

A Triptych of Tales



From boy to man

A Fable for Today – Dragon Island

by ©Tracy Hayes, 2014

He wakes up early, his parents and older sister are still asleep, and not wanting to wake them, he quietly picks up his tablet computer, switches it to silent and begins feeding his monsters on Dragon Island. He loves this game as the world that can be explored on Dragon Island is massive, with lots of interesting places to discover: towns, forests, dungeons and unexpected battles – you need to keep your wits about you!

An hour or so later he hears his parents stir, and goes through to their room to see them. ‘Look mum, I’ve got three new monsters, and found a new forest - see how big the trees are growing.’ ‘That’s great, you’ve nearly got as many as me’. They laughingly compare their computers, looking to see who has more of what. He wonders back to his room, pulls on his school uniform, and still clutching his computer makes his way downstairs for breakfast. The TV is already on, and cereal in his bowl waiting for him. He settles into the sofa cushions and slowly spoons his food into his mouth, alternating his attention from small screen to big screen, not wanting to miss anything.

All too soon it is time for teeth, shoes and into the car for the journey to school. It is close enough to walk, but there is not enough time, his parents have to take it in turns to do the drop-off at breakfast club before heading to work. Whichever one gets to go to work early, then leaves early to do the pick-up from after-school club. Life is such a stressful juggling act.

The boy gazes out the car window on the way to school: he can see the trees are blowing in the wind, but he can’t feel that in the comfortable, air-conditioned car. He can see a bird sitting atop a tree, it looks like it’s singing, but he can’t hear that, the radio is playing in the car. His legs

feel twitchy and restless, so he swings his feet from side to side: it helps a bit.

Soon he is at school, a quick run across the playground and inside to greet his friends and teachers – happily starting another day. Lots of interesting subjects to learn, books to read and games to play; he likes school. It's raining at lunchtime, so playtime is in the school hall, followed by P.E. – climbing ropes to reach the ceiling – he loves this, he is small, quick and nimble, can beat the bigger, heavier children to the top.

School finishes, however work does not, so it's off to afterschool club. Monday it's drama, Tuesday football, Wednesday art, Thursday karate, Friday is fun – music and movement. It doesn't matter what the weather is doing outside, inside is safe and dry, activities can happen as planned.

Then home for tea – another ride in the car, safe and secure. Homework, bath, books and bedtime – cuddly up with teddy and drift off to sleep.....

.... quick, must just check the dragons, there are no healing spells in this game, if one dies, then it's gone for good! All ok, now can sleep and get ready for another busy day.

He dreams of dragons, monsters, birds and trees ... what would it feel like to live in a forest and feel the breeze?

A Fable for Tomorrow – Whose World?

by ©Tracy Hayes, 2014

He wakes, stretches, lazily reaches one arm out to grab his mobile phone, and switches off the alarm. It's too early to get up. He draws the duvet over his head to drown out the sound of his TV, which has been droning in the background as he slept, and goes back to sleep.

He's rudely reawakened by a shout from the other side of the door *"Get up NOW! You're late for school! You've missed the bus and I'm going to have to drive you to school. That means I am going to be late for work – again! And don't forget you're going away today, you need your kitbag. Why can't you get your act together? When I was your age..."* the words tail off, sentence unfinished, as the footsteps retreat downstairs.

Resentfully he swings his legs out of bed, grabs his jeans and t-shirt from the floor and pulls them on over his boxers and socks. A quick squirt of body spray, slip feet into trainers and mobile into pocket, grab kitbag, and he's ready to go.

They silently sit in the car, both lost in their own worlds. Neither has had time to eat, one too stressed by the conflicting pressures of parenting and work, the other has no need, or time, for breakfast, he'll grab something later! The car comes to a pause, he steps out, slams the door, and without a backward glance heads into school.

