies laugh.
Rain has softened everything.⁶

(to create an image)

⁴ This poem reflects plot elements of a story. It follows a brewing storm and ends when the storm has passed.

⁵ Here are the two verses that demonstrate the anxiety and pessimism accompanied with the most treacherous fears and struggles.

⁶ This closing line presents the final resolution. Despite the great storm and the dark night of the soul, everything seems better for it; there is hope for something better through the rain.

April 27, 2020

It's Government

A sickly, little, childish light
Gives us hope and even might.
A friendly glance and curly hair
Show us strength and even care.
But it's not real life, it's government.

They call extraction charity
And honesty barbarity.
They say distraction's clarity,
Education: calamity.

Do not take what isn't yours
Answer kindly to harsh roars
Spend it wisely or you'll see
Working hard's not that easy.

We heard these tales on reading mats,
That you can make and sell your hats.⁷
We learned to mind the way we speak,
As though the world is kind and meek.
We try to work and earn our keep,
But still cannot afford to eat.
We save and squeeze and skimp and sell,
Though it is hard to see or tell.

Love your neighbor as yourself.
Keep your toys upon the shelf.
Say your prayers before you sleep.
What you sow, you soon will reap.

They take without a care to see
I've worked for what belongs to me.
They speak without a thought to know
Their loyal listeners row on row.⁸

⁷ This phrase references to a well-known children's book, *Caps for Sale* by Esphyr Slobodkina.

⁸ This phrase "row on row" comes from *In Flanders Fields*, a poem memorized by most Canadian, elementary-age students in memory of lost soldiers recited every year on Remembrance Day. Flanders Fields hold the burial stones of *thousands* of veteran graves lined row after row with unnamed plots. This verse is meant to show the power and influence of the government to change and ultimately, save or end thousands of lives. The government has loyal supporters who will even be called to arms with the hope that their government is applying itself to their best interests.

Our tiny, wilting, sickly light
Might give us hope or maybe might.
Yet every year despite what's known,
Another steps up to his throne
To be for us what's clearly shown:
It's not real life; it's government.

(to express opinion)

November 27, 2019

This Valley

A calm dwells within this valley
Of storms past since when a tally
Brought men of every sort and size
To fight for king and clearer skies.

This valley swallowed up the men
Who fought and died time and again
For higher people's state of mind
And lowly people's burnt cake rind.

After the wars, this valley grew
Green things to eat, however few,
But fewer people then remained
To eat and sing beneath the rain.

Yet still, they sang and loved and died
And thanked the Lord to have survived
To work the earth beneath the sun
With dog and kin, daughter and son.

In this valley, sweet silence came
Of sunsets and the horse's mane
Of the dog's pant and gentle wind
That wound around the house and kin.

And now, within this valley, here's
A maze of corn from many years
Of sweat and tears and blood and grease
To let this valley sit in peace.

(to reflect)

November 19, 2019

Many Names and Those of Mine

Many call me many names.
Some wish to call me just the same.
I go by many names, you see.
You'll find it hard to call for me.

Now, what name will I respond to?
Today, what title should I choose?
Sarah, Sally, Susie, or Sue?
Tara, Carrie, Ruthie, or Rue?

Why can they call me many names?
Come close to know the names I claim.
These names I heard when first I came,
But never were they quite the same.

At first, I laughed at Baby Boo.
And then, I cried at Stupid You.
Soon, others called me Little One.
Then, others said the Winner's won.

My brother tried out Idiot,
While others used Oblivious.
I answered each and every call,
And even those not mine at all.

For once, I turned to 'Excuse Me!'
To see if it referred to me.
And sure enough, he beckoned me
Closer to him, his book to see.

As I grew, my names were different;
Some were yelled, but some were written.
They called me Fast or Smart or Fat.
Some tried to call me Slow or Sad.

Still worse, they got as I grew more.
They called me Lonely and a Bore.
And then, they called me Lesbian,
Because of my sweet, lady friends.

These names were cruel and mean and wrong,
But I was taught to play along.
The names still came up every year,
For me to hope I wouldn't hear.

But soon they chose more solemn names,
Of dwelling sickness in my brain.
“Depressed, Suicidal,” they said.
Broken and Tired I went to bed.

Just then, a whole new set came in.
They said my life would now begin.
They called me Grown, Adult, Person.
They called me Worker, Aunt, Certain.

‘Student’ held a different meaning.
‘Growing’ turned to grown and beaming.
They said I worked so very hard.
Still, my new names seemed somehow marred.

If they had used those names so long,
Why did they now call them so wrong?
Which ones should I accustom to?
To Smart and Sweet or Mean and Rude?

