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In which Neville and Pooh visit an Enchanted Place, and both take their leave of the Hundred Acre Wood Untitled Chapter

IN WHICH NEVILLE AND POOH VISIT AN ENCHANTED PLACE, AND BOTH TAKE THEIR LEAVE OF THE HUNDRED ACRE WOOD

Drawn liberally from Chapter 10, "In Which Christopher Robin and Pooh Come to an Enchanted Place, and We Leave Them There", from Milne, A.A. & Shepard E.H. (1928). *The house at Pooh Corner* [1988 reissue]. New York: Dutton.

Summer, 1991

Neville was going away. Nobody knew why he was going; nobody knew where he was going; indeed, nobody even knew why he knew that Neville was going away. But somehow or other everybody in the Forest felt that it was happening at last. One day Rabbit took a notice round to everybody. And they all said they would meet at the House at Pooh Corner to pass a Rissolution.

"We all know why we're here," Rabbit said after everybody in the Forest had come, excepting several of Rabbit's friends-and-relations, "but I have asked my friend Eeyore –"

"That's Me," said Eeyore.

"I have asked him to Propose a Rissolution." And he sat down again. "Now then, Eeyore," he said.

"Don't Bustle me," said Eeyore. He took a piece of parchment from behind his ear, and slowly unfolded it. He coughed in an important way, and began: "Heretofore – a long word meaning – well, as I was saying, all the Poetry in the Forest has been written by Pooh, a Bear with a Pleasing Manner but Very Little Brain. The Poem which I am now about to read to you was written by Eeyore." Eeyore paused, and looked about morosely. "That would be Myself. I call it – *Poem*."

Thus Eeyore read his Poem, which was very long and rhymed more often than not.

"If anybody wants to clap," said Eeyore when he had finished the Poem, "now is the time to do it."

They all clapped.

"It's much better than mine," said Pooh admiringly.

"Well," explained Eeyore, "it was as good as it was meant to be."

"The Rissolution," said Rabbit, "is that we all sign Eeyore's Poem, and take it to Neville." So it was signed PooH, PIGLET, WOL, EOR, RABBIT, KANGA, BLOT, SMUDGE, and they all went off to Neville's house with it.

"Hallo, everybody" said Neville – "Hallo, Pooh."

They all said "Hallo," and felt awkward and unhappy suddenly, because it was a sort of good-bye they were saying, and they didn't want to think about it. So they stood around, and waited for somebody else to speak, and they nudged each other, and said "Go on," and gradually Eeyore was nudged to the front, and the others crowded behind him. Eeyore hemmed and hawed and budged and fudged, and eventually managed to walk away after thrusting the Poem at Neville.

Not quite knowing why, the others began edging away, and when Neville had finished reading Eeyore's Poem, and looked up to say, "Thank you," only Pooh was left.

"It's grand," said Neville quietly. He folded up the paper, and put it into a pocket inside his robe. Little pieces of waxy paper followed his hand out of the pocket. Pooh picked up the funny papers, and Neville took them back glumly. He was quiet for a very long time, until he walked off quickly and called back, "Come on, Pooh."

"Where are we going?" said Pooh, hurrying after him, and wondering whether they were going on an Expedition.

"Nowhere," said Neville. "Nowhere at all."

So they began going nowhere, and after they had walked part of the way Neville asked, "What do you like doing best in the world, Pooh?"

"Well," said Pooh, "what I like best –" and then he had to stop and think. He liked honey, of course – he *loved* honey, in fact. Still, being with Neville gave him the same hummy sort of feeling, and having Piglet near was a very friendly thing to have; and so he said, "What I like best in the whole world is Me and Piglet going to see You, and You saying, 'What about a little something?' and Me saying, 'Well, I shouldn't mind a little smackerel, should you, Piglet?'"

"I like that too," said Neville, "but what I like *doing* best of all is Nothing. There won't be much more of that going on."

They walked on, thinking of This and That, and by-and-by they came to an enchanted place along the bank of the River called The Bank Of The

River. Pooh knew it was enchanted because Neville always came back to it no matter where an Expedition took them. Neville sat at the very edge of the bank and trailed his fingers in the water and watched the water rush onward to wherever it was going in such a hurry.

