

BILLY AND THE BIG "WHAT IF"

Rabbit Billy was not happy. It was dinnertime—carrot-and-potato pie—but Billy's rabbit brain was not on dinner.

"Dad, what if I don't hear the morning alarm? Then I'll be late for school!"

"Well," replied Father, "if you sleep through your alarm, I'll wake you up so you'll still be on time."

"But what if you don't wake up?" asked Billy. "What will happen then?" Billy's mind slowly began to fill up with thoughts of things that could go wrong.



“Good question,” said Father. “I suppose I’d call your teacher and let him know that you’ll be a little late. Then I’d pop into our motion mobile and drive you to school.”

“But by then I’ll have missed the first part of the first class!” moaned Billy. “And *what if* everyone watches me as I sit down?”

“If that is all that would happen,” said Father, smiling a little, “I don’t think you have to worry.”

Billy thought about it. “Yes, I suppose.” Billy was quiet as he toyed with his food. Then he had another thought. “What if I forget to take my homework papers to school tomorrow? Teacher Reamus will be so unhappy.”

“Billy, you’ve never worried about that before; why all the fuss now?” asked Mother.

“I don’t know,” mumbled Billy miserably. “I can’t help it.”

When Billy went to bed that night, his thoughts were filled with big what-if questions about the next day. *What if... What if... What if...*

★★★

The next morning Billy heard the alarm go off, and he jumped out of bed. *Hurrah!* He had heard the alarm. He would not be late today.

He sat next to his best friend, Hedgehog Alex, during class, and he enjoyed himself quite a bit during arts and crafts period. At lunch he opened his lunch box to find his mother had packed him a delicious-looking carrot sandwich with all his favorite fillings. After lunch, he played in the school playground with Alex and Pheasant Fisk and Badger Smogl. And before it was time to go home, Teacher Reamus passed out a homework paper to be filled in and completed the next day.

As Billy and Alex walked home through the forest, they collected some berries for their mothers. It had been a good day.

"Mom! Dad! I'm home! I had such a great day!" exclaimed Billy, stepping into the living room. "And I picked some berries for you, Mom."

Billy opened his bag to pull them out, and he noticed that his homework paper was gone!

"Mom, Mom! My homework isn't in here!" Billy wailed, pulling everything out of his school bag in his search for the homework he was to complete that day.

"Oh dear, are you sure?" asked Mother.

"Yes, I'm sure! Maybe it fell out while I was gathering berries in the forest with Alex. I need to go out and find it."

Billy walked toward the door to go out in search of his lost homework. Father patted Billy's shoulder. "It will be dark very soon, and you know our rule about not being out after dark.

Besides, I doubt you'll be able to see so well right now." Billy looked out the window. Father was right; dusk was here and the sun was beginning to set.

"But if I don't have my homework, what will I do?"

"I suppose you'll need to tell your teacher you lost it. He'll understand—everyone loses something at some time or another."

"But *what if* he thinks I did it on purpose. And *what if*..." Billy's voice trailed off.

"Billy, why don't you help me set the table, and I'll tell you the story of a pet night-bump I had at your age."

Billy was interested. "Are night-bumps even real?"

"Well, this one was very real to me. His name was 'the Big What If,' and like most night-bumps, he was not well behaved."

"No? What did he do?"



“He wanted attention all the time, but the more attention I gave him, the bigger and bigger he grew, until he took up almost all the space in my bedroom, and then he began following me everywhere!”

“I thought that’s what pets are supposed to do...”

“Yes, except he was actually a rather bothersome pet. He wanted to know everything that could possibly happen in that day and in all the tomorrows! He would start every sentence with ‘What if’—which is why I called him the Big What If. Anyway, soon I wasn’t having any fun taking my night-bump anywhere. He needed so much attention that I found I couldn’t enjoy my family or school or friends anymore.”

“What did you do?”

“I eventually learned how to train him. It helped **when** I talked with my father about the problems the Big What If would warn about, instead of spending so much time only hearing **about** the problems from my Big What If. I also learned that if I prayed and asked God to be with me, then the Big What If wasn’t half so worrisome or bad or difficult to take care of.



“Something that also helped to quiet him down was when he saw with his own two eyes that things he dreaded or worried about rarely came true, or weren’t as bad as he thought they’d be. —I mean *he*—learned that he could choose to question and worry about everything that could happen, or he could choose to be brave and courageous.”

“You—I mean *he*—chose to be brave, didn’t he?” asked Billy, who liked this story a lot.