My mother told me they were wrong
To call me cruelly for so long.
But still, these names crept in my heart
To tease me and tear me apart.

Very soon, I began to see
These names did not pertain to me.
Instead, they showed the dwelling rot
Within the tongue the Devil’s caught.

Although I’m called by many names,
I know the ones from which I came.
Sometimes I think I’m Kind or Sweet,
But even these aren’t mine to keep.

The ones that still remain today
Are those I was first taught to say.
He called me His and called me Loved.
He calls me Home; I’m His Beloved.

Those other names mean little now.
His names for me I am more proud.
He calls me Daughter of a King.
Now, I can do nothing but sing.

He calls me Heir and Safe and Known.
He says of greater names He’s shown.
His names for me are what He sees,

But best of all, He says He's Pleased.

Those other names disgust me now
When they escape from other mouths.
Can they not hear His sweeter names?
Do they not know from where they came?

(to testify)

October 10, 2019

Little Light⁹

The light comes down in swifts and swirls,
Dancing for me in tips and twirls.
It whirls for me in sways and swells,
Bouncing along like little bells.

It cascades forth in gentle streams,
Pushing forward, although it seems
To flicker just for me to gasp
Afraid that I had seen its last.¹⁰

But still, it presses through my lids¹¹
And dwells as warmth between my ribs,¹²
For even when the light goes out,
It will return without a doubt.¹³

(to give hope)

⁹ *Little Light* highlights the imagery of the Holy Spirit from the perspective of a young child amused by a little light like in the song: “This Little Light of Mine.”

¹⁰ Like in *The Last April Shower of May*, this verse highlights the moment when all endurance is threatened. What hope is there?

¹¹ For in sweet dreams are moments of peace and light despite closed lids.

¹² This verse references the common understanding of Jesus dwelling in our hearts or “between my ribs.”

¹³ Again, there is hope and resolution even in the darkest times “when all other lights go out” (Tolkien, 1991).

September 13, 2019

Did You See It?

It seeps between my fingers.
It drips upon my shirt.
Between my teeth, it lingers,
Appearing quite overt.

My friends and teachers watch it,
Yet no one points it out.
My mother came to see it,
But I can't get it out.

I spray my face with water,
Sucking madly at my teeth.
I stab it with my pointer,
But concede in my defeat.

I show it off within my smile,
Chewing loudly as I speak.
I smile, but I can't wait till I
Get home to brush my teeth.

(to amuse)

Book Samples

I – Little Eeyore Continued...

They brought Eeyore home as I understand, where she spent the majority of her time screaming or flying up to the ceiling over her father's head. Though her sister only remembered the screaming, I fancy the child would remember her fat, little body flying up into the air with hysteric giggles for many years to come. I imagine her eyes flashed about as a plump tongue wagged out amid her wee cackles. Again and again, Father threw the child to increase their collective glee and goad their mother and wife.

Another tactic to suppress the shrieks of Eeyore was called the wrap-and-roll. Father could bundle the child so tightly the screams could not quite get enough air. Very patiently and solemnly, the child would lift her legs and arms appropriately as he wound her up tightly. Once she was quite stiff and trapped, she went into her crib which was tilted just to the angle from where she *thud-thud-thud*-rolled to the bottom only to *thud-thud-thud*-tumble back again. She laughed a shrill shrieking giggle as she bobbed from side to side, quite safe in Dad's cocoon. The "oh, honey, are you sure she can breathe?" or "oh my! She almost hit the ceiling!" always transformed the child and father's ecstasy into pure mania according to her increased gasps, giggles, and shrieks and his beaming smiles.

II - The Playful Tower

As a plump two-year-old, our little Eeyore journeyed to many a foreign place. Attached to the arm of her mother and sister, Samantha, she gawked at wispy, wonderful clouds at one point painted upon the low ceilings way up near her mother's large hat. With great pounding steps, she listened closely to the history of this place according to her four-year-old sister in which a lovely, old man once had a granddaughter, "about your age, little Eeyore," who was quite blind when she was born, but this grandfather loved the child so dearly that he wanted to try to help her see. He took her in an airplane, "for they had already been invented," and let her stick her soft hand out the window when they were very high up. Though she could not see anything, "because she was blind, you know," she knew that she was in a cloud castle in the sky by the damp smell and general "*splendorousness*, that's like a better word for beauty or peace," and she...

"She fell out?" Eeyore was always quick to offer some adventure into these stories.

“No, no. Her grandfather would never have let her fall, because he was holding her tight and he loved her so.” Sammy gave Eeyore a kind but direct look to mind what she said. “She knew she was in the cloud castles, and she never forgot her castles in the sky even when she was one hundred years old.”

