Turtle Tales

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Purpose of Thesis

This book is an exploration of the child I was and the woman I have become. I gained insight into who I was as I traveled through my memories and decided which ones I was willing to share with the rest of the world. Sometimes I smiled as I remembered, and sometimes I cried.

I used the skills I have been taught in the course of my academic career to present my tales to my readers. Without the support and encouragement of professors such as Professor Margaret Dimoplon, Dr. Michael Covington, and Dr. Thomas Thornburg I would never have dared to write these stories. They gave me the literary knowledge I needed to complete this quest.

I have always dreamed of writing children's stories. When I was a child, growing up as an "only," I made up stories and acted them out. This book is a compilation of those stories as literature. I believe that it is a fitting capstone to both my Honors education and my childhood.
Turtle Tales

by

Laura L. Massey
This Book is Dedicated to:
Marmee and Daddee
Grammy and Pappa
Mamaw and Papaw
The Cousins
Uncle Debbie and Aunt Marc
Aunt Ruffie and Unca Theo
Aunt Rosie
Ben
Bunny - never was there a more loyal friend
Turtle, of course
and, Childhood - may yours never end
Turtle Tales
Prologue

Long ago, it seems, though it was not so very long, there was a little girl. This little girl had bright yellow hair - though it would not always be bright yellow - and dark brown eyes. The little girl, whose name was Laura Lee, had no brothers or sisters, but she had Turtle, her beloved companion.

Turtle was, in reality, a pillow made in the shape of, you guessed it, a turtle. He was far more than this to Laura Lee, though. You see, Turtle had been with her since the day she was born. He was crafted specifically for her, cut with compassion, stuffed with love, and sewn with tenderness. Of course, everyone knows that things made with love are magical, and Turtle was no exception. For Laura Lee, he walked and talked, hugged, dried tears, and had the ability to always make everything all better.

They were never apart. He cradled her head by night, and by day they had adventures.

Would you like to hear some of the adventures they shared?
I knew you would. All right, then - here you are...
Chapter One
or
It's a Pirate's Life for We!

There was once a time, when Turtle and Laura Lee were young, that it rained for a whole week. I don't mean sprinkled or drizzled, but *rained*. They spent the whole week cooped up inside a stuffy old house, longing for fresh air and sunshine.

Then, something miraculous happened. The clouds parted, the rains stopped, and jolly Mr. Sun showed his smiling face.

Laura Lee and Turtle cheered and ran outside, but what should greet their eyes? Why, water everywhere! The entire yard was under water. Water as far as the eye could see. How could they enjoy the sunshine with no place to stand or run?

"Do you think there are sharks and allie-gators?" asked Turtle in a rather timid voice.

"I don't think so, but I could be wrong," answered Laura Lee. Turtle gave a distinct shiver and took hold of Laura Lee's hand, as she was much bigger and wiser than he.

Turtle noticed something bobbing on the horizon. "What's that?"

"I think it might be a ship!" The two watched the ship grow larger and larger as it got closer and closer. A black flag with a skull and crossbones rode the mast. "A pirate ship! She flies the Jolly Roger!"

"Pirates?" squeaked Turtle, "shouldn't we hide?"

"Don't be silly. Let's join them. We can sail the high seas, have wonderful adventures, and see the world." Well, this idea sounded just fine
to Turtle, who was sure nothing bad could happen as long as he was with Laura Lee.

"Hallo!" Laura Lee called out. She waved her hands over her head to get the ship's attention. It lazily turned in the companions' direction. As it grew closer and closer, Turtle noticed that it had a rather odd crew - they were all animals.

A small green rowboat, manned by an owl and a tabby cat with one ear, was lowered into the water. The two pirates rowed to where Laura Lee and Turtle stood waiting.

"Hallo!" Owl greeted them, "Why did you hail us?"

"We want to join you," Laura Lee answered.

"Well, we do need a new captain and first mate - ours had a duel and neither won."

"Ah! Captain sounds like just the job for me, and Turtle can be First Mate," chirped Laura Lee happily.

"Ahem...hurrum...the others must vote on it. We should all return to the ship." Laura Lee lifted Turtle into the tiny rowboat and climbed in after him. Old One-Ear-Tom, the cat, rowed them to the pirates' vessel in no time at all.

The four got out of the boat and climbed a rope ladder over the side of the ship. Before them stood the menagerie crew. They studied the two new additions to the ship. A small field mouse ran up Laura Lee's leg clear up to her shoulder. He looked her straight in the eye and shouted "BOO!" Laura Lee didn't even flinch.

"She's got nerves of steel, this one," said Tiny Mouse appreciatively. The others nodded their approval.
An old sea-dog spoke up from the back. "But can she sail a ship?"
He stumped forward on a wooden peg-leg to look at her more closely. He
used a crutch to help him walk. A bright red and yellow parrot sat on his
shoulder.

Laura Lee stuck out her chin. "Of course I can sail a ship. I can do
anything. I'm a girl." Turtle drew halfway back into his shell and looked
very nervous.

"Pssst," he said, "pssst - Laura Lee..." He tugged at her shorts. She
leaned down to him.

"What's wrong, Turtle?" she whispered.

"Laura Lee, you don't know how to sail a ship."

"Well, it can't be all that hard. I'll figure it out as I go. Besides, they
may not make me sail the ship - captains don't have to."

Peg-Leg Pete, the old sea dog, looked at her. "Ye can sail a ship ye
say? Prove it, I say."

Laura Lee looked defiantly back at him, "Sure," she answered, "just
lead me to the wheel." The crew parted, revealing the stairs to the helm.
She and Turtle climbed them. She reached out and put her hands on the
wheel. She leaned down to Turtle, "Wish me luck." Turtle crossed his
fingers.

"Raise the anchor!" she cried, "Unfurl the main sail!" The crew
rushed to obey. She turned the wheel and felt the great ship move to her
command. Turtle clapped and jumped for joy. Laura Lee only smiled, not
wanting the crew to think her a foolish child. She set a course for the open
sea. Off to Great Adventure!
The crew cheered. Peg-Leg Pete turned to the others, "Well," he said, "I'm convinced. I think we've found a new captain, maties. Anyone against?"

The crowd was silent. "Anyone for?" They cheered again. "What be yer name, Captain?" he asked, turning to Laura Lee.

"I'm Laura Lee, and this is your new First Mate, Turtle."

"Hoorah for Captain Laura Lee! Hoorah for First Mate Turtle!" shouted the crew. One-Ear-Tom brought both of them beautiful swords and showed them to their quarters.

No sooner had they settled in when they heard Lenny the Lizard shout "Land, ho!" from the crow's nest. They rushed out to have a look. Sure enough, an island rose on the horizon. Palm trees swayed on a sandy beach.

Peg-Leg Pete sat in a chair, leaning back and smoking a pipe. "Do ye know what island that be?" he asked. The crew shook their heads "no."

"That be the treasure island of Blue Beard - scourge of the sea."

"An' just how d' ye be knowin' that, Pete?" asked Scottie, a small black terrier with a Highland accent.

"I know 'cause I sailed with him, ye pup. I be knowin' where every treasure chest he ever stole be buried."

"Then we land," said Laura Lee. The crew cheered and sang as they worked.