Suddenly Neville began to tell Pooh about some of the things: of people called wizards and wizards called Ahrrs, and something called Charms, and a place called the Divvie Nation, and plants that could shout so loud that you could hear them across the Hundred Acre Wood, and places called castles where wizard people lived, and pictures that moved, and pots that boiled, and hogs with warts. Pooh thought that warts would be most uncomfortable for hogs, being that hogs could not properly scratch. And Pooh, his back against a stout tree, and his paws folded in front of him, said "Oh!" and "I didn't know," and thought how wonderful it would be to have a Real Brain which could tell you things. And by-and-by Neville came to an end of the things, and was silent, and he sat there looking out over the world, and wishing it wouldn't stop.

But Pooh was thinking too, and he said suddenly to Neville, "Will the Divvies be good to you?"

"What?" said Neville lazily, as he listened to something else.

"The Divvies – will they be good to you when you go to their nation?" explained Pooh.

"What are you on about, Pooh? Are you talking about Divination?"

"Oh, was that it?" said Pooh. "I thought it was a – nation with Divvies."

"Well, it's not as grand as all that," said Neville, and then, as Pooh seemed disappointed, he added quickly, "but it's grander than Potions, from what I'm told."

"Could a Bear be one?"

"Could a Bear be what?" asked Neville.

"An Ahrrr," said Pooh. "Could a Bear be a wizard called Ahrrr?"

Neville sighed. "Pooh, I'm not even sure that *I'm* a wizard. Gran says I am, but I don't think Uncle Algie believes it. I can't imagine I'd ever be an Auror. Dad and Mum –" He stopped and sat up straight and squinched shut his eyes and bit his lip, and Pooh looked for bees because Neville looked as though he had been stung by entirely the wrong sort of bee.

Pooh waited, and waited, and waited some more, and wondered if they were doing Nothing. Neville opened his eyes and smiled and Pooh was again doing what he liked best in the world.

"Of course a Bear can be an Auror," Neville said. "But not just any Bear. An Auror Bear would have to be an especially ferocious sort of Bear. Are you a ferocious sort of Bear, Pooh?" And Pooh squinched up his eyes and curled his snout and squeaked, "Ahrrr!"

Neville snorted. "You're quite a Bear, Pooh – truly ferocious and terrible. You can be an Auror. In fact –" He picked up a stick. "It's time I give you an award for Special Services Rendered." Pooh wondered what a Special Service was and how he might have Rendered it, but decided it was just another thing that required a Real Brain to understand. Neville took the stick and touched Pooh on the shoulder, and said regally, "As Minister of the Hundred Acre Wood, I declare you, Pooh Bear, to be Head Auror of the Wood. Will you rise to the challenge, Sir Bear?" Pooh shot to his feet and nearly rolled over. "Yes – well, will you defend the Hundred Acre Wood against the forces of darkness?"

"I suppose I can do that," Pooh decided. "It's light more often than dark, especially in the summertime."

Neville nodded. "Very good, Sir Bear. In gratitude for Special Services Rendered, I award you the Order of Merlin, Fourth Class." He fumbled in the pocket of his robe, and took out one of the funny waxy papers that he carried, and solemnly handed it to Pooh. "Your certificate, Sir," he added. The stick rose, and Neville touched it to Pooh's other shoulder and then bowed.

So Pooh sat down and said, "Thank you," which is the proper thing to say when you have been received an award for Special Services Rendered, and he drifted off into a dream, in which he and Piglet and the others lived together with a charming but warty hog, and they were all faithful Ahrrs to Minister Neville, and they defended the Hundred Acre Wood against those nasty Divvies ... and every now and then he shook his head, and said to himself, "I'm not getting it right." Then he began to think of all the things Neville would want to tell him when he came back from wherever he was going to, and how muddling it would be for a Bear of Very Little Brain to try and get them right in his mind. "So, perhaps," he said sadly to himself, "Neville won't tell me anymore," and he wondered if being an Ahrrr meant that you just went on Rendering without being told things.

Then, suddenly again, Neville stood up, swept back his robe, thrust his hands into his pockets, and kicked a rock into the River. He called out "Pooh!"

"Yes?" said Pooh.

"When I'm – when – Pooh!"

"Yes, Neville?"

"I'm not going to do Nothing any more. It's time for me to do Something now."

"Never again, then? Nothing never again?"

"Well, not so much anymore. They have timetables, you see."