“She was one hundred years old?” Eeyore gasped.

“Yes, but the grandfather helped her remember by giving her a magical gift.” Sammy nodded for effect. “He painted the great globby clouds on the bottom of the top bunk of her bunk bed and every night, just before she went to bed, she reached up her hand and ran her little finger along those wisps of paint and remembered her cloud town.”

Eeyore and Sammy sighed.

“Then, after the grandfather died because he was very old, the little girl grew up into an infamous painter; that means she was really really good, and everybody knew it. When she was an infamous painter, she traveled all around the world, painting clouds on all the ceilings and through the years they even started to make cloud wallpaper to put on ceilings because of the little girl and her grandfather. Mom says that this ceiling is just wallpaper,” she lowered her voice to a whisper, “but I think it is one of the original ceilings that the little girl painted when she was infamous.” Whether believing the story or pretending to--for these are much the same, the sisters trotted behind their mother under the peeling wallpaper as though they were *infamous* as well, with noses raised high to watch the ceiling not caring how they tripped and stumbled with hands held in each other’s, tight with delight.

Mother brought the sisters to a little room where they might wait for their father. The sun slipped away outside the window to cloak the city and room in jumping shadows and twinkling lights. Leaning up against each other, Sammy and Eeyore drifted slowly into their own little cloud towns until a swish and click let Father into the room. He lunged onto the bed, sending the girls clearly into the air from where he had to snatch them lest the warning glare from Mother become more severe. In a great hug of bewildered sleepiness and delight, father and daughters collapsed together on the bed.

“Girls! Do you think magic is real?” Father smiled, not daring a glance at Mother.

“Yes!” replied Sammy without hesitation, though Eeyore sat with her mouth open as though having spoken also though not wishing to affirm so quickly.

“Would you like to see some magic?” Again, the same responses of affirmation and only patient hope. “Come, come, I’ll show you.” The girls rolled off the bed after their father, plopping on the ground and reaching to be lifted to the window. Pressed against the glass, they waited with tiny noses and her tongue, in Eeyore’s case, smushed to the cold pane, while eyes searched for what Father called *magic*. Suddenly a great spray of water and lights exploded in front of them. Blues and purples danced along, while glimmering pearls of water dripped into the air like tiny fairies before joining again in pools at the foot of a shining tower. With wee gasps, the girls followed the spotlights that shot up into the clouds before falling down beneath the water with splashes of wet color. The tower seemed to bounce and sway under the lights, as though making fun of its reflection in the pools below.

“I just knew it was real; it had to be.” Sammy clasped her hands in delight as Eeyore started to snore beside her. “Magic can make even a cold, old tower playful, right Dad?”

“Yes, Sammy, even a cold, old tower.” He held her closer to him before slipping Eeyore back under the covers where she kept up her snoring for the greater portion of the night.

III - A Joke

Through the first few years, the family discovered that much of Eeyore’s displeasure was according to hunger, for although Mother waited on the two day and night, she never imagined that little Eeyore really needed quite so much more food than slight Sammy. However, as a gluttonous child from the beginning, Eeyore demanded increasingly more food than Sammy could hold. When screams and tantrums did not provide the desired sustenance, Eeyore resorted to a little whit.

In every family, there are a handful of stories to draw from one’s pocket and tell a friend, relative, or even a stranger at the teller’s fancy. As stories recounted repeatedly for the indefinite existence of a child, these stories are cute enough to allow for their repetition, short enough for everyone to be capable of remembering every detail, simple enough for everyone to roll their eyes at the need to repeat the stories yet another time, and sweet enough for everyone to smile at the end. The story of most interest to us remembered Father as a toddler. First told by Father’s mother, the story followed hungry Father as he hobbled up to grab the counter and pull himself up with all his might, before slumping down on the floor farthest away from food to mutter, “*Hungy, hungy, hungy,*” in a sorry, whining tone that went straight to Father’s mother’s heart.

She supposed she really ought to feed him more and maybe with a little extra jam for his bread and potatoes for his belly.

A thought popped into Eeyore's head, something very unusual for Eeyore. In a gentle, little voice just loud enough for Mother to hear, she tried out Father's old tactic, for it had worked mightily then. "*Hungy, hungy, hungy?*" She ventured. With everlasting patience, Mother swept across the room, as angelic people often do, to teach the fat child a little joke. She showed Eeyore how to press her hands together just so to mean that she would like some more. Utterly delighted, Eeyore slapped her hands together greedily and soon found a larger heap of food upon her tray, which she struck through with one hand smacking her tray with the other and wiggling her feet under her highchair to show her rapture. How wonderfully clever of Mother to invent such a lovely trick for more food.