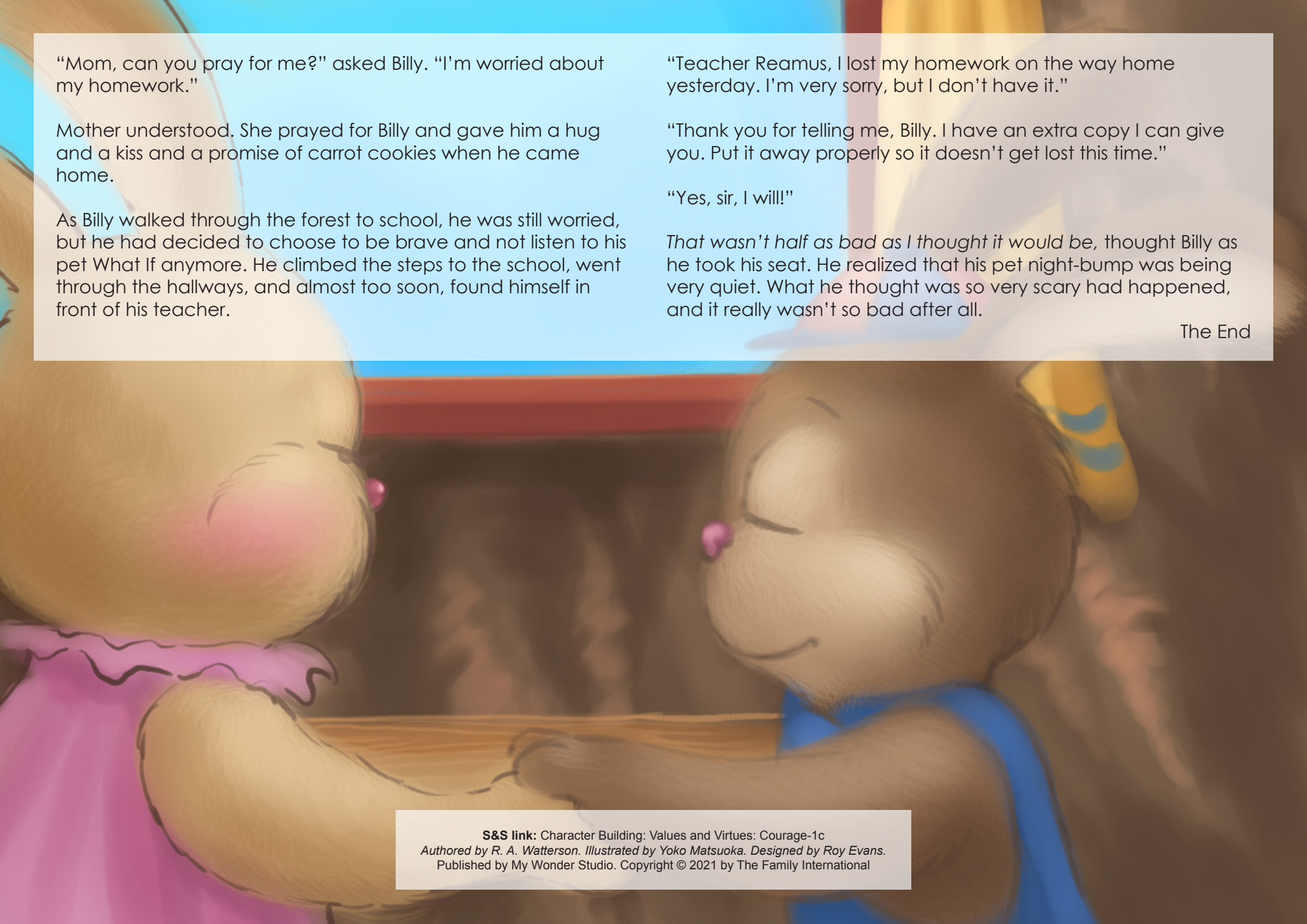
“Yes, and eventually the Big What If returned to a manageable size, and soon he became so small I could no longer keep him as a pet.”

Billy thought about his dad’s story all throughout dinner and as he lay in bed that night. He knew he probably also had a pet night-bump similar to the Big What If and that he’d been feeding his pet much too much.

★★★

The next morning was bright and beautiful, and Billy had gotten up on time. He had pulled on the school-day clothes that his mother had prepared for him and was halfway through his breakfast when he remembered his lost homework. His tummy started to churn, and he wondered what Teacher Reamus would say when he told him what had happened to his homework. He could hear the Big What If night-bump stirring awake.





“Mom, can you pray for me?” asked Billy. “I’m worried about my homework.”

Mother understood. She prayed for Billy and gave him a hug and a kiss and a promise of carrot cookies when he came home.

As Billy walked through the forest to school, he was still worried, but he had decided to choose to be brave and not listen to his pet What If anymore. He climbed the steps to the school, went through the hallways, and almost too soon, found himself in front of his teacher.

“Teacher Reamus, I lost my homework on the way home yesterday. I’m very sorry, but I don’t have it.”

“Thank you for telling me, Billy. I have an extra copy I can give you. Put it away properly so it doesn’t get lost this time.”

“Yes, sir, I will!”

That wasn’t half as bad as I thought it would be, thought Billy as he took his seat. He realized that his pet night-bump was being very quiet. What he thought was so very scary had happened, and it really wasn’t so bad after all.

The End