"Yo ho! Yo ho!
What treasure there'll be!
Yo ho! Yo ho!
O bless the open sea!"

Soon, they reached the island. Laura Lee, Turtle, Peg-Leg Pete, Tiny Mouse, and One-Ear-Tom set out in the little green boat. Tom rowed them
ashore and pulled the boat up on the sand. Pete looked around. "This way," he said. He walked towards the center of the island. The rest of the group followed, Tiny riding on Laura Lee's shoulder.

In the middle of the island was a big rock. The rock looked just like a human skull. Turtle grabbed Laura Lee's hand and trembled at the sight. Pete stood right in front of the place that a nose went. He walked straight forwards, counting each step out loud.

"1...2...3...4...5...6...7...8...9...10! We dig right here." He pointed at the place just in front of his feet. Tom ran to grab shovels from the boat. The whole group did their part, and the work went faster for it. Soon, they unearthed a huge chest. "Keep digging!" cried Pete, "There be more where that came from!" More and more chests kept coming out of the dirt. Soon, they had five all lined up in a row. The group stopped, panting.

Laura Lee opened the first chest. Gold gleamed out at them. Gold and pearls and rubies and diamonds and emeralds and anything you could imagine! It made Laura Lee's head swim to think about it. The group gasped. "There's enough here for the whole crew," Laura Lee said happily.

They carefully carried all the chests down to the beach. There, they loaded them into the boat and took them back to the ship. It took them three trips to get it all.

Once they were all back in the ship, Laura Lee called all of her crew together. They "ooh-ed" and "ahh-ed" as she showed them the bright treasures. She passed it out to all of the crew equally, but kept the largest portions for herself and Turtle as Captain and First Mate.

Old One-Ear-Tom growled, "I think ye kept a bit much, Captain."

"I don't," answered Laura Lee, "I'm the Captain. I could have kept it all."
Owl stood behind his friend, "I agree with Tom. Share and share alike."

"I'm the Captain here!" Laura Lee yelled. Turtle shivered by her side and grabbed her hand.

"Pssst," he said, "pssst, Laura Lee." She leaned down.

"What is it, Turtle?"

"I don't think this is a very good idea," he told her, but it was too late. From the back of the crew came a cry - "Make 'em walk the plank!"

Tom darted forward and grabbed the companions. Pete kicked out the plank. Laura Lee and Turtle were put on the end and forced at sword-point to walk.

Laura Lee turned to Turtle, "I think you're right. I can't swim!"

Turtle thought really hard. Suddenly, his face brightened. He had an idea. "Don't worry," he said, "I'll save you!"

They looked at the water below them, and jumped.

Turtle bounced up to the surface on his back. Laura Lee climbed up on his tummy, safe and sound. They laughed and waved at the pirate ship as they floated off.

"I love you, Turtle."

Turtle blushed with happiness as they floated safely home.
Chapter Two

or

Tea Time for Turtle

Now, you may be wondering what Laura Lee and Turtle were doing all day while those horrid rains fell. You were? I thought so! Well then, I'll tell you...

One rainy day, Turtle and Laura Lee were playing at checkers. Well, they were sort of playing. Laura Lee was trying to teach Turtle to play just as Pappa, her grandfather, had taught her. Unfortunately, Turtle just didn't seem to be able to get the hang of it.

"You mean, I can't put my chip on the black squares?" he said.
"No, you can't, and it's not a chip, it's a checker," she answered.
"Why not? All that pretty black space is wasted, then."
"Because it's just part of the rules."
"But that's a silly rule."
"Lots of rules are silly. We still have to follow them."
"Besides, it looks like a chip," he said after much thought.
"It's a checker."
"Then what does it check?"
"It doesn't check anything!"
"Then how can it be a checker if it doesn't check anything?"
Laura Lee sighed. She shook her head solemnly. "Turtle, I love you." Turtle glowed happily, if not a little confusedly. "Let's do something else. This isn't working at all."
"What shall we do, then?" he asked.
"I don't know," she answered, "What do you feel like doing?"
"I don't know. I am a little thirsty, though."
"That's it," she smiled, "We'll have a tea party!" Turtle clapped his paws happily.
"Oh! A tea party! What fun! Um..." he paused, "Laura Lee, what's a tea party?"
"It's when you have tea and sweet-cakes and friends over."
"Oh! That sounds wonderful."
"I'll go invite Teejaye Bear and Dunkey right away."
"What about the puppies? Shouldn't we invite them, too?"
"No, they're taking a nap, and they're too messy, anyway." With that, she leapt up and ran to tell her friends.

Teejaye Bear lived in a little cave made out of pillows. The pillows were so he'd be comfortable, of course. He was a very soft type of bear with thick, chocolate colored fur.

Laura Lee came to the opening of his cave and called out to him.
"Teejaye! Oh, Teejaye Bear! Are you home? I need to talk to you."

She heard a sleepy grumble from inside the cave.
"Laura Lee? Could that be you?" Teejaye rumbled happily.
"Yes. Yes, it is."
"Well then," he said, popping his head out of his doorway, "what can I do for you?"

"Well," she started, "on account of there's so much rain, I'm having a tea party in my room. Would you care to come?"

"A tea party! With sweet-cakes? Sweet-cakes maybe sweetened with honey? Oh, I always take a little honey in my tea, you know. Of course I'll come."
"Wonderful! Oh, and I'm inviting Dunkey, too. Would you mind bringing him?"

"Of course not. Just let me freshen up, and we'll be over directly."

"Good." she said, "I'll just go tell Dunkey he's invited." With that, she skipped off to Dunkey's pen.

Now, you must understand something about Dunkey. Dunkey was a beautiful red donkey that had once belonged to Marmee, Laura Lee's mother. He had a soft black mane and a bushy tail. Unfortunately for poor Dunkey, he had no eyes. He'd had an accident and had been blind ever since. He never let that get him down, though - oh, no! Not Dunkey! He was soft and sweet and quite helpful. He always had a great big smile for everyone.

Dunkey heard Laura Lee skipping long before she reached his pen. His ears and nose were very sharp, you know.

"I know that skip," he said and smiled, "Hallo, Laura Lee."

"Hallo, Dunkey," she grinned, "How did you know it was me?"

"I may be blind, but I'm not deaf," he said lovingly, "Everybody has a different step. They all sound different - special. I can tell your step from everyone else's in the world."

"Wow!" she cried, "Really? Can you tell Turtle and Teejaye's, too?"

"Yes ma'm, I can," he said proudly and puffed out his chest, "Now, what brings you all the way to my pen?"

"Oh! I almost forgot. I'm having a tea party and you're invited."

"Splendid! I haven't been to a tea party in years - since long before you were even born."

"Then we'll have to make this a good one. Teejaye will be over to get you shortly."
"Marvelous. I'll just go comb my tail," and with that, he wandered off.

Laura Lee rushed back to her room and found Turtle hard at work. He had found Laura Lee's tea set, spread the cloth on the table, pulled up the chairs, and laid out four places. Each little setting had a spoon on one side, a fork on the other, and a cup and saucer right in the middle. He had even remembered to lay out the napkins. Laura Lee scooped him up and gave him a great big hug.

"Turtle, you're wonderful." she said. Turtle blushed and was speechless for a moment.

"I was only trying to help. Anyone would have done that."