IV - s-u-n

An exceedingly pleasant day began, one full of peaceful dreams and hearty sighs. It was the sort of day when the sun might take over an hour to set for the elderly neighbors sitting on their porch or make sure not to burn the two naked children squirming around their kiddie pool next door. Soon, their mother drew them inside wrapped together in a thick shower towel. Sucking soggy fingers or dripping hair, the two cuddled under a serenade of soft sweetness and gentle kindness from their homeschool teacher.

Before them, she held a card quite overcome by the sun that seeped through the door behind her. Eeyore knew from Sammy that the card said, "Sun," but how it told her so, she could not understand. She wished only to continue blinking in the gentle beams that colored her cheeks and warmed her heart. Delicate wisps made a halo of Mother's hair, which reflected in Sammy's eyes. She knew then that Mother was an angel, despite her trying to teach dyslexic Eeyore to read. Eeyore hated reading. You may hate reading too, but to have gotten this far in my book, I dare say you like it a great deal more than poor Eeyore.

From the floor to the couch, the girls followed Mother and squished into her lap. She pulled out Anne of Green Gables, though Eeyore maintained the distinct impression that Mother made the stories up from her head like Sammy always did, only pretending to understand all those obscure scribbles on the pages. Nevertheless, the sweet tales of L. M. Montgomery drifted into the sisters' cloud towns where the 'White Way of Delight' took form and smell for Sammy

and Eeyore to roll through the apple blossoms, suck in the deep earthy, sweet smells, and giggle with the wind in the trees. Such lovely times the girls had within those books, not reading for that was detestable to Eeyore, but only guided by the sweeping form of their gentle Mother closer to the sun and the s-u-n, quite separate things in Eeyore's mind.

V - The Corner House and Its Company

One afternoon, Sammy pledged eternal friendship to another 4-year-old found at the park adjacent to the house on the corner. Martha, as slight and tending to read lee-oh-pard instead of leopard as Sammy, came to acquaint Eeyore with her little brother, Charlie, and newest sister, Gracie. Soon after, Eeyore and Charlie were betrothed by Martha and Sammy, after which they got along excellently. Still in diapers, Eeyore slept over at the Irons very often. Sammy soon had her own bed set out for her in Martha's room, but Eeyore was always stuck sharing with Gracie in Charlie's.

Often, Eeyore wobbled across the carpet to watch the grown-ups as Gracie fell asleep so that she could tuck Gracie away somewhere where she could not disturb dreams, such as down the side of the bed or on the floor. While she waited, she plopped her chubby legs through the banister and pressed her full cheeks against the bars to squint down at those below. The night we are most excited to remember there were a fair number of strangers in the house with Mother, Father, Mr., and Mrs. Irons. They played games, tossing little packages around as though they might explode or pulling white slips that seemed either very exciting or disappointing. Mother and Father seemed to be very smart, Eeyore thought.

After the games, they all read books together. The books were all different kinds: old and new, blue and red, very large or quite tiny, but everyone seemed to be following along somehow. Eeyore supposed they were just pretending after all, just like Sammy's fairytales. Closing their books, everyone stood rather solemnly, some adjusting their position in order to see something on the large blank wall above the fireplace. As though stared into being, pictures and words appeared on the wall that everyone began to repeat, some very quiet, some very loud, and some on very different notes than the rest.

After a while standing rather rigidly, a few in the group, mostly ladies at first, began to sway around like teetering trees preparing to fall. Some even stretched out their arms like

branches to add to the picture. A few seemed to fall asleep and began muttering under their breath. Maybe they were still singing but in their sleep guessed Eeyore.

As she watched the moving group and Mr. Irrons strumming the guitar up and down and back and forth, little Eeyore thought Gracie had probably gone to her cloud towns and it was safe to crawl back into bed, but just as she turned away from the strange gatherers, she remembered having to pee and too tired now to decide where or whether to pee, she placed her head down on the thick carpet.

Whether she fell asleep or peed first, we will never know. However, Mrs. Irrons rescued little Eeyore from her puddle in the carpet and tucked her next to Gracie so gently that neither woke until terrible screams were heard out on the pavement.

Rather groggily, Eeyore toppled from Gracie's bed to rub the sleep from her eyes. Martha and Sammy had already risen to accompany the commotion outside. Sliding down the carpeted stairs, Eeyore reached for the door, pushing it open having been left ajar. Across the pavement, Charlie screamed and pleaded with Martha to the dismay of many onlooking shoppers. Martha paid no heed to Charlie, depositing the dime she received from selling Fuzzy, Charlie's most-treasured, stuffed lion, into her recently empty fanny pack. Pushing passed Charlie, Martha made for the large pile of other stuffed or beloved toys until then kept in the farthest corner of Charlie's closet. How Mrs. Irrons retrieved those treasures, I shall never know.