He's greeted inside the main door by a sarcastic voice *"What time do you call this? Lessons started 5 minutes ago."*

Without thinking he responds, *"Well, perhaps if school didn't start so stupidly early, I wouldn't be late. I just wanted to sleep. I reckon they should make school start a bit later, because then I might have enough energy to keep going all day."*

"Development centre now!" He shrugs, here we go again, another hour in the development centre, to 'reflect on his attitude' and to 'consider how this will affect his future'.

Lunch is at 12.30 then the bus arrives: time to head off to the residential centre. Two days of outdoor activities to develop his leadership potential and raise his aspirations. He was sure his parents only gave their permission because they wanted a break. Two days to spend with the other losers from the development centre!

Oh well, at least he has his phone – lots of games and online chats. And it has to be better than being trapped in school! Three hours later after a boring drive up the motorway, the bus turns off into a narrow, muddy track. Ouch! He bangs his head on the window as the driver attempts to negotiate the potholes and overhanging trees.

"Ok, we're here. Everyone off the bus – and make sure you have all your belongings." He grabs his bag, and exits the bus. Glancing up he is transfixed.

"Wow! This place looks just like my computer game!"

The bus driver laughs, *"Don't you mean your game looks like this?"*

"No. No, THIS is just like my game."

A Fable for the Future: Right here, right now by ©Tracy Hayes, 2014

Beep, beep, beep. The alarm wakes him - yawning and stretching, he rolls over and switches it off. After a quick shower he pulls on his uniform – t-shirt, fleece with the logo, and dark trousers. Today is a work day. As he brushes his hair he gazes in the mirror and says to himself, “Well look at you, turned out all right in the end, eh?” All part of his regular morning routine. A hearty breakfast to start the day, then boots on and he’s on his bike. It’s only a short cycle to work, to the office set within a nature reserve, surrounded by woods and overlooking a large lake. As always, he pauses at the top of the drive to savour the view before freewheeling down to the front door.

Bike locked, coat hung up, computer on...what does the day have in store for him? Whilst the routines may be the same, he never quite knows what is going to happen. One day it could be rescuing an injured swan that has got their leg caught in fishing wire; or taking school kids pond dipping; or teddy bear hunts with toddlers. Or helping someone find their dog... although, in his experience, the dogs generally find their owners – when the dogs are ready. He checks his calendar – “*Oh no!*” he groans, he’d completely forgotten it was an indoor training day. Some woman from ‘head office’ coming to teach them about a stupid award scheme; he’d tried to wriggle out of attending, but the boss thought it would be good for them all to go so had made it a staff team day.

He sighs, rummages around in his drawer to find notebook and pen and reluctantly makes his way through to the training room. No-one is there! A voice calls through the open door, “*Come and join us, we’re out here in the walled garden.*” He steps outside and is surprised to see his colleagues dotted around the garden – each in their own little space. No-one is talking, except for the woman who’d called to him. She has long brown hair, eyes that reflected the colour of the sky, and a warm,

welcoming smile. He instinctively likes her, although he doesn't know why.

"Hello," she says, "We've only just started. You're not late, it's just that some people got here early and we thought we'd make the most of the morning sun. I've asked people to find a place of their own within the garden, to sit and remember a time they spent outside. To think about where it was, who was with them, what they did and why they went there. I like to call it a magic place – somewhere that has lingered in our memory and means something special to us."

He sits under the willow tree, at the far end of the garden, feeling a bit unsure and desperately tries to think of something. He looks around for inspiration – the sun is casting funny shadows, which move and dance as the wind blows through the leaves. He hears the reeds near the lake singing as the breeze moves through them too. The birds are still singing, although the dawn chorus finished hours ago, some birds carry on throughout the day – he can hear blackbird, robin and up in the tree a little wren is singing at top volume. Then he hears it – the plaintive mewling call of a buzzard. He'd first heard that sound years ago, on a school trip. He hadn't wanted to go on the trip, and when he'd got there he'd been annoyed to find his mobile didn't work – no signal! Two days without it - however by the end of the first day he'd forgotten about his phone, far too busy exploring the new place – walking, canoeing, climbing and making new friends.