Laura Lee made the tea and got four freshly made cupcakes for the group. She suddenly remembered Teejaye's request and grabbed the honey as well. Presently, there was a knock at the door.

Laura Lee ran to answer it. She promptly ushered in Teejaye who had Dunkey safely in tow.

"Do have a seat," she said quite properly.

"Thank you," Teejaye and Dunkey answered.

Turtle pulled out Dunkey's chair for him. Dunkey nodded and smiled as he eased his old body into the seat. Laura Lee took the seat opposite him with Turtle on her right and Teejaye on her left.

"Dunkey," she started, "your tea cup is twelve o'clock center and your sweet-cake is ten o'clock high. Oh, I almost forgot - your napkin and spoon are at three o'clock."

"Why, thank you, Laura Lee," he smiled.

"But, Laura Lee," Turtle said hesitantly, "it's one o'clock. How can his cup and cake and napkin and spoon be other times?"
"Oh, Turtle," Laura Lee giggled, "they're not really times. A blind person - or donkey - sets up his things so that they're sitting like the numbers on a clock. That way he can find them easier than just feeling around for them."

"Oh, I see," said Turtle, hastily adding "no offense, Dunkey."

Dunkey laughed. "None taken, Turtle. Now, how about some tea?"

Laura Lee poured for everyone. When she got to Teejaye's cup, she noticed that there wasn't much room for tea. While the rest had been talking, Teejaye had almost filled his cup with honey.

He blushed. "Well, I told you I liked a little honey with my tea."

Laura Lee laughed and topped off his cup.

They sat and talked of the weather and whether or not the moon would be full in three days, and other such important matters. They ate their cupcakes and sipped their tea until Dunkey said "Sshh..."

Everyone fell silent as they looked at him. He was listening intently, one ear held up as high as it would go.

"I think," he said, "we're about to have uninvited guests."

At just that moment, a horde of puppies burst into the room! Laura Lee counted all six from the last litter as they turned over the table, drank the tea, and ate the sweet-cakes. She yelled and shoved them towards the door. Suddenly, she heard a startled exclamation.

"Help!" Turtle cried from behind her, "Help! Laura Lee!" The last puppy had grabbed Turtle and was running with him. Laura Lee made a snatch for the wily pup, but he was too quick. He bolted out the door with Laura Lee in hot pursuit.
Just as Laura Lee caught up with the rascally pup and frightened Turtle, another puppy grabbed her friend. The second pup took off in another direction.

"Marmee!" Laura Lee yelled in desperation. Marmee stepped out of the room the puppies had run into. She cuddled something in her arms. "Marmee! The puppies got loose! They got Turtle!"

Marmee bent down with the something in her arms. She held it out to Laura Lee. It was Turtle! The puppies were Chesapeake Bay Retrievers (chessies, for short) and had brought him right to Marmee. Laura Lee covered him with kisses and cuddled him close. Marmee hugged them both. She gave them more sweetcakes, made more tea, and righted the table.

The four friends finished their tea party, discussing the excitement of the puppies again and again. Much later, when everyone was tired, Teejaye and Dunkey headed back home. Marmee came in, tucked Laura Lee and Turtle in, and kissed them both goodnight.
Chapter Three

or

How We Met the Faerie Folk

Do you believe in faeries? Laura Lee and Turtle do - they met them! When? Well, that's a story all in itself. Would you like to hear?

One bright, sunny day, Turtle and Laura Lee were having a picnic under the Great Old Walnut Tree. Marmee had given them a pretty red and white checkered cloth, a little picnic basket, a thermos full of creamy milk, fresh-baked chocolate chip cookies, and peanut butter sandwiches. It was a feast fit for a king.

Laura Lee had carefully laid everything out on the cloth, and she and Turtle were happily munching away. "I wonder," she said, "how the flowers know when to bloom?"


"Faerie folk? You don't really believe in them do you, Turtle?"
"Sure I do! But only people who believe can see them."

Laura Lee stuck out her lower lip. She thought really hard, and said, "Well, I want to see them, too."

"All you have to do is believe," said the wise little Turtle.

Laura Lee looked around at the world. Flowers bloomed, little beetles ambled happily through the grass, walnuts lay ripening on the ground, but no faerie folk were to be seen. Turtle took Laura Lee's hand and led her to a plant with soft, fuzzy leaves.
"These leaves are the faerie folk blankets," Turtle told her. He led her to a patch of morning glory flowers. "These are the trumpets the faeries play." He pointed to some mushrooms and said, "Those are their umbrellas, and they use the thick layer on top for the bottoms of their shoes." He showed her another patch of mushrooms shaped like funnels. "Those," he said, "are what the faeries use to collect dew drops for drinking. Look inside."

Laura Lee got down on her hands and knees. She looked at the funnel-ooms and, sure enough, they were full to the brim with water. Near the faerie water-funnels was a patch of soft moss. "What do they use that for?" she asked.

"Why, they use the moss to fill their beds. It makes the beds soft as soft can be."

"What do they eat, Turtle?"

Right over Laura Lee's shoulder, a little voice like the tinkling of bells said, "Why don't you join us for a feast?"

Laura Lee was so surprised she squeaked! It was a faerie. A real, live, faerie! A beautiful lady-faerie with wings so light you could see right through them.

Turtle clapped his paws and said, "Oh, can we? Can we?"

"Sure," Laura Lee said, "I'm Laura Lee, and this is Turtle. What's your name?"

"Thistledown," said the tiny faerie-lady, "and it's very nice to meet you. So many people forget how to believe in us nowadays that we rarely have visitors."

Laura Lee blushed. If it hadn't been for Turtle, she wouldn't have believed, either. Now that he had shown her things, she would never be
able to look around without seeing the faerie blankets, beds, umbrellas, and everything else they used. Why, it was all right there if you looked.

"But, Thistledown," Laura Lee said, "Turtle and I are so much bigger than you. How can we ever go to the feast?"

Thistledown laughed and said, "That's easy - faeries have magic." She waved her hands and suddenly the whole world looked huge. Laura Lee and Turtle were no bigger than mice. The grass had become a jungle with bugs the size of panthers.

Thistledown blew through a whistle made from a leaf stem. Soon, several other faeries arrived. They lifted Turtle and Laura Lee up, up, way up high. The friends were carried up to the very top of the Old Walnut Tree, and they saw the most amazing thing - the whole tree was a castle.

There was a gate at the tippy-top of the tallest limb. Two faerie men stood guard with blades of grass as weapons. They recognized Thistledown and smiled as everyone flew through the gate. The faeries set Laura Lee and Turtle down just inside the limb.

The whole limb was hollow. There was a spiral staircase that led all the way down into the trunk of the tree. The center of the limb was a shaft so the faeries could just fly up and down. All around the staircase were little doors. Thistledown noticed Turtle looking at the doors and told him that those were faerie homes. There must have been hundreds of faeries in just that branch alone.

Thistledown led the companions down and around, down and around, until they reached the end of the staircase. There, they saw a huge hall. It was decorated with streamers made from single strands of colored thread and yarn. Laura Lee recognized the yarn from a sweater she had to throw out because one of the puppies had chewed a hole in it.
Curled up in niches in the walls were glow worms, glowing happily. Their light made the hall seem warm and friendly. There were faeries everywhere. Long tables filled the hall, and food filled the tables. Thistledown found them seats at the head table, where the faerie queen and king sat.

