



IN WHICH POOH AND PIGLET VISIT THE POLING

“What,” asked Piglet quietly, “is a Poling This Way?”

“A what?” asked Pooh.

“A Poling,” said Piglet carefully. “Like A Pole. But longer. Poling This Way.”

“Oh,” said Pooh. “That.” Pooh sat down to think. Thinking was always better when sitting down. He had once tried thinking when standing up and he had felt quite dizzy all over. Wol had later informed him it was ill-advised to try that sort of thing on an empty stomach.

After thinking for a long time, Pooh shook his head.

“I think,” he said to himself, “that I will know the answer if I first have some Hunny. Yes,” he nodded, and turned to Piglet. “Would you like A Little Something, Piglet?”

As it happened, Piglet was just in the mood for A Little Something. Somewhere nice and cosy indoors. He had been counting the fluffy clouds that drifted across the sky, wondering whether it might rain and whether he should have worn his sou'-wester. Or perhaps brought a Numberella. So Piglet and Pooh set off together to Pooh's house. However, they had not gone too far when they met Eeyore.

“Looks like rain,” said Eeyore glumly. “But we shouldn't be surprised. We haven't had rain for at least a day. Time for it, really.” He sighed. “I suppose I shall just get wet. Again. Haven't been properly soaked through since – oh...yesterday morning.”

“We are just going off for A Little Something,” said Piglet.

“Are you?” said Eeyore slowly. “How nice. I wish I had time for A Little Something. But Duty Calls.”

Pooh looked puzzled. “I didn't hear anything,” he said.

Eeyore was about to explain that Duty didn't make a noise when it called. But then along came Rabbit. He was running and looking very busy. “Can't stop,” he announced. “Duty Calls.”

Pooh scratched his ears and looked around. “I didn't hear anything,” he said once more, rather wishing he had got back to Pooh Corner before Eeyore and Rabbit had appeared. Eeyore meant well, but he sometimes got in the way of Elevesens. Rabbit always did.

“No, you probably did not,” said Rabbit. “After all, why should you? Duty calls and only Responsible Animals reply.” He put his hands on his hips and looked Pooh up and down severely. “Have you not read the Notices?” he demanded.

“We read them,” said Piglet quickly. “Didn't we, Pooh? And Pooh and I were just discursing them.” He nudged Pooh. “Weren't we, Pooh?” He coughed loudly. “About the Poling This Way.”

“Oh,” said Winnie-the-Pooh. “Ah.” He looked gratefully at Piglet. “Of course, Piglet. The Poling This Way. Quite right. We were just discursing that, Rabbit,” he said politely. “And wondering where it was. When you came along and interrupted us. And so on.”

“Well, then,” snapped Rabbit impatiently. “Let's not stand around. Follow me. Or we'll be late!” He set off at a brisk pace, leaving Eeyore, Piglet and Pooh to follow him as best they could.

“Piglet,” puffed Pooh as they ran faster than was usual at Elevesens, “where are we going?”

“I think,” gasped Piglet, “we are going to the Poling.”

“Is it,” wondered Pooh bleakly, “further than the North Pole?” He hoped not.

They soon came to Wol's house. Outside was a large sign stating that this was the ‘Poling.’ A smaller sign below read: ‘Here.’ And below that: ‘Open at Leven.’ And below that again a fourth sign which said ‘Sharp’. Wol was standing at his door. He held a large watch and was looking at it through two pairs of

spectacles.

“Ten past eleven,” he announced crossly. “You’re late!”

Rabbit looked at the watch. Then he put an ear to it. He shook it.

“That watch has stopped,” he said. “So we aren’t late.”

Wol was very surprised. He examined the watch. “It belonged to my Great-Uncle Barnabus,” he muttered. “It has never stopped before.”

“Well,” said Rabbit, thumping restlessly with his left foot, “it’s stopped now. So can we get on with it?”

Wol took a last look at the watch, put it down, shook his feathers, drew himself up to his full height and proclaimed: “I now declare this Poling Stashun open !”

“Hear, hear!” said Rabbit. Pooh looked at him in astonishment and was about to ask something, when Wol continued.

“The matter for Poling today is ... oh dear, now what was the matter for Poling?” He consulted a tall pile of papers on which he had carefully made certain notes. Some of these pieces of paper stated: ‘A Gendar’ and ‘A Nother Gendar’ or simply ‘Item’. Others, on the other hand, did not.

“Good grief!” exclaimed Rabbit in a *We-Haven’t-Got-All-Day* sort of voice.

Wol adjusted his spectacles and grabbed a piece of paper at random. “Item Three,” he announced gravely, “the Nelection of a Present.”

Piglet’s eyes grew very round at this. He liked Presents. Especially when they were wrapped up in red paper and tied with a silver bow. He had only ever received one Present in his life. And now they were going to Nelect one. How very exciting!

“Wol,” said Pooh after a while, “what is a Nelection?”