He hadn't wanted to return home, or to go back to school. He didn't like school, couldn't wait to leave. One day, after he'd got back, he'd been on the way to school when he suddenly decided to switch buses – he didn't know where the one he got on was going, all he knew was that it wasn't going to school. That was good enough! After 10 minutes driving it had stopped at a gate to an entrance that looked inviting. He got off the bus and stepped through into a wonderful place – there

were paths winding through the woods, a lake with reflections that shifted shape as the wind rippled the water. He'd spent hours exploring the site, first walking quickly, eager to find out all about it, then slower, meandering until finally he lay on his back on the grass, looking up at the clouds as they drifted past.

A voice had disturbed his reverie, *"Hello, are you ok?"* He looked up and saw a young man, probably only a few years older than him. He was wearing a uniform, with a logo on it, obviously worked here. *"Sorry, I lost track of time, it's really nice here – so peaceful. Guess I should be heading home soon,"* he had responded. *"That's ok, as long as you're alright, you can stay as long as you like. In fact, if you really like it here, you could always come and give us a hand. We're could do with some new volunteers."*

That's how it had started. When he'd got home he'd checked the map and realised it was only a short cycle to the reserve. He'd started volunteering once a week, on Saturdays, then work experience arranged by school and now an apprenticeship. He was where he wanted to be, where he felt happy, doing things he enjoyed, with colleagues he liked.

"If everyone is ready, let's come back together and share some of our magic places with each other. Who wants to go first?" The call back to reality makes him jump, then he smiles and raises his hand.

"I'll go first. My magic place is right here, right now, with all of you. Thank you for helping me to remember why."

A Triptych of Tales



From girl to woman

A Fable for Today - Good Girl

by ©Tracy Hayes, 2014

She wakes up quietly, arms tightly wrapped round her teddy bear. The room is softly lit by the dawning sun, peeking through a gap in the curtains. The silence is disturbed by the sudden song of a wren, the high pitched notes, rapidly repeating around the middle trill. It sounds just like a referee's whistle (the old-fashioned type, like the one her Granddad used to blow at football matches). The wren seems to be trilling "Come on little girl, time to get up."

She slides out of bed, tiptoes to the window and gently pulls the curtains apart. There is the wren, perched at the very top of the tree - what a loud noise, from such a small bird! She smiles and whispers "*Hello Mr Bird.*" Teddy gives the wren a little wave. The wren keeps singing. Under the tree she can see the hutch where her rabbit lives, nestled amongst the daisies. "*Good morning little bunny, hope you slept well?*" she thinks to herself, hoping that the rabbit would somehow hear.

Carefully she peels off her pyjamas and pulls on the clothes her grandma has laid out for her. White knickers and socks, white school blouse, grey skirt, topped off with red jumper. Today is a school day. Playtime for bunnies is after school, when they will be able to play in the garden. Then teddy will help her make daisy chains which bunny can eat. For now bunny has to wait. Teddy has to stay home too. She tucks him back in bed, nestling the duvet under his arms and then tidily folds her pyjamas, placing them under her pillow. "*See you later alligator, in a while crocodile...*" she murmurs to her bear.

The door opens and her grandma steps in, "*Good girl, you're ready, let's go have some breakfast.*" She smiles at her grandma and follows her downstairs. The table is set for two - cereal and fruit juice for her, with a mug of tea for grandma. As she eats, her grandma methodically

brushes her hair, removing the knots and smoothing it into a neat ponytail, with a pretty white bow to tie it off. *"There, now, who's a lovely girl? Ok, go brush your teeth and we'll walk to school."*

Hand-in-hand they leave the house. *"Careful, don't take the steps too quick, you don't want to fall over and graze your knees."* *"Let me do the gate, you might trap your fingers."* *"Watch out for dog poo on the pavement, look where you're putting your feet."* *"Mind out, that car's going ever so fast."* *"Hold tight while we cross the road."* The warnings came thick and fast, until finally she heard, *"There now, safe at school. Off you go, have a fun day. Be good, work hard. I'll be here at the gate at 3 o'clock."* Kiss on the cheek, then free to go skipping away over the playground to join her friends.