The king and queen greeted them like old friends. Then, the king stood up and got everyone's attention. "Faerie folk," he started, "we had planned this feast to celebrate a bountiful harvest, but now we have another reason. Let us feast in honor of our new friends, Laura Lee and Turtle."

Everyone cheered! The king clapped his hands and a faerie band began to play magical music. Faerie dancers spun and twirled in mid-air. Someone sang like the twinkling of tiny bells, and the food was served.

The food was like nothing Laura Lee and Turtle had ever seen. There were chestnuts that had been roasted until they burst open, tender blackberries, mulberries, and blueberries from the bushes by the cornfield (and fried corn kernels, of course). They had sweet dew drops to drink out of cups made from acorn caps, and the acorns themselves served in their own shells as bowls. There were baked pine cones and pine needles, and walnuts soaked in dandelion butter and served in cream from a milkweed pod. And, for dessert, there was honey from ground up honeylocust seeds and big, fat, juicy strawberries.

After the feast, Laura Lee and Turtle was so stuffed they could hardly move. The faerie folk told them both that they were welcome to come back any time they wanted to. Thistledown showed them a secret passage that led down to a hole at the base of the Great Old Walnut Tree.

Once they were outside, Thistledown turned the friends back to their normal size. Then, she flew back to the tree for some more dessert.
"Now do you believe in faeries?" Turtle asked with a smile.
"I do, Turtle, I do!"

With that, they packed up their picnic and went back home.
Chapter Four

or

Daddees Have Strong Hands

Laura Lee and Turtle were always getting into some sort of trouble. Fortunately, there always seemed to be someone there to rescue them. A lot of people loved Laura Lee and Turtle, even when they didn't know it. One day, they had to be rescued twice! Would you like to hear about that day?

It was one of those bright, shiny summer days. Laura Lee and Turtle were outside, trying to think of something to play. They heard the most pitiful sound ever imaginable coming from the maple tree outside Laura Lee's bedroom window. Turtle ran to investigate with Laura Lee close behind.

They heard the sound again. "Meeeeeerrrrrewww!" It was coming from way up high in the branches. Laura Lee put Turtle on her shoulders and he strrrretched out his neck. "It's Tabby kitten," Turtle said, "she's stuck up in the tree."

"Well," said Laura Lee, "we have to get her down."

They sat and thought and thought and thought really hard. Finally, Turtle brightened. "Why don't we just climb the tree, Laura Lee?"

"That's it, Turtle! That's exactly what we have to do."

Turtle beamed with pride. Laura Lee boosted him up into the tree. Then, she grabbed the branch and he helped pull her up. Now they were both in the tree with Tabby kitten. Only, Tabby kitten was up a lot higher.
They climbed and climbed. Laura Lee would boost Turtle up, and Turtle would help pull her up. Finally, they reached the branch with Tabby kitten. Tabby kitten purred and purred, happy to have company.
"Now to get you down," Laura Lee said to Tabby kitten.
"Meerreew?" Tabby kitten asked.
"I'm going to carry you," Laura Lee told her.
"Meerreew!" Tabby kitten said, and promptly climbed down the tree herself! Well, now this was a fine pickle. Laura Lee and Turtle were stuck in the tree, and Tabby kitten was free.
"Now what do we do, Laura Lee?" asked Turtle.
"Well, I guess we climb back down." But, just then, Laura Lee looked and saw just how far down was. The ground was way, way below them. "Oh, Turtle," she said in a shaky voice, "I'm afraid! It's so far - what if we fall?"
"I believe in you. You can do anything you want if you put your mind to it."
Laura Lee nodded at Turtle. Slowly, carefully, she climbed down to the next branch. She reached up her hand and helped Turtle climb down, too. You can't always do everything by yourself. Some things take two.

The companions climbed down together, branch by branch, until there were no more branches. Now what were they to do? The ground was still as far away as Laura Lee was tall. She and Turtle were stuck.
"Got a problem, Baby Girl Kid?" said a big, deep voice.
"Daddee!" Laura Lee giggled. They were saved! Daddee reached up and scooped Laura Lee and Turtle from the branch, gave them each a big kiss, and set them on the ground.

He ruffled Laura Lee's hair and said, "Now, try to stay out of trouble."
"I will, Daddee," she promised. Daddee went back to the garden.

"Now what?" asked Turtle.

"How about hide-and-seek?" said Laura Lee.

"Great!" shouted Turtle. They played all over the yard and in the barn. They hid in bushes, dog houses, behind the woodpile, and in the hay loft. Laura Lee even tried to hide in Princess' stall. (Princess was Laura Lee's shetland pony. She was rusty-brown and white spotted, called a "paint.")

No matter where Laura Lee hid, Turtle always found her. She decided to really stump him and ran into the cornfield. She ran this way and that way and this way again. Turtle would never find her now. She sat down and giggled.

A little time went past. Laura Lee giggled. Usually, Turtle would have found her by now. She had really fooled him this time.

A little more time went past. Laura Lee didn't giggle as much now. Where was Turtle? Surely by now he had looked in all the bushes, and through the woodpile, and maybe even through the whole barn. Hide-and-Seek just isn't as much fun when you feel like you're playing all alone.

"Okay, I give up!" she heard a little voice yell.

"Beat you! Beat you!" she yelled back and laughed. She headed back to the yard. She looked around - which way was the yard?

All Laura Lee could see were cornstalks. They were twice as tall as she was. They went so high that she couldn't even see the chimney on the house. She looked up - all she could see there was blue sky. She couldn't even see the sun. Now she remembered - Marmee and Daddee told her never ever to go in the cornfield alone because she could get lost.
Laura Lee sat down and started to cry. Pretty soon, she heard a BIG THING coming through the corn rows. Suddenly, a dark shadow fell over her. Laura Lee squeaked with fright and turned around. It was Daddee! She ran to him and he picked her up.

Daddee carried Laura Lee back to the yard where Turtle was waiting. Daddee sat Laura Lee down and knelt beside her. He looked firm.

"Now, Laura Lee, I've told you before not to go in that cornfield, haven't I?" he said.

"Yes, Daddee," Laura Lee whimpered. She knew she was in trouble.

"You scared Daddee, and Daddee doesn't like to be scared. I love you, Laura Lee, and I don't ever want anything to happen to you. Don't ever do that again, okay?"

"Yes, Daddee," Laura Lee answered.

"Now, why don't you and Turtle go in the house and stay there. I think you've been in enough outside trouble for one day."

"Okay, Daddee."

Daddee kissed Laura Lee and sent her and Turtle in, but that was okay, there's lots of things to do inside, too. All it takes is imagination.
Interlude

The problem with little boys and little girls is that they grow up. They don't really mean to, it just happens. One day you're climbing trees and getting stuck, or playing pirates on a woodpile, pretending that it's a ship flying the Jolly Roger, and the next you're starting school, learning math, and having the magic of the world stolen by something called "science."

You see, children know that magic is real. The eyes of the innocent are the ones that see truth. I knew those faeries were real. I saw them, I spoke with them, I believed in them. Science would have stolen them from me if it weren't for Turtle. It is hard to talk to a stuffed turtle-shaped pillow and give up believing in magic, especially when he talks back. You see...