Pooh wondered about timetables, and whether they would hold up a proper pot of honey, and waited for Neville to go on, but he went silent again.

"About the timetables, Neville...?" asked Pooh helpfully.

"It'll be hard for me to do Something, Pooh. I'm not much, you know. I'm not much at all," Neville whispered.

"You are Something," Pooh offered. "After all, you are the Minister of the Hundred Acre Wood."

Neville smiled. "Pooh, when I'm – *you* know – when I'm *not* doing Nothing, will you come up here sometimes?"

"Just Me?" Pooh asked.

"Yes, Pooh," Neville said.

"Will you be here?" Pooh wondered.

"Sometimes, unless I'm doing Something," Neville said. "It's time that I take my place, Gran says."

"Is it a good Place?" Pooh asked.

"I hope so," Neville said glumly.

Pooh scratched his head. "What shall I do, when I come up here sometimes? Shall I Render?"

Neville chuckled. "You've Rendered enough Special Services for a lifetime, Pooh, but if you like –"

"That's fine," said Pooh. "I shall be a splendid Ahrrr, I should think. After all, I am a ferocious Bear."

Neville cleared his throat. "Pooh, *promise* you won't forget about me, ever. Not even when I'm a hundred."

Pooh thought for a little.

"How old shall I be then?"

"Ninety-eight, I think."

Pooh nodded.

"I promise," he said.

Keeping his eyes on the river and the world beyond, Neville put out a hand and felt for Pooh's paw. "Pooh," he said earnestly, "if I – if I'm not quite –" he stopped and tried again – "Pooh, *whatever* happens, you *will* understand, won't you?"

"Understand what?"

"Oh, nothing." He laughed and jumped to his feet. "Come on!"

"Where?" said Pooh.

"Anywhere," said Neville.

They were part of the way there, when they reached Pooh's house. Neville and Pooh parted company there, and Pooh watched as Neville disappeared beyond Neville's House, toward the Big Stone House At The Edge Of The Wood.

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Pooh looked up and saw the Man with the face that looked like the bark of Owl's tree pass Kanga's house. He was a nice Man, and Pooh always spared a spot of tea and a smackerel of honey for him.

"Hallo, Mister Alger-Not," Pooh called out.

The Man smiled and the bark shifted. Pooh was surprised that the Man's face didn't crackle into bits each time that he smiled. "Hallo, Pooh Bear," the Man called back. "And how do you fare on this fine day – this, er, hummy sort of day?"

"We passed a Rissolution of Rabbit's today," Pooh said. "It was a perfectly fine Rissolution, though I can't remember it so well now. Eeyore took the Rissolution to Neville, but couldn't stay for long."

"Yes, I saw you with Neville," the Man said. "He will miss you, Pooh – very much."

Pooh stood up smartly. "Neville made me an Ahrrr because I am a ferocious Bear," he said proudly. "He never told me before that he is Minister of the Hundred Acre Wood. He must be very important."

"Neville *is* terribly important to me," the Man agreed.

“Yes, and I shall protect the Hundred Acre Wood from those awful Divvies,” Pooh told him. “Nasty sorts of things, the Divvies. That’s what an Ahrrr does, you know.”

“An Ahrrr... oh, of course, an *Auror*,” the Man said. “Neville’s father and mother were Aurors.”

“Neville told us about Mums and Dads once,” Pooh said, “but then his eyes started leaking and so we went with Piglet on an Expedition to find the Gold Stitch.”

Pooh thought that the Man drifted off into a dream, the way that Pooh sometimes did. When he came back, the Man said, “That was good of you, Pooh. You’ve been everything I could ever have hoped. Tell me... do you remember your father?”

Pooh thought and thought. “Someone once told me – well, I think that someone did – it might have just been a Windsday, and the gorse bushes may have been rushing – but I think that someone once told me that my words came from... a Mill. Yes, a Mill. And the same someone told me that a shepherd drew pictures of me. I remember that one.”

“Perhaps if you see him, you’ll remember,” the Man said. “He will be here shortly.”

“Here? In the Hundred Acre Wood? In my very own house? Goodness me, I shall need more tea,” Pooh twittered, “and perhaps more honey, or does he prefer marmalade, or –”

“I think he shall be satisfied simply to see you,” the Man said. “In the mean time –”

Pooh sighed, “You want to clean out my ears again.”

“That’s right,” the Man said.