VI - Around a Pear Tree

As toddlers, Eeyore, henceforth called Ee until we need to remember her name, and Sammy found many days worth of amusement in the dust of Grandma Ann's backyard. Sprawled under a miniature pear tree, the girls soaked in the sun as the dirt licked up the water from the hose. With rolled-up jeans and muddied T-shirts, Ee and Sammy sloshed and patted their clay into little pies to show Grandma Ann.

Wiping the back of her filthy hand across her face, Ee leapt to spray her feet and hands. With cupped hands under the hose, she filled her tiny palms before racing back to her pie where she deposited the little wetness left in her hands. Sammy waved wildly at Ee from across the wetting dirt patch. She pointed to a line of ants that she guided across a miniature bridge made of two stones and a leaf.

“We must protect them from the floods.” Sammy sent Ee to collect the few dry, bridge making materials left. After they set a variety of dams around the yard, Sammy led Ee into the miniature pear tree in the middle of the yard. “When I was making bridges, I saw a little family of ants trying to escape from the middle of a puddle over there, see?” Sammy waited a moment for affirmation as Ee listened dumbly. “Ants usually live in colonies, but this family had been trapped away from their colony for decades in ant years that they had forgotten all about their colony.” Ee surveyed the little lawn of dust and puddles; she saw the little pie she had forsaken, and as she stared at it imagining all it could have been, a wee ladybug crawled onto her finger. Fascinated by the little orange shell, Ee gazed piercingly at it, as the bug prepared to take a nice chunk out of Ee’s finger. “I knew the ants should probably go back to their colony, even if they had forgotten all about it.” Ee frowned as the tiny bug chomped into her finger. Shaking the beetle quickly, she tried to free herself, with no success. “So, I asked Grandma Ann for a little cup from the cupboard, and I used it to take some of the water out of the moat that surrounded the ant family.” Ee struggled to decide what to do. Should she shake harder or give up? “Then, since the ground was very soggy, like quicksand for an ant, I put down two sticks on top of four rocks with a leaf on top, and I had to coax, that means make sure something moves, the ants across.” In a final move of desperation, Ee stuck her finger and the bug into her mouth, which to her surprise was a very effective way to dispose of the little biter. “So the ants got back to their colony.” Ee nodded in congratulations, whether to the ants or herself you will have to decide.

Grandma Ann called the two sopping girls to show her what they had made. Guided around her yard, Grandma Ann, followed by Ee, stepped carefully where Sammy directed as she heard all the tales to be known about the tiny yard. Finding the exhibition very satisfying indeed, Grandma Ann invited the girls to the porch to enjoy popsicles while their clothes were washed and dried. The popsicles were quickly replaced with cold lemonade after Mother read the label on them, which revealed something rather remarkable to her. Sipping her lemonade, Ee watched Sammy drop some from her finger for the caterpillar on the wall.

“He must have been so thirsty to climb up so high.” She exclaimed after flopping back on the floor beside Ee.

VII - A Little Caregiver

After a few years, Ee's life became overcome with business. Rising early, Ee and Sammy woke Mother to release them from their pen. By the time she finally consented, both girls were found laughing hysterically, giggling slyly, singing at the top of their lungs, or crying at Mother's long absence. Let out of their crib, Ee made straight for her four children and their many stuffed relations waiting for her. Each she dressed and led downstairs, where each had to be fed and changed while keeping up thoroughly sophisticated conversations regarding stuffed animals, spiders, and cloud towns. From breakfast, each child completed some task, whether the dishwasher or stealing the donuts from the top shelf of the corner cabinet. Ee's halfplings often went on trips out of doors to pick flowers or watch bugs or make rivers and dams when it rained. Much of the day passed in this manner while Ee's real family only heard one word from her in a tender whisper: baby.

VIII - Chaos

A swift bend tucked under a bridge before breaking out into the sun again bringing the little family to Sunday School. Mother and Father left Sammy and Ee with Martha and Charlie in the nursery down the narrow hall by the sanctuary. As four and six-year-olds, the friends believed they were quite grown up enough to take charge of the operation. Children of all ages littered the small room, lit poorly and cluttered with busy and happy noises; the distressed noises were ignored. In an attempt to amuse the little hoard, Ms. Miserly heaved a ginormous Mr. Potatohead from the closet. Placed on a low table, he towered over all the children, covering them in an ominous shade. The kids closed in upon the giant to rip open his belly and fight over the insides. Little hands grabbed from all directions, shrieking and bargaining in tongues not fully established.