"Laura Lee, what are you doing?"

"Um, it's Laura now, Turtle. People don't call me Laura Lee anymore. That was a name for a little girl. Anyway, I'm writing an interlude."

"You're still Laura Lee - you've only forgotten. She's still there, if you only look. What's an interlude?"

"It's a thing that comes in the middle. I wrote a prologue for the beginning, and I'll write an epilogue for the end."

"Then shouldn't it be an interlogue?"

"No, no, Turtle. There's no such thing as an interlogue."

"Then maybe you should make one," says a little voice. I know that voice. That voice belongs to a little blonde girl with big brown eyes.

"See," says Turtle, "I told you you were in there."
I clear my throat and tell him, "I don't know what you're talking about, Turtle. I'm a twenty-two year old betrothed woman."

"Liar, liar, pants on fire! Why are you afraid of me?"

"I'm not afraid of you. I'm just too old for playing."

"Why?"

"Because I'm a grown-up now."

"So?"

"Grown-ups don't play."

"Why?"

"Because they're not supposed to."

"Says who?"

"Well, I don't know."

"Then, play with me, Laura Lee!" says Turtle, tickling me. I've always been ticklish from head to toe. All you have to do is wiggle your fingers to make me laugh.

The magic is there. I can feel it. I am lighter, smaller, younger, more free. I manage to giggle out, "okee-dokee." Turtle grabs a black crayon and "fixes" my title for me. He's right, you know. You should either have a Prelude, an Interlude, and an Epilogue, or a Prologue, an Interlogue, and an Epilogue. Grown-ups don't make much sense.

You can go back to the stories - I have to go play now.
Chapter Five
or
Turtle Accidentally Camps Out

Laura Lee and Turtle weren’t always alone. Sometimes, they went to spend the night with the Cousins at Grammy’s house. There were five little cousins, all younger than Laura Lee and Turtle. There was Verley, who was born when Laura Lee was one year old, Jason who was born when she was two years old, Leah who was born when she was three, Marc (called Marky, only spelled Marcy, with a “c”) when she was four, and Joshua when she was six!

Everybody had a brother or sister - or both - except Laura Lee. Jason and Josh were brothers, and Verley, Leah, and Marcy were brothers and sister. Laura Lee was just Laura Lee, but she had Turtle. Besides, she was the oldest of all.

Now sometimes Verley and Jason liked to play tricks on people, especially their older cousin. This is a story about one of those wicked tricks and what happened because of it.

One day, all of the cousins were at Laura Lee’s house, except Joshua because he wasn’t even born yet. They had played inside and outside and inside again until the day was almost gone. Then, a wonderful thing happened - Grammy called!

Grammy wanted all of her little ones to come spend the night at her house, and have homemade biscuits and gravy for breakfast. If there was one thing Laura Lee and Turtle loved best in all the world, it was Grammy’s
homemade biscuits and gravy. Marmee said they could all go if they hurried. Laura Lee and all the cousins rushed to get ready.

The first thing Laura Lee did was to boost Turtle into Marmee's car so he could get a good seat. She didn't know that her wicked boy cousins, Verley and Jason, were watching her instead of getting their things ready. She went back into the house while Turtle snuggled in and made himself comfy.

Jason and Verley ran to the car as soon as Laura Lee was out of sight. "Oh, Turtle," said Verley, "we have a surprise for you."

"What?" asked Turtle, all excited. He loved surprises!

"You have to come see it," said Jason, innocently.

"But we're going to Grammy's house," Turtle replied.

"It won't take long," Verley told him as he looked at Jason with an evil grin.

"Of course, if you don't want it..." said Jason as he started to turn around.

"I do! I do!" shouted Turtle, and he hopped out of the car. The boys each took one of his hands, and they led him around behind the woodpile. They had taken out a log, leaving a big, dark hole.

"It's in there," Verley said to Turtle.

"Are you going to get it out?" Turtle asked.

"Nope," said Jason, "if you want it, you have to go in and get it."

Well, Turtle didn't want to look like a 'fraidy-cat, so he told the boys to boost him into the hole. They lifted him inside and told him to look all the way to the back. Turtle took two steps in, and all of a sudden it was dark! The boys had put the log back and trapped Turtle in the dark!

"Hey!" yelled Turtle. "Hey! Let me out!"
"Bye, bye, Turtle!" said one of the boys, and he heard them run away.

"Help! Laura Lee! Help me!" cried Turtle, but Laura Lee couldn't hear him. She was already back in Marmee's car. There were so many cousins and so much stuff that she didn't know Turtle had moved. She was sure he was there because she had helped him into the car, and Turtle would never leave - she was sure!

Turtle heard the car. Vrrr... vrrrrrr... vrruchk... vrruchka... vrrummmm...

He heard the gravel in the driveway crunch under the car's tires as Marmee pulled out. Then, the engine sounds faded out as the car went down the road, heading for Grammy's house without him.

Poor Turtle sat down and just cried. He cried because he was lonely. He cried because it was dark. He cried because he was scared. He cried because he and Laura Lee had never been apart before. Most of all, he cried because he was going to miss Grammy's biscuits and gravy.

"Why are you crying?" squeaked a little voice in the dark. Turtle was so surprised he jumped!

"Wh-wh-who is that?" asked a frightened Turtle.

"Just me," said the little voice, "Lucy Ladybug."

"Oh, I'm Turtle," he said, much relieved.

"So, why are you crying?"

"Because I can't get out and it's dark."

"Have you tried to get out?"

Turtle turned as red as a summer tomato. He hadn't tried at all. All he had done was sit down and feel sorry for himself. "Well, no," he answered.
"Maybe you should," Lucy said. Then, she turned around, crawled through a crack, and flew away home. She must have remembered leaving something on the stove while her children were all alone.

Turtle felt his way over to the log. He realized suddenly that a small sliver of light peeked in all around it. He wasn't really in the dark, he was just in the not very light. He pushed on the log a little. It didn't move. He pushed on it a little more. It didn't move. He pushed on it as hard as he could. It moved!

Turtle pushed and pushed, and the log moved a little every time. Pretty soon, though, he was really tired. He sat down to rest for a minute. It wasn't very comfortable. He seemed to be sitting on a stick. A stick! That was exactly what he needed. With a stick, he could make a lever. With a lever, he wouldn't have to work so hard to move the log.

Turtle grabbed the stick and pushed the edge of it under the edge of the log as far as he could. He leaned an the stick, and the log moved! It wasn't long before the log popped right out of the hole and fell thump to the ground. Turtle was free. He looked down to where the log had fallen - it was a long way down. He took a big breath and jumped.

Turtle landed in the soft grass right beside the log. He was feeling kind of hungry. Maybe there was something yummy growing in the garden. He set off to look.

He waded through the tall grass, smelling his way to the garden. The scents of growing carrots, green onions, and fresh, clean earth told him which way to go. He didn't have to go far before the grass parted and a forest of tomato plants surrounded him.

Turtle wasn't really in the mood for tomatoes, though; what he really wanted was some nice, juicy lettuce. He wandered through all of the
tomatoes, past the potatoes, and between the bean and pepper plants. Just as he reached the cabbages, right before the lettuce, he heard a strange sound. It sounded a lot like *munch, munch, munch*.