The school bell rings shrilly, time for lessons. English first: *"Today's task is to write a story. The title is 'My happiest memory'. It can be about anything you want, as long as you check your spellings carefully, and keep your words on the lines....."*

She doesn't hear the last few words intoned by the teacher, her mind is already drifting away, to a world where children run free, eat ice-cream, build sandcastles, run in and out of the sea, splashing and squealing with delight.

A land where she is the loudest child on the beach – everyone can hear her when she speaks.

Somewhere where she can play with teddy and bunny all day, running races and rolling in the sand, laughingly brushing the sand from their fur.

She can see the pictures in her head, can smell the sea and feel the sand between her toes. Licking her lips she can taste the ice-cream...

"Ahem!" The teacher is standing over her frowning, "What's the matter? Can't you use your imagination? Come on, get on with it, you've only got 5 minutes left." Shocked back to reality she quickly scrawls:

Once upon a time, I went to the beach.

I had a nice time, and I was very happy.

I will always remember it.

The end.

A Fable for Tomorrow: Hunting for Treasure by ©Tracy Hayes, 2014

She wakes up, slips out of bed and opens the curtains. Turning back to the room she smiles at the photo next to her bed and whispers, *"Morning Gran."* She pulls on the clothes which she'd laid out the night before, smoothly weaves her hair into a plait and tidies her bed. She picks up her school bag and heads downstairs for breakfast.

Wendy is already in the kitchen, *"Morning love, you're up early. Here get some yourself some cereal whilst I wake the others."* The peace and quiet is soon shattered by the others' grumbles – phrases drift downstairs *"Oh Wendy, five more minutes, pleeeeeeaaassee..."* and *"I hate school, don't make me go..."*

The taxi arrives and they head off. Her school is first on the route; she thanks the driver as she leaves the car and walks through the school gates. Her heart sinks as she remembers the first lesson is art. This used to be her favourite lesson – she used to love painting, using lots of beautiful bright colours. But that was then, when she was little, before she realised that she was no good, that she was not an artist - her childish scribbles can't compete with the proper 'Artists' of this world.

She sighs and reaches into her bag in search of her pencil case. *"Change of plan, class."* She looks up in surprise at the teacher's words, *"We're heading outside today. We're going to the beach to do some natural art. Get your coats and off we trot – no, you don't need your bags, we'll find everything we need when we get there."*

The rest of the class is already half way out of the door, giggling excitedly, pushing and shoving. Feeling distinctly uncomfortable at this unexpected change to the timetable, she quietly follows. A short walk later they arrive at the beach where they are greeted by a bright-eyed woman, with spiky blonde hair, and clothes that seemed to contain all

the colours of the rainbow! The woman smiles and in a gentle, soft voice says,

“Welcome to the beach. Today is your day. I’m not going to tell you what to do. Together we are going to explore and play and discover more about the beautiful world around us. This is a treasure hunt with a difference – you create the treasure. Today you are all natural artists – no pens or pencils needed. Everything you need is right here – if you look hard enough. Off you go, see what you can find.”

Bewildered she gazes around and sees a boy has started drawing in the sand with his foot – *“Look I’ve drawn a shark,”* he calls, *“Watch out it doesn’t bite your toes!”* She squeals in reply and jumps away. Two girls have found some shells and are busy creating a mosaic – she isn’t sure what it is supposed to be, but they don’t seem to care – they’re having far too much fun running up and down the sand looking for more shells. What should she create?

“Hello,” says the soft voice, *“Do you need some help? How about finding some sticks to create a frame for your picture, whilst you think about what you want to put in it? I saw some over there – here you go, there are lots to choose from.”*

Two hours later, covered in sand, she laughingly rejoins the group as they make their way back from the beach. Her hair is knotted and tangled, and she has saltwater tide marks part way up her jeans. Her pockets rattle from the collection of pebbles she’s tucked away – some treasures to remind her of the wonderful morning. The spiky-haired woman’s words linger in her memory.