“I’m glad you asked,” said Wol, pleased. “A Nelection is when all the animals get together and choose someone. Everyone has one vote, and whatever gets most votes is Nelected. Or chosen, if you will.”

“I see,” said Pooh sadly. He didn’t see and was feeling a little tired. His tummy was complaining that it was well past Elevenes now.

“Of course,” Eeyore pointed out, “in this case we are not choosing a Present, but a President. Pity,” he added, “a Present would have been much more useful. Say, a piece of string or an empty bottle. But I suppose we deserve a President more than a Present. It’s not as if it was a Birthday or anything.”

“Wol,” said Pooh slowly, “what is a President?”

Rabbit rolled his eyes. “Unbelievable !” he muttered. “No wonder nothing ever gets done round here.” Rabbit struck an Important Pose. “A President makes Decisions. A President leads by example. It’s quite clear that we need a Strong and Sensible President,” he announced. “Which is why you should vote for me. Vote Rabbit for President !”

Eeyore held up a foot and called for quiet. “I may be wrong,” he said. “I frequently am. It’s only what anyone might expect. But my view is -” He paused.

“Well?” demanded Rabbit.

“My view, for what it’s worth, which may not be very much, since no one ever expects Eeyore to have any ideas worth listening to -”

“Quite right,” muttered Rabbit.

“Not at all,” said Wol kindly.

“Is that,” continued Eeyore, “a President should be the nicest person and not the most sensiblest one.”

“Rubbish !” exclaimed Rabbit. “Drivel. Whoever said that? No wonder!”

“I did,” said Eeyore.

“I know you did,” said Rabbit. “Just what I said !”

“Well,” said Wol, studying another piece of paper, “we should move on to the next item. Item Seven,” he announced in a loud voice, “the Vote.”

“The what?” asked Pooh.

“The Vote,” repeated Wol. “When we vote for the Nelecting of the Present.”

“Ah,” said Pooh, feeling quite faint now. “Will it take long? It’s just that I need -”

Wol explained that everyone had a Vote and that they could all vote for anyone they wanted to be President. All they had to do was write someone’s name on a piece of paper. Rabbit said that was an excellent idea. “I’ll just go and fetch all my Friends and Relations,” he added importantly.

“Ahem,” said Wol in a firm voice. “Friends and Relations do not get a vote. Only Piglet, Pooh, Eeyore and Rabbit. And myself, of course.”

“What?” said Rabbit, outraged. “Not any of my Friends and Relations?”

Wol shook his head. “All your Friends and Relations, Rabbit, are too small.”

“Well,” said Rabbit, “and what about Tigger and Kanga and Roo?”

Wol thought for a few minutes. “Kanga can vote,” he decided at last. “But Tigger is too bouncy. And Roo is too young.”

“Well, really !” exclaimed Rabbit, puffing his cheeks and breathing very hard.

Piglet was sent to get Kanga, who was giving Roo a bath. And Kanga and Roo (squeaking excitedly, wrapped in a blue tea-towel, and with his ears all bubbly) and Tigger (who bounced all the way back, shouting ‘Hooray!’ and ‘What-ho!’ which made Piglet very anxious indeed) came back to Wol’s house. Wol explained everything to Kanga very carefully. Pooh listened too. Tigger sulked. Roo jumped about, spreading soapy bubbles everywhere.

And then they voted. It took a while. Eeyore sucked on his pencil and muttered to himself. Pooh stuck out his tongue and wished there were not so many letters in the Arthur Belt. Rabbit dashed off something and waited impatiently.

At last Wol gathered up all the voting slips and sat down at his table to count them. This also took some time. And then Wol cleared his throat impressively and read out the results.

“Wol - two Votes. Piglet - three Votes. There was one Spoiled Vote - which means it does not count.”

“Nonsense!” said Rabbit. “That can’t be right! I’m sure I got a vote. I demand a recount!”

Wol explained crossly that he did not need to recount. Whoever had cast the Spoiled vote had written “Rabbit for President! Make One Hundred Acre Wood Great Again!”, instead of just a name. That meant, said Wol firmly, that whoever it was – and he looked hard at Rabbit - had spoiled their Vote.

“And we don’t know who it was,” he added hurriedly, “because the Vote is Secret.”

Piglet quivered excitedly. He liked Secrets.

“Well,” said Eeyore, “that seems to settle it. I mean, if we wanted a result. Which is possibly not what we want. There are definitely times when one does not want a result at all. I don’t know, Rabbit: what do you think?”

But Rabbit had stormed off, loudly complaining about a Rigged Democratic Process. And Procedural Failings. Not to mention Fraud. And Corruption.

Which left the rest of them to congratulate Piglet on his stunning victory. He turned quite pink with pleasure, and then announced that his first act as President was to go and have A Little Something with Pooh. And Pooh was glad he had Nelected Piglet and not Rabbit.