He peeked around a head of cabbage to see where the sound was coming from. There, right in the middle of the lettuce, was a rabbit. The worst thing was that he had eaten the best parts of almost every head of lettuce. Turtle was angry.

"Hey, you!" he cried, "Get out of my garden!"

The rabbit turned and looked at him. "Your garden?" asked the rabbit, "Why, how can this be your garden? You're only a turtle!"

"But I belong to Laura Lee, and she belongs to Marmee and Daddee, and this is their garden, so it's my garden, too."

"Oh," said the rabbit, "I see. Oh, well, I guess you'll just have to make me leave."

Turtle hadn't thought about that. He had thought the rabbit would just go. So, he said, "Why don't you just go?"

"Because I don't want to."

"Oh. Why not?"

"These are really good lettuces, and my children like them."

Turtle looked around. "I don't see any bunnies," he said.

"They are gathering sweet clover. I was going to take some of this fine lettuce back to them as a surprise."

That made things different. "That's all right, then," said Turtle. The rabbit gathered up the pieces of lettuce that he had picked out. He waved to Turtle and hopped off into the deep grass, disappearing. Turtle sat down beside one of the undisturbed lettuce heads and began to peel off the leaves, eating them one by one.
By the time he had finished the whole head of lettuce, it was starting to get dark. Worse yet, tiny raindrops had started to pepper his shell, and they were getting bigger every minute. Turtle started looking around for shelter. The only place he could think of was the hole in the log pile that he had escaped from.

He stuffed some extra lettuce in his shell for later. The ground was starting to get soft and muddy, so he quickly dug up a handful of new potatoes and stuck them in his shell, too. Then, he hightailed it for the woodpile.

Turtle climbed up on top of the log he had pushed out. He stretched up as high as he could. He could barely reach the edge of the hole. He grabbed the edge and pulled himself in. There was a scary moment where he thought he was going to lose his grip and fall, but he didn't. He made it into the safe, dry shelter.

The logs of the woodpile were kept stable by the kindling sticks shoved in the spaces between them. Some of the sticks still had dried leaves on them. Turtle plucked all the leaves he could find. He piled them all in the corner. Soon he had a soft, warm, snuggly bed.

By now the rain was falling hard. Huge drops fell from the sky, but none fell inside the shelter of the woodpile. Turtle was thirsty. He pulled out one of his lettuce leaves. It was curved like a shallow bowl. He held it outside for a few moments. When he pulled it back in, it was full of water. He drank some and used the rest to wash his potatoes.

Now, of course, potatoes taste better baked or roasted than they do raw. Turtle had plenty of wood for a fire, but no place to make it safely and no way to light it. He needed something safe to light a fire on, like rocks.
There were plenty of rocks in the driveway, but the rain would get Turtle all wet. He needed something to keep the rain off his head and out of his shell.

Turtle pulled the rest of his lettuce leaves out as he thought. He looked at the leaves and realized that they were exactly what he needed. He chose the biggest leaf and put it on his head. It stuck out just enough to protect his shell, like a rainhat. Protected from the rain, he hopped out of the woodpile.

The ground was all muddy and sucked at his toes as he made his way to the driveway. Fortunately, he didn't have far to go. He picked out two handfuls of big, smooth rocks and went back to his shelter. Here he found a problem. He couldn't climb and hold the rocks at the same time. He thought for a second. Maybe he could throw the rocks up high enough to make them land inside the hole.

Turtle backed up a little, took aim, and threw the first rock with all his might. It disappeared into the mouth of his woodpile shelter. He could do it! He threw and threw, getting all of the rocks inside his shelter. His arm was a little sore by the time he was done, but he still managed to climb back up himself.

Back inside the warm, dry hole, Turtle arranged the rocks in a circle. He made sure that the circle was solid so that the wood underneath would not catch fire. He piled some twigs and bark on top of the stones. All he needed was a way to light the fire. He shivered a little. His head had been protected from the rain, but the rest of him had gotten pretty wet. Now, he was getting cold.

Turtle was cold, wet, and all alone in the dark. He curled up in his leaf bed and started to sniffle. The sun was all the way down, and the storm hid the moon and stars. He felt very lonely.
He looked out at the sky. A tiny light blinked way up high. It blinked again a moment later, and it was closer. Then, something blinked right in front of Turtle's face! He was so startled he fell over backwards. 

"Oh, I'm sorry," the tiny light said. 

"You can talk?" Turtle squeaked. 

"Sure I can!" it answered, "I'm a lightning bug." 

"A lightning bug?"

"Yes sir! I'm also called a firefly."

"A firefly! Can you help me light my fire?" Turtle asked, hopeful. 

"Sure," said the little bug. He flew down and landed on the twigs and bark Turtle had gathered. He flashed brightly, and smoke curled out of the little pile. A moment later, the fire was burning merrily. The little bug flew out and landed beside the toasty warm flames and made himself comfortable.

Turtle thanked the little bug and gave him some lettuce. He put his potatoes around the fire to bake while he warmed himself. Soon, Turtle was all dry. It was not long after that the potatoes were ready to eat. They dined on baked potatoes and lettuce washed down with rainwater.

After dinner, Turtle's belly was very full. His eyes felt heavy. He curled up in his leaf bed and fell sound asleep. It seemed like only a moment later that someone touched him. He opened his eyes in surprise. Suddenly, hands lifted him and pulled him out of his hole. It was Marmee!

The bright morning sun was warming the world. Turtle had slept all through the night. Marmee cradled him in her arms.

"My, my, Turtle," she said, "you must have had quite an adventure. Let's get you back inside where it's safe. Laura Lee missed you very much. She even brought you some of Grammy's homemade biscuits and gravy."
Biscuits and gravy! He hadn't missed out, after all.
Chapter Six
or
How a Bunny Is Not a Rabbit

You never know what kind of wonderful surprises a day will bring until it brings them. Sometimes a day will bring cookies, or trips to the park, or beautiful rainbows. Sometimes it will bring things that are even better...

I want to tell you about a very special day in the lives of Laura Lee and Turtle. This day brought them the best friend that they would ever have, and the start of a wonderful adventure that would last a lifetime.

It was a day like any other. It started out as a perfectly ordinary, run of the mill, hum drum day. The Companions woke up, watched a few cartoons, feasted on oatmeal and toast just dripping with butter, and chased butterflies through the garden.

Around noon, a strange van pulled into the driveway. Laura Lee and Turtle hid behind the woodpile and peeked at the newcomer. All the chessies in the kennels barked like crazy - they knew that the strange van did not belong in their driveway.

The door opened, and a dark-haired lady got out. She walked up to the door of the house and knocked. Marmee opened it, all smiles. She took the lady inside. Laura Lee and Turtle were curious.

"C'mon, Turtle," said Laura Lee, "I wanna see what's in the van."

"I don't think that's a good idea, Laura Lee. What if it's full of monsters?"
"Don't be silly," she answered, but she didn't sound very certain. The two friends crept up to the side of the van and peeked through a window. The glass was very darkly tinted, but they could make out two boxy shapes inside. Laura Lee knew what those were - they were dog crates!

They turned and ran down to the barn as fast as they could. Laura Lee helped Turtle climb the ladder to the loft. They pulled themselves up onto some of the wood stored there so they could peek out the high window and see the strange van.