Poor Ms. Miserly went to lean her head against the wall, where she remained quite still. The older children realized her defeat and exercised blatant bullying and passive aggression to contain the mob. Suddenly remembering the snacks, Ms. Miserly revived to circulate the stiff cookies before retreating to lean lifelessly against the wall. When the adults returned, Johnny's sixteen licked cookies stuck to the wall, Mary's noes still had not stopped bleeding, Ee had all the animals from the ark lined up in pairs according to size or family which she was guarding from the other children with a large stick, a handful of three-year-old boys tumbled around the

room and against the walls, destroying everything in their path, Sammy, Martha, and all their minions sat around an exclusive, invisible tea party, and Ms. Miserly wept with three crying toddlers on her lap. Mother and Father thanked Ms. Miserly and wished her the best, for they were not to return.

Sammy and Ee heard this little farewell, but it was worse than they imagined. A few days later, a group of old strangers came to take everything from the house. One had to coax Ee from her post protecting the toy box saying moving was not so bad. Eeyore disagreed. To her, it was the very worst thing that could happen. There was no more hope of living a happy life for Eeyore. This was devastating. How could she like a home with a ghost in the basement and bats in the attic? What was the point of having a bigger house if you brought all these strangers in to make loud noises and fill it with dust?

One of Mother's many sisters, Margo, stopped right in the middle of the most riveting story of the tree of many colors, though quite ordinary to the untrained eye, that brought the eater to mountain peaks, desperately lighted flames, singing hills, concealing passages, and back to the tree of many colors with its lustrous and terrible fruit. Oh, the places they'd been! But would now forget. The stories must end forever, Eeyore knew. After a few lifetimes, the dust started to settle in the big, old house, and Margo came to visit again. She held little Sammy and Ee in the grand old recliner squished up against the windowsill to stretch their imagination and make them giggle and gasp.

IX - Of a Forgotten Name

Even I have forgotten it, as people often forget humble people. She lived at the school Mother taught at. Every morning, Mother brought her two little girls to color calendars, twit each other's hair, and giggle of all the old people that walked by on the other side of the desk beyond the protection of the kind secretary lady. The sisters made as little trouble as they could until Mother came to take them home to Father.

Ee and Sammy still remember all sorts of jokes and games by which this lady kept the two amused. She squeezed into the corner behind her desk, tucking Sammy and Ee underneath it and sending after them handfuls of colored pencils, flashy markers, and tasty treats. When the lady fancied it to be a good day, she brought special desserts for the sisters. Being an amiable

and excellent woman, the lady believed it was a good life to have two sweet sisters hidden under her desk on most days, and treated them nearly everyday.

On Ee's birthday, she came to the kind lady to spend the day under her desk. Little Eeyore grinned with her little secret, but the lady reflected a similar smile. Could this lovely lady know of Ee's most special day? When Mother left, Ee and Lady squirmed in their seats. With huge eyes and stifled breath, Ee watched the lady pull a strange package from one of her many bags. It was all tangled up in shiny paper, as though wrapped hastily in the car. Eyes and smiles popping, the two exchanged the misshapen package.

"Happy Birthday, Little Eeyore."

She delicately unwound the gift, which looked much larger in her little hands. Tape snapped away from the silver paper under her little fingers. The papers held a stuffed dog with a blue-plaid handkerchief tied around his neck. After surveying the fluffy present, Ee brought it to her cheek to squeeze and kiss until Mother brought Ee, Sammy, and precious Cashew home. At home, Ee tucked Cashew into the heaping pile of animals that lay perfectly positioned on her bed. He took the most prominent position, as a guardian over the smaller animals and their families. The only creature larger than Cashew was a life-size--compared to Eeyore--teddy-bear that sat in the corner of her bed to watch over her when she slept.

That night, as every night, Mom came to pray with and sing for little Ee. She prepared butterfly kisses under her eyelashes and a patient smile between her lips, before gliding into the little room. Kneeling down to the mattress which lay on the floor, Mom grinned at the little star under the covers. Many nights Ee attempted to disappear under those covers with arms and legs out in a five-pronged star, the flattest position in her opinion, only to be immediately found with giggles and butterfly kisses. Tonight, Mom made to tickle the little body, bringing up Cashew and not Eeyore. Mother ripped off the blanket and began tearing apart the heap of stuffed animals covering the bed.

The life-size teddy-bear gave a muffled giggle, as though bursting joyfully and then slapping paws or hands across its mouth. Mother kept searching frantically for her little girl. Unable to control herself, Eeyore grabbed her mother from behind the bear, shaking her a little. "Mom! I'm right here." Mother swept up the little child in a rather hasty and rough hug, soon leaving the room with little heart to sing.