“Wow! What a wonderful picture you’ve created – I can see a rabbit and a bear – and oh, is that you, holding their hands? What a talented, natural artist you are - thank you so much for sharing your treasure with me.”

A Fable for the Future: Treasure Trove

by ©Tracy Hayes, 2014

She wakes before her alarm, stretches and savours the sound of silence. Her gaze drifts slowly around the room, before lighting gently on the photos of her loved ones displayed on the wall opposite. Smiling she says, "*Morning folks.*" Then her gaze shifts to the collection of colourful boxes stacked neatly on the shelf below. Her treasure trove containing her pebble collection: each box represents a year of her life. The pebbles within have been gathered during adventures outside – each one a reminder of a new experience.

Carefully inscribed in neat, black ink on each pebble, is the date and place it had been found. She thinks back to her first pebbles, found on the beach on the day she had remembered how much she liked drawing. Those first stones had since been joined by a variety of others – sparkly ones from the granite fells, rounded ones from riversides, sharp flinty ones from cliff edges. Some of the early ones have pictures painted on them, to make them look like people or animals. Some of the later ones have holes drilled through them so that she can wear them on a leather cord around her neck.

She slips out of bed and pulls on her clothes, tidies her room and draws back the curtains. The sun is just beginning to peep over the horizon, the dawn of another day. Making her way through her flat, tidying and straightening as she goes - everything has its own place, where it belongs - she thinks to herself how lucky she is to have a home of her own. A home where she can decide what to put where, and know that it will stay there, until she decides to move it.

She tiptoes into the other bedroom and gazes down at the sleeping child in its bed – sensing her presence the child wakes and with sleepy

arms reaches out to her. *“Morning precious, it’s another beautiful day,”* she whispers as she scoops up her child in her arms.

After breakfast, they pull on their boots and coats and head out to play. She struggles with the pushchair, carrying it down four flights of stairs, whilst also holding her child – the lift has been broken for weeks, no idea when it will be fixed. They make it to the bottom and she straps the child in safely, with a fluffy blanket for extra warmth.

She’d love to go to the beach, but that is too far away – it would take three buses each way and the fares would cost more than her food budget for the week. Instead they turn towards the park, once through the main gate she releases her child from the pushchair and hand-in-hand they skirt round the dog walking area, dodging the stinky brown piles. They walk on past the skate park, to the fenced off area at the back. This is the space for little ones. She opens the gate, and ignoring the shiny metal and plastic toys, they make their way to the furthest corner. Here is a huge pile of leaves, swept up by the man who cares for the park. Underneath is soft, sandy soil, with a mix of stones and grit. It has been raining recently so there are plenty of puddles too. All the ingredients needed for a mud kitchen!

Two hours later, mud pies made and ‘eaten’, accompanied by worm spaghetti and spider stew – all washed down with a ‘smelly cocktail’ of muddy water, they return home. They both have dirty hands and happy faces. A playful hot bath to freshen up (where’s the duck/here’s the duck) and then soup and sandwiches for lunch. Time for a nap, but story-time first. They cuddle together on the sofa, and she begins to tell a story:

“Once upon a time, there were three best friends, Boggart, Bear and Bunny Rabbit. They were very different characters: Rabbit was cautious and gentle, loved being with friends and tended to giggle a lot. Bear was nurturing and caring, and at times a bit too sensible and serious. Boggart was....well, it’s fair to say that Boggart was often misunderstood. Boggart was not spiteful, or dangerous, and never meant to upset anyone deliberately. However Boggart had a great sense of fun, which sometimes led to mischief! What the three friends loved doing, most of all, was playing games together outside.....”

As her child sleeps, she carefully stows a small stone from the park into the topmost box.