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### I'll Always Have

I sat on the ugly green couch my mother just bought, looking from behind hideous cream-colored curtains at my unexplored neighborhood. Tears began to slowly roll down my cheeks as I thought about what I left behind and starting over. The only thing I had left was Pooh. I held his stuffed with fluff body as close as possible to me and rubbed my damp face on his abnormally large yellow head. "Will we always be friends?"

I was newly twelve years old. It was the first time I had ever moved, and it was across the country. That meant across the world to me. I thought almost constantly of the friends I left behind—the people I grew up with and who defined the very being of my adolescent soul. During that time, I often regretted leaving behind the friends that I considered family, even though I didn't much have a choice in moving anyway. When I was not reminiscing, I was questioning my fate in this new dwelling, "the new home" as my mother called it. Not having someone to speak honestly with, I whispered secret fears in Pooh's perfectly round and perky ears.

The new neighborhood settled on the edge of a compact town. Being twelve, there wasn't much to do in a town that was primarily made up of a university campus, hookah bars and pubs. It was an odd college town that claimed to be a city; if it really was a city, it was the smallest city that I had ever seen. The new school wasn't far from my new house, walking

distance, but had restriction at the park it was next to: "Closed after 5pm" and "Children under 18 must be accompanied by an adult." The students at the new junior high had already formed immature cliques and were not open to new-comers. I had no place to fit in and hadn't made friends to play with yet. All I had was Pooh.

Pooh was my childhood idol and star. He was my mentor and educated me of the morals of life, always teaching me how to be a virtuous person. I learned from his many adventures and sappy heart-to-heart moments in the Hundred-Acre Wood. Through observation and reading, I learned to always help my friends, listen to those much wiser than me, and that exercise was good for my health. This silly ole bear that weighed less than a pound, weighed heavy in my mind daily, even to this day.

I often turned to Pooh for comfort after the move. I held him close every night and scenes of his adventures flashed in my mind. "Will we always be friends, forever?" Pooh would ask, climbing through a broken fence. "Of course. Forever and ever," Christopher Robin would reply, taking Pooh's hand to sit cliffside to look over the Hundred-Acre Wood. It was my favorite part in all of Pooh's classic movies and adventure stories. I would take comfort in that small bit of conversation.

Pooh was also my annual travel companion. I would always save him a first-class seat in my lap on the plane to Texas for summer vacations at my father's. I would even strap the seat belt across the both of us; I wanted him to be just as safe as me on the plane. Pooh often let me use him as a strangely shaped pillow during the flight and was always ready for a cuddle during the nights that followed. He provided a sense of security to a little girl, and eventually to a hormonal teenager.

As I grew older, Pooh's bright yellow fur darkened and lime green string started to unravel at the right side of his neck. The tag on his buttocks softened, becoming silky, and the washing instructions became unreadable. His red shirt stretched and the yellow stitching on the shirt started to turn a light brown, but still I could read "Pooh." When I turned sixteen, I convinced myself and others that I did not need a teddy bear any longer. I thought of myself as an adult. I was too old to be carry around a Winnie-the-Pooh, a child celebrity. That was for children, toddlers. However, I couldn't pack him away in a box for storage, nor give him away to one of my many nieces and nephews; I just did not need him anymore. Or so I thought.

The second time I moved, Pooh was the first thing on my mind, though I wasn't moving as far as the first time I moved. He was the last thing I packed so I could find him easily. He was the first thing to arrive at the new place. I needed him to be there; I needed him to once again help me through another life changing moment. He did as I hoped. He helped me the first time, and continued to help all the way to the ninth time I moved. He accompanied me across the world and back again.

When I moved to my mother's in Wisconsin I was twenty years old; it was the eight time I relocated. It was a difficult choice, but a choice for the better. I had self-realizations that led to a better life. Even though I considered myself mature and an adult, I was scared and turned to Pooh for consolation. I cried secretly behind closed doors. I sat at my bedroom window holding Pooh looking at the neighborhood that lined a small wooded area, anxiously thinking about what I just left behind and what was waiting for me. I kept telling myself while holding Pooh tightly; "This is not new. I have moved many times. I have done this before." All I had was Pooh.

I looked at Pooh and adjusted his red shirt. I chuckled to myself and smirked as his belly played peek-a-boo from under his shirt. I saw my reflection in his large black glossy eyes. In that moment, a flood of memories swarmed my mind like honey bees swarming their nest. I remembered pictures taken of myself throughout the years of my life, and Pooh was usually somewhere in the photos. I saw scenes of his adventures and heard the voice of the author, A.A. Milne, telling stories about Pooh and his other animal friends. I remembered Pooh's full name was Winnie-the-Pooh and how the "r" came to be and not to be. I heard his theme songs playing in my head; I couldn't help but smile like a kid on Christmas. Finally, I visualized my favorite part.

"Forever and ever," Christopher Robin confirmed. "Even when you're a hundred?" Pooh asked delicately, watching the sun set on Hundred-Acre Wood. "Even when I'm a hundred," Christopher Robin would laugh. Pooh turned to Christopher Robin as his curiosity would spike: "How old will I be?" Christopher Robin would smile and reply: "Ninety-nine."

A wave of relief smoothed over me, calming my anxious mind. I felt comforted in the fact that I was twenty years old and still looked to a bear in my time of need; Christopher Robin would still need Pooh at the age of one-hundred. Pooh's red lips seemed to knowingly smile right at me because he knew what he did to me and for me in those few seconds. I picked him up and pressed my cheek against his. As I sighed, I smelt the residue from our adventures and travels on his fur; the dust from the south, the spicy kimchee from Koera, and the weird smell the vacuum always tosses into the air. I realized that it had been a while since I washed him, but that was something to take care of another time. At that moment I needed comfort, and Pooh was exactly what I needed.

He reminded me that I made lots of friends all over the globe. Some of them would be life-long pals and some would be great pen-pals. He reminded me that I'll always have support from these people, that I will never be alone. He let me know that no matter where I went, near or far, he would always be with me. I always had Pooh.

I'll always have Pooh.