"Do you think Marmee sold one of the chessies?" asked Turtle.
"I don't think so," she answered.
"Why else would a strange lady come with dog crates?"
"I don't know. Maybe she's a friend of Marmee's."
"Have you ever seen her before?"
"Well, no."
"Then she's a stranger. I wonder which chessie got sold."
"Well, not Stormy for sure. She's Marmee's favorite. She was Marmee's first chessie. Hey, they're coming out!" Marmee and the strange lady were indeed coming out of the house. They walked around to the back of the van, and the strange lady opened it.

The lady pulled out one of the crates. It was far too small for a chessie, and it had a handle. She carried the crate towards the house. Marmee looked around. Then, she yelled, "Laura Lee!"

Laura Lee and Turtle knew that yell. They moved as fast as they could. They ran to Marmee, shying away from the strange lady with the small crate. Something inside whimpered.

They all went in the house. The lady put the crate down on the kitchen floor and opened the door. Nothing happened. Marmee whispered
to Laura Lee to be still. In a few moments, a little black nose and a white muzzle peeped out.

The strange lady cooed, "come on, sweetie," and the soft, white muzzle was followed by a reddish-brown head with big, brown eyes. The strange lady made a kissing sound, and the reddish-brown head was followed out by a thick little body on short, stubby legs. It had long ears, like a rabbit, only they were laid back flat against its head.

"What is it?" Turtle whispered to Laura Lee.

"I don't know," she whispered back. Then, she turned to Marmee and whispered, "Marmee, what is it?"

Marmee laughed and said, "She is a Pembroke Welsh Corgi puppy."

"Can I pet her?" Laura Lee asked, hopeful.

"Sure. She's ours."

Laura Lee sat down on the floor and patted her knees. The puppy looked at her, but didn't move. "It's okay, puppy," she said reassuringly. The puppy cautiously walked over to her.

Laura Lee reached out and petted the puppy very gently. The puppy put her head on Laura Lee's leg, laid down, and sighed contentedly. They were fast friends.

Marmee and the lady went to sign contracts in the dining room. Laura Lee and Turtle stayed in the kitchen, petting the puppy. The puppy closed her eyes and just relaxed while Laura Lee rubbed her big ears and told her how pretty she was. She was red and white. The white on her muzzle turned into a streak that ran all the way up over her head and back down to her neck, where it made a collar. The collar went around her neck and met the white of her chest, belly, and legs. On her back was a funny
place where the hair made the shape of a saddle. Then Laura Lee noticed - she had no tail! None! Not even a little bob of a tail.

Turtle brought a ball with a bell in it. He rolled it for the puppy. The puppy watched it, then yawned. Marmee looked in to see what was going on. The puppy turned to look at her. Marmee dropped a squeaky mouse. The puppy's ears shot straight up!

Turtle giggled and said, "She looks like a rabbit."

"Not a rabbit," Laura Lee giggled back, "a bunny!"

"Well, let's call her Bunny," Marmee said, and so the puppy was named.

Nobody knew it then, but Bunny was to be the best friend, other than Turtle, that Laura Lee would ever have. She would spend the next 14 years raising Laura Lee to be a good person. When she finally decided it was time to rest, that rest was well-earned.
Chapter Seven

or

The Secret of a Shadow

Did you know that, wherever you go, you are not alone? You always have a very special someone with you. Would you like to know who? Then let me tell you about the day that Laura Lee first discovered her special someone...

Laura Lee, Turtle, and Bunny were out playing tag in the warm sunshine. It wasn't really fair because Turtle's legs were so much shorter than Laura Lee's and he only had two where Bunny had four. Laura Lee didn't want to embarrass him, so she asked if they could just sit down and take a rest.

The three friends plopped down in the soft grass. Bunny laid her head on Laura Lee's knee so Laura Lee could scratch her ears. The sun was really bright, so Laura Lee turned her back to it. That was when she saw the Thing.

Sitting on the ground, right in front of her, was a big, black Thing. Laura Lee froze. It froze, too. She moved her hand, and it moved its hand. She was scared. It must be a monster, come to eat her up. She jumped up and started running.

The Thing ran right beside her. It was trying to catch her! Laura Lee screamed, "Help me! Help me! It's going to get me!"

Turtle and Bunny jumped up and ran after Laura Lee and the Thing. Bunny barked and growled at the awful monster chasing her friend. She
tried to pounce on it and bite it, but it always slipped right out from underneath her.

Turtle realized what Laura Lee was afraid of. He tried to tell her not to be afraid, but he was all out of breath from running. He watched Laura Lee climb a tree while he sat down to catch his breath.

Laura Lee looked around from the safety of the tree branches. The Thing was gone. Bunny sniffed all over the ground under the tree, but she could find no trace of the big, black, Thing. They were puzzled.

Turtle got his breath back and started to laugh. He laughed so hard that he rocked back and forth on his shell.

"Why are you laughing, Turtle," said Laura Lee, rather angry because she had almost been eaten by a big, black, Thing.

"Because you're silly!" he replied. "Come out of the tree and I'll show you."

Laura Lee climbed down and came out from under the tree. The Thing reappeared! Laura Lee squeaked and ran for the tree again. "Wait," yelled Turtle. She stopped.

"There's nothing to be afraid of, Laura Lee," said Turtle, "that's only your shadow."

"My shadow?"

"Yes. A shadow is a friend who never leaves you. Your shadow is part of you. See, when you move, your shadow moves." Laura Lee moved, and her shadow moved just like she did. It was true. "You can even make neat puppets with your shadow. Watch!" Turtle moved his fingers, and his shadow moved his fingers. All of a sudden, the shadow's hand looked like a bunny rabbit. It was like magic.
"Oh! Oh! I want to try!" Laura Lee said. She put her hands together and moved her fingers. Her shadow made a butterfly.

Bunny turned around and saw that she, too, had a shadow. She raised and lowered her ears, and so did her shadow. She took off running across the yard, racing her shadow to the barn and back.

Turtle said, "You never have to be afraid as long as you have a shadow. Even when you're in a dark room and can't see your shadow, it's still there. It just blends in. Shadows never sleep, so they always watch over you."

"You never know where you'll find a friend," said Laura Lee, smiling down at her shadow. "Let's go chase butterflies!"

And they did.
Chapter Eight

or

Turtle and Laura Lee Start School

When you grow up to be five or six, something very exciting, and very scary, happens. You get to start school. Laura Lee and Turtle had never gone to daycare, or been kept by babysitters. The first day of Kindergarten for them was the first day they had ever been away from home (not counting Grammy's house or the Cousins' houses), but they got through it together. In fact, they had a lot of fun. Would you like to know how?

Jolly Mr. Sun had just started to peek over the edge of the world when Marmee came in and gently woke Laura Lee up. Laura Lee woke up Turtle, who slept under one of her arms, and Bunny, who slept under the other.

"Why do I have to get up so early today, Marmee?"

"Because today is your first day of school," Marmee told her. School! She was a big girl now.

Laura Lee got up and picked out the clothes she wanted to wear. Big girls got to dress themselves. She pulled the clothes on and found her shoes. She looked at the shoes really hard. Daddee and Marmee had taught her about shoes. The curved part goes inside. She put the left shoe on her left foot and the right shoe on her right foot. Then, she tried to tie them. It took her a couple tries, but she finally came out with a pair of sloppy bows. That was all right, she had done them herself. She was proud.