X - E-yore and Jane

When Eeyore became old enough to become under impressions, Eeyore became under the impression that her parents had quite mistaken in naming her Eve Anastasia Wansley. Eve was understood to be a good, sensible name, but Anastasia was simply unacceptable. Instead, she insisted on being called Eve Andrews, though not like Jane Andrews--the nasty girl in Anne of Green Gables. In Ee's mind, to be named Jane would be simply unpardonable. She might just as well be named Sallie, Sophia, or Sopapilla. Having dismissed these names as uttering abominable, Ee took courage in her adopted name Ee, or Eeyore. For one thing, Ee was the fifth letter of the alphabet, which was saying something, and her name was spelled with five letters. Five was a very useful number as far as times tables and things go. Thus, Ee Andrews was quite satisfied with her five-letter and *not*-Jane name.

You and I might suppose it was only a matter of time before a 'Jane' was brought into the family, but we mustn't suppose to predict how it came to be. One bitter cold night, when all the cousins huddled near the stove, Mother and Father seemed rather flustered. In fact, they seemed to rather neglect the guests of Jamie's birthday party and soon left them all to their own entertainments. Why they wished to go into such a storm was beyond Ee and Sammy's knowledge, but with their cheeks pressed together in front of the fire, they soon fell asleep.

Much later in a heaping bundle of jackets and blankets came little Jane with Mother and Father. Little Eeyore wobbled behind Sammy to the door where they gathered. Tugging at a close pant leg, Ee begged for an invitation to see. Leaning down to kiss her little forehead, Mother placed the new child in Ee's arms. With little hands clasped around the child, Ee held her breath lest she might wake the child or break it. Little Jane only sighed and wiggled her pink tongue about. One tiny whisper reached up to where the parents stood. "Baby," breathed from Ee's thoughtful grin.

XI - Her Best Friend Forever

Little Ee tumbled around a corner to flop upon the stairs. Something in her grin showed she meant to be solemn, but her little body would not comply. She flapped her legs about and nearly clapped her hands with glee. Soon, Mother joined her by the stairs. Mother asked Eve if she was sure about the decision. Eeyore beamed back with clasped hands and hysteric giggles. More dignified as Mother always was, she nodded deeply, despite the jumping of her heart.

“What do you think it all means?” Mother paused.

“Well, it means that Jesus will be my best friend forever, and He will come live with me, in my heart,” she said, folding her tiny hands across her chest. Seeing in Mother’s eyes that this answer was quite satisfactory, Ee’s little grin broadened to her ears.

“Ok, close your eyes. I’ll pray for you, and you can pray when I’m done.” Desperately determined, Ee followed these directions, snapping her lips shut as well. Mother’s sweet voice reached up to heaven as Little Ee’s best friend came into her heart. When the prayer was done, Mother squeezed her little girl with one shining tear. Breaking from this embrace, Ee barrelled through the house to find Father, jumping on his lap to tell him all about sweet Mother and dear Jesus.

A few days passed before Ee prayed again with Sammy in the bathtub upstairs. She needed Friend Jesus back in her heart again, but soon, she would find him there safe and strong, when all other lights went out.

XIII – Six and Nine and Worms

Eeyore strutted down the hallway wearing Dad’s shoes and an expression of sophisticated delight. With each step, Eeyore dragged the shoe boats with a big *tum-bump, shrum-thump*.

“What do you think you’re doing in my shoes?”

“I don’t know yet, but I can do it.” Ee bumped around the corner where she grabbed a fist-full of Dad’s pant leg to help sturdy herself.

“Oh, you can. Can you?” Dad smiled.

“Yes,” was the determined reply. “I’m six now, and that means I can do anything.” Ee made off to stomp ahead but stopped short because of a little ‘psst’ from the entry. Hands flapping and tongue out, Ee maneuvered around to find Sammy poking her finger through the front door and motioning Eeyore to come closer. Forgetting her shoes, Ee ran to the door where she sat on the front step as Sammy directed.

Sammy crossed her arms and began to pace across the tiles. Ee looked passed to the rain that pounded into every crevice in the walkway, forming tiny rivers and waterfalls that chased away the little pieces of soil and clumps of twigs.

“So, you see it’s very important for us to be very gentle with the little guys before the sun comes out and they all die. Do you understand?” Sammy finally looked up. Changing her

expression, “Eeyore, have you been listening to me at all? I was telling you all about the little rivers and the worms that will probably drown or else dry up because of the downpour, that means there is lots of rain pouring down and I know you are six now. That’s very nice, but I’m almost nine, which means I am almost *three* years older than you instead of only two, which means I can tell you what to do.”