Pooh relented, but he fidgeted. “That tickles, you know!” the bear squeaked.

The Man laughed heartily. “I’m sorry, Pooh. Now be a good Bear and hold still, would you?”

Pooh always marvelled at how much gooey silvery stuff the Man could pull out with that stick of his. He had Very Little Brain to begin with, and sometimes wondered whether there was anything left at all after Mister Alger-Not cleaned his ears. The Man flicked the gooey stuff off into a bowl that reminded Pooh of a very old honey pot.

There was a *pop!* and a rush of air, and another Man appeared from nowhere. Pooh said “Oh!” and landed on his soft rump. The new Man didn’t seem as old as the old Man, but he was old. Neville and Mister Alger-Not usually wore black robes, or sometimes red, but this Man wore shiny blue robes and had shiny blue eyes.

“Good afternoon!” the new Man said. “What a fine day it is! I never cease to be amazed at what a difference a few hundred miles can make on that count. Yes, a fine day indeed.”

Pooh cleared his throat. “A hummy sort of day, I should think,” he offered.

The new Man smiled broadly, and his shiny blue eyes flickered in a way that made Pooh think of a room filled to the edges with honey pots and a thousand sun-shiny days in a row. “Hummy, indeed,” the Man said. “I haven’t seen you in many years, Pooh. I imagine that you don’t remember me?”

“Mister Alger-Not told me that my Dad was coming,” said Pooh. “Do you know my Dad? I thought that only Neville had a Dad. Roo has a Mum, of course, but I’ve never actually met any Dads.”

The new Man rolled his eyes at Mister Alger-Not, who smirked back. They were both funny sorts of Men, Pooh decided, but he knew that he liked them anyway. “Pooh, my name is Albus. In a way, I suppose that I am your Dad. May I ask, have you enjoyed your time in the Hundred Acre Wood?”

“That is a funny kind of question, Mister Albus,” Pooh said. “It means that I shall either enjoy or not enjoy more time, and either means something entirely different than the other.” Mister Albus stroked his long silver beard and laughed a long laugh.

Mister Alger-not shook his head. “Did Odd Lovegood have anything to do with the enchantments?” he asked.

“Oh, no,” Mister Albus said. “Pooh Bear came to life before Mister Lovegood was born.” He turned to Pooh. “Pooh, Neville is leaving the Hundred Acre Wood, and it is time for you to move on as well.”

Pooh fidgeted. “But I promised – I told Neville that I would – that I would go to the Bank Of The River and that I would Render. *I promised*, you see. I am a ferocious Ahrrr, so I must keep my promises.”

“I see,” Mister Albus said kindly. He took out a long shiny stick, and stirred the sticky silvery stuff in the old honey pot, and said “Hmmm” and “Oh” and then “Excellent”. He said to Pooh, “We shall see that you receive a proper medal, Pooh. The Order of Merlin, Fourth Class is a great honour. Do you understand what an Auror does?”

“Well, let me see,” Pooh pondered, “an Ahrrr protects the Hundred Acre Wood from the foul, nasty Divvies... and I suppose that an Ahrrr protects the Minister, since the Minister is surely a Very Important Sort of Person.”

Mister Albus nodded. “Very good, Pooh. Neville is coming to live with me now, and I will protect him. There will be a new Minister for the Hundred

Acre Wood shortly. The new Minister will surely have need for a ferocious Bear. What say you?"

"But – but – I *promised*," Pooh spluttered.

"You promised that you would remember Neville, Pooh, even when he is a hundred," Mister Albus said. "You shall be able to honour that promise – you have my word. Why don't you take a nap, while you await the new Minister?" He waved his shiny stick.

Pooh yawned. "Yes, well, it is a very hummy day. I shall have a spot of honey, then, and... perhaps a nap first, and then... honey..." He smiled a contented smile, closed his eyes, and slid to the forest floor.

Algernon Croaker grinned. "That is a stunning enchantment, Albus. Ten years, and it still amazes me each time."

Albus Dumbledore reached to the forest floor, and gently picked up a sleeping bundle of brown fluff. "The Impervious charm seems to have held nicely, despite a decade in the woods," he said.

Croaker grunted. "It shouldn't have been in the woods for ten years," he said. "It should've been in the house, or wherever else Neville wanted. We shouldn't have had to skulk around over the whole thing." He looked up and scowled. "Augusta probably would've turned us in for illegally enchanting Muggle artefacts."