She looked around the room. There was something else she needed. What could it be? "Turtle," she said, "what else do I need to do?"
Bunny jumped off the bed and bounded over to the dresser. She stood on her hind legs and could barely reach Laura Lee's brush. She pulled it off so it landed on the floor.

"Oh! That's right!" Laura Lee said with a giggle. She scratched Bunny's ears and picked up the brush. She carefully brushed her long blonde hair. When she was done, she put the brush back where it belonged.

Just the week before, Marmee had taken Laura Lee out shopping. They had gotten a brand new backpack for carrying school things, two big, fat pencils, a box of big crayons, and writing paper with big lines it was easy to write in. Laura Lee knew about reading and writing because Marmee and Daddee had taught her to do some of each. She even knew her phone number and address, in case she got lost.

Laura Lee found the pretty new backpack. All the school things were already in it.

"Um, Laura Lee," said Turtle, "can I go to school, too?"

"Well, what if the other kids are mean, and try to hurt you?"

"I could hide in your backpack, and then they wouldn't know I was there. I want to learn things, too."

Laura Lee thought about it, then said, "Okay." She opened up the backpack wide, and Turtle climbed in. Bunny whimpered and hopped up and down. "I don't think you can go, too, Bunny," she said sadly. "We can ask Marmee, though."

Laura Lee put her backpack on. Turtle giggled and peeked out. The three friends went to the kitchen. Marmee had made breakfast. In between bites, Laura Lee asked Marmee if Bunny could go to school, too.

"No, Laura Lee," Marmee said, "they don't like puppy dogs in school. I know, Bunny can go with us to drop you off, and she'll be there when you
come home." That sounded like a good idea, but it would have been more fun to have Bunny with her all day.

After breakfast, Marmee took the friends out to the car. Bunny loved to get in the car, but she hated to ride when the car was started. She hid under Laura Lee's feet when Marmee turned the key.

Marmee drove the car to a big building. In front of the building were yellow buses, and lots of kids. She stopped in front of the main doors. She leaned over and kissed Laura Lee on the cheek.

"Now, be a good girl," she said, "and remember where the room is? You go in these doors, turn down the first hall to the left, go all the way to the end, and the room is the last on the right."

"Yes, Marmee," said Laura Lee. She was scared, but excited, too. It was like riding on a roller coaster. She kissed and hugged Marmee, then hugged Bunny, and got out of the car. She took a deep breath, and went into the school.

There were kids everywhere. A lot of the kids were way bigger than she was. They were loud. Laura Lee wanted to turn around and run back to the car, but she heard Turtle whisper from her backpack, "What an adventure!" It was, really. This was a big adventure! Adventures weren't scary - well, sometimes they were, but most weren't.

She followed Marmee's directions to the room. The door was open. It had a big $K$ painted on it. Laura Lee went in. It was full of toys and other kids. There was a playhouse in the corner, huge building blocks, a pile of pillows for naps, stuffed animals, and all kinds of things. The end of the room with the toys was all carpet. She turned and looked in the other end of the room.
The floor was all tiled like the kitchen at home. Some of the tiles had the ABC's, some had numbers, and some were in the shape of a clock. There were long tables with chairs just her size. She walked over to look at the tables. There were names on bright colored cards in front of each chair. One of the cards said, "Laura Lee Massey." That was her. This chair was hers.

"Hello," said a woman's voice behind her. She turned to look. There was a very tall lady there. "I'm your teacher, Miss Bird. What's your name?"

"I'm Laura Lee."

"The bell is about to ring. When the bell rings, we all take our seats. Why don't you go ahead and sit down in your chair?" Laura Lee took off her backpack and hung it on her chair. Then, she sat down in her very own seat.

The bell rang with a loud bizzzzz. All the kids who knew how to read their own names ran for their seats. A lot of kids just stood around. Miss Bird helped them find their seats.

As she went around, she handed everybody a piece of construction paper with their name on it. Each piece of paper had a long strand of yarn that was tied to the two top corners, making a necklace. Laura Lee and all the other kids put theirs on.

It was time to tour the school. She had all the children line up in alphabetical order. She told everyone to remember who stood in front of them and who stood behind. They went through the library, the cafeteria, and even the sixth graders' rooms. The sixth graders were 11 and 12 years old. That was twice as old as Laura Lee. They looked really big.
The best part of the tour was the gym. Miss Bird let everyone play for a while. There were big bouncy balls to play with and a huge rope attached to the ceiling to swing on.

Laura Lee grabbed a ball and turned to ask Turtle if he wanted to play catch, but Turtle wasn't there. He had stayed in the room, hidden in her backpack. Instead, a boy was standing there. It was the boy who stood behind Laura Lee in line and sat next to her at the table. His name tag was bright red and said D-E-R-I-C-K M-I-L-L-E-R.

"Hi," said the boy. He looked at the ground shyly.

"Hi," said Laura Lee, just as shy.

"I'm Derick. Can I play ball with you?"

"Sure. I'm Laura Lee." She and Derick bounced the ball back and forth between them. Then, they bounced it off the wall and saw who could catch it first. It seemed like only a few minutes later that Miss Bird blew a whistle.

Everybody stopped playing and looked at Miss Bird. She called for everyone to line up just as quick as they could, in any order. Laura Lee got to the line up place first, so she got to be the leader. Derick was right behind her. Miss Bird had Laura Lee lead the whole class back to the room.

Miss Bird had everyone sit in their seats while she read them a story. When the story was over, it was time to go home. Everyone lined up again and Miss Bird led them back to the main doors. Buses and cars were waiting to take the children home.

Laura Lee saw Marmee's car, with Bunny standing in Laura Lee's seat, looking out the window. She said goodbye to Derick and ran to Marmee's car.
She opened the door and Bunny licked her face and hands. "How did you like school?" Marmee asked.

"School is fun!" said Laura Lee. "I can't wait until tomorrow."
Epilogue

And tomorrow came, and another, and another, and soon I was one of those sixth graders, looking back at the new Kindergardeners and wondering, "Could I have been that small?" The tomorrows kept on rolling, bringing new adventures.

Soon, I was in junior high, then high school. I had my first date, my first dance, my first kiss - uncountable milestones that we use to mark the long road to adulthood. Still, I never stopped chasing butterflies, climbing trees, or sleeping with one turtle-shaped pillow.

High school moved by far too quickly. I thought I wanted to be all grown up, but my first semester of college finals made me ache for the simple joys of childhood. I found a good climbing tree on campus, and I slept in its branches between classes for four years. Turtle stayed in my dorm room, except for one day when I hid him in my backpack with childish glee. I think he really enjoyed my criminal law class.

College brought an even bigger milestone than any before it. I met Ben, the man I will be honored to spend the rest of my life with. He might not understand why I sleep in trees, but he does understand why I still sleep with Turtle. He has to - just ask Teddy, the bear in his bed!

At the time of this writing, I am exactly one month from my college graduation. It's a little bit scary, and a lot bit exciting. The future is uncertain, unmolded, just ready to be shaped by whatever I choose to do with it. What an adventure!

I can hardly wait for tomorrow!