Eeyore blinked, unsure of the proper response.

“It’s very important that you do what I tell you to. Since I’m older, I know better what you should be doing. Got it?”

This time Ee knew how to respond properly. She nodded solemnly, keeping her eyes on the floor.

“Ok, come on.” The two stepped down into the rain. “Now, it’s very important that you don’t trap the water or ruin a river. See. Follow where I’m stepping. The water needs to keep moving to where it’s going, because if it were to go away from where it should be going, it would leak, that means to drip, into our house and make our beds wet.” Ee followed Sammy on her tiptoes down the front walkway. Both girls were quickly soaked through, but the rain would not hurt them “like it hurts the worms.”

Afraid to divert the streams of water falling over her eyes lest the water go up the steps into her bed, Ee blinked wildly to find Sammy crouching on the driveway a couple feet ahead. Sammy had cupped her hands around something on the pavement and called Ee down to see it.

“This is our first worm of the day.” She grinned with pleasure. “See how he’s trying to crawl on the gravel, but the stream is pushing too hard on him?” She looked up at blind Ee. “Our job is to gently pick up every worm and carry them safely onto the grass far enough for them to not get back on the pavement.” Sammy nodded officially. “The tricky part is to not step on any other worms when you walk over to the...” Ee held up six wiggling worms caught in her fist. “Good job! Now, just make sure they have enough room to breathe and start walking carefully over there so I can show you where to put them.”

Ee spun around and stomped over to the lawn. She plopped down in the grass and opened her fist to watch the little wrigglers. They squirmed around on her pink palm, desperately flipping and flopping into the soil below. Ee rubbed the last one off on the wet grass as Sammy came balancing a tiny worm in two hands.

“Ee! Where did you put them?”

“They crawled off.”

“They can’t all go in one spot or else they will fight over space.”

“They landed in different places.”

“Landed?!” Sammy was mortified. She collected herself quickly. “Well, next time, make sure to bend down right close to the grass and let them crawl off onto something somewhere where there aren’t any other worms.”

Back on the driveway, Ee piled as many worms as could fit in her two fists, before running to the lawn and spraying them around close to on the grass. She figured that the worms would land on either the soft dirt or grass and be happy she was saving so many at once. In this manner, Ee swept the driveway back and forth for little worms. Finding herself much farther down the driveway than Sammy, Ee sank down onto the driveway to look up at the sky. Don’t worry. She checked for worms first.

Through squinted eyes, Ee watched the rain sprout from somewhere far above. It shot down into her eyeballs and wetted her pink tongue. The clouds wisped around in the dark above, while large drops splat near her ears on the pavement. Sitting up, Ee found three little worms near her legs. She scooped these up not knowing what to do next. If she tried to stand, they would probably fall to the gravel and die. If she put them down again, they would be far too close together, and she might not find them again. Instead, Ee squinted over to Sammy to make sure she was distracted. Eeyore leaned back and catapulted the little worms as far as she could towards the grass. One landed on the pavement, and Ee jumped up, hoping that it was not dead. Saved by a little pile of dirt, the worm made its way to the grass under Ee’s supervision. Quite exhausted from the near murder experience, Ee lay down in the grass to wait for further instruction from Sammy.

The sun started to poke out, and the sisters determined their job complete. “You know, Ee, this grass is the cleanest it has probably ever been. The rain has washed away all the bad things kinda like a good bath. I’ve always wanted to try grass to see how it tasted.” Ee lay down to look hard at the little pieces of grass. “Lots of things like to eat grass: cows and horses and rabbits. It’s rather funny that some animals can survive on mostly just grass.” Ee’s tongue hung out ready to lick a tuft she had pulled from the ground. “I suppose those animals chew it a lot,

but maybe, the chewing is what makes the grass taste good.” With a handful of grass rolling around in her mouth, Ee found her newly discovered snack very satisfactory. Since her handful was mostly water, she had not gotten to the vegetable-y taste of grass, we are all so familiar with. “The problem with this grass is that Dad just fertilized it yesterday, which means he put poisonous things on it to help it grow. Well, it’s not poisonous to the grass. Mom says it’s only poisonous to us.” As Ee kept chewing the grass, a horridly healthy taste began to fill her mouth. Having done away with all the water, she now tasted the grass in a fuller sense, though she thought she was now tasting the poison. Ee spit out her mouthful of grass. Scraping the remaining grass off her tongue, Ee tried to concentrate on the rest of Sammy’s story though she was more distracted by the poison she felt trickling down her throat.

To Be Continued...