"Pooh and his friends predate the Muggle Protection Act; they are exempt. As for Madam Longbottom... she does the best that she can, I'm sure," Dumbledore offered.

Croaker sighed. "*Augusta* should listen to me; she is *impossible*. She's made a second career out of mourning Frank, and she's taken her grief out on her grandson. That's difficult to forgive, Albus. She's certainly old enough to know better, and she should have been big enough to let me take on more of the responsibility. Of course, it doesn't help that the boy barely possesses the slightest spark of magic... sweet Merlin, how will he ever survive at Hogwarts?"

Dumbledore absently flicked leaves of grass loose from Pooh's fur. "I seem to recall that Franklin was a very late bloomer. He must have been in his sixth or even seventh year before hitting his stride."

"True, but he was a bundle of accidental magic as a child," Croaker protested. "Poor lad... gods, he nearly drowned in this very river! Frank would have bounded up into a tree or onto the banks after a few seconds of panic. I tossed him from a window once, you know; I'm ashamed to admit that. If he hadn't bounced..."

"You would have cared for him even if he were a Squib. Believe me when I say that there's more to young Neville than meets the eye," Dumbledore insisted. "He will come into his own, given time and opportunity. Harry and he will be good for each other, I imagine."

"Harry Potter at Hogwarts... that will surely be interesting. I doubt they'll be in the same house," Croaker said. "Neville's bound to be a Hufflepuff like Alice."

"While I don't pretend to fully understand the Sorting Hat's machinations, I have found that I am right much more often than wrong," Dumbledore said, "and I expect that Neville will be sorted into Gryffindor House. I suppose that it is possible... no, Harry will be placed in Gryffindor as well."

Croaker grunted. "He's a Potter. The world would stop rotating if a Potter sorted elsewhere." He hesitated, and then added, "Neville could have been the Boy-Who-Lived if Voldemort had found him first. More likely, he'd have been the Boy-Who-Died. I'd much rather have him with us the way he is, than not at all."

"Neville is a fine boy, in my estimation – a *good* boy," Dumbledore said. "We will look after him. He is bound to struggle with our Potions Master, but I suspect he will acquit himself well in Herbology." He pointed at the tree in which Pooh's House was ensconced. "Look at how much taller and stronger this tree is than its neighbours; Pooh Bear's enchantments were not responsible for this." His blue eyes twinkled. "Give the boy credit, Algie."

"I'm too old to go through this again," Croaker said. "I lost two grandchildren to Grindewald, and Frank and Alice to Voldemort, and now Neville's off with Harry Potter. Promise me you'll take care of him."

"He'll be well looked after," Dumbledore assured him. "The old crowd would devour us both if it were otherwise. I do hope the Bear served his purpose, old friend."

Croaker managed a wry smile. "Well, I don't know if it was a sterling idea for Neville to bond with a Bear with Very Little Brain, but it did bring him a bit of joy... and there's been precious little of that in this manor, I can tell you."

Dumbledore flicked his wand, and a toy chest appeared. He opened the chest and carefully tucked Pooh Bear into a corner. "Did Augusta ever catch on to us?"

"It's not as though she would ever have run across the book," Croaker said. "I'd certainly never heard of Winnie-the-Pooh until you brought up the idea." He looked toward the manor house. It wasn't aging well, rather like its mistress. "She must have seen one of them moving about, at some point. I suppose she chose not to know." He thought about that for a moment. "That was enough."

Dumbledore waved his wand, and muttered a gentle incantation. Pooh's House faded into the tree trunk as though it had never existed. "Would you help me collect the others?" he asked.

Croaker nodded. "I promised Neville that I would take him to Diagon Alley this afternoon for his supplies, perhaps a pet... I don't believe he could

manage an owl, but he might fancy a toad." He moved heavily toward Kanga's House, looking every bit Dumbledore's elder. "I should have retired long ago, Albus. I don't have the stomach for what's to come, not this time."

"This is a perilous time, and the Department of Mysteries needs you. I'm afraid we find ourselves in the same position – far too old to do what we must. In a few more years, we'll both be able to move on." Dumbledore said. He clapped Croaker on the shoulder. "Neville truly is a good boy, Algie – never forget that. His path may prove winding and steep, but everything will work out in the end."