

## SAMPLE OF “UH AND ER: THE WORDS THAT WEREN’T”

by

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People use words every day, so it’s no surprise that words think very highly of themselves. They’re proud to be part of phrases like “good morning,” “pass the orange juice” and “five more minutes” and every night they combine to form “good night,” “I need a glass of water” and “I’m not even tired” with vigor. Ask any word and they’ll go on about how they’re why we can talk to people, get what we want, even make our closest friends. But this story is about two simpler words.

Uh and Er are two little words who are the best of friends. They both appreciated each other in spite of their size, and boy were they small words. Those little words were so tiny that most people don’t think they really are words. They just think they’re sounds. Just sounds! And nobody liked using them either. You know those times when you can’t think of anything to say, so you just say “uh?” Well, the thing is, people think they sound stupid if they say “uh” or “er,” and nobody likes sounding stupid. So those two little words weren’t very popular with all the others.

School was awful for Uh and Er. While all the other words were learning how to be read, written and spoken, the meaner ones wouldn’t even let Uh and Er into the building. “Words only! Uh and Er aren’t words!” All the other words liked to hang out in little dictionaries (that’s where words live, you know) that their parents had built in trees, but nobody would invite Uh and Er into the tree---dictionaries. “Uh and Er don’t belong in dictionaries!” Even less popular words like Ain’t, Like, and Well didn’t want to play

with them. None of the people liked saying Uh and Er, and any time they did it was by accident.

One day, Uh and Er were walking around when they saw a word...selling extra letters!

“Get your letters here!” the sales---word hollered, “I’ve got Es! I’ve got Ys! Swap out that tired old C for a shiny new K! Make yourself plural with a nice solid S!” Uh and Er looked at each other with glee.

“Extra letters!” Uh said, “Those are just the things we need!”

“How so?” Er asked. Er liked adding on an extra letter as much as the next word, but it seemed silly to add one on for no reason.

“Don’t you get it Er?” Uh explained, “All the other words think we’re too short to be real words! If we add on more letters, we’ll be the biggest longest words in the world!”

“Then people will have to use us!” Er agreed. The two little words rushed over to the sales---word and started looking around.

It took forever to find letters for Uh and Er to buy. The vowels were gorgeous and looked great on them, but they cost so much money. Most words only add on extra vowels if they wanted to look extra fancy. And some of the consonants looked so weird on them. Only a few words can have a Z or a Q and still look and sound good. Even more common ones like C and F didn’t feel right to them. And where would they put the letters; in the front or the back?

Uh happened to find a nice looking M in the cart. It was a perfect fit! Er tried on an M too, since it looked so good on Uh. That letter looked just as good on Er! The words

stocked up on Ms and went to make their purchases, but they only had enough money to buy one each. Letters were expensive and Uh and Er didn't have huge allowances. The two words went to school the next day, showing off their flashy new letters. All the other words at school still made fun of them.

"So you're 'Uhm' and 'Erm' now?" Cat laughed, "You sound even dumber than before!"

"You can't just turn into words by adding new letters!" Food mocked, "Everyone knows that!"

"Maybe 'Met' could become 'Meat' and 'Ear' could become 'Hear,'" Snide sneered, "But you sure can't do that!"

Uh and Er heard even worse things than that throughout the day. Uh's parents, Hello and Goodbye, decided to have Er over for dinner to cheer them up.

"Don't listen to them!" Hello said, passing the potatoes. "You two look wonderful with those Ms!"

"You don't even need those Ms to be real words," Goodbye added, offering Er some juice. "You'll grow up to be the best words the world has ever heard." Er spent the night at Uh's house, playing word games until they fell asleep.

During the weekend, Uh and Er went into the city to see a movie. On their way to the theater, they saw a building with a huge glitzy sign.

*Letter Stretching Clinic: Longer Vowels! Guaranteed Results! Become A Whole New Word!*

"Now I've got an idea!" Er said to Uh, "Let's stretch out our letters!" "That's crazy talk Er!" Uh answered, "What good would that do?"

“Remember when Bet got an E stretched and became Beet?” Er explained, “Beet was a whole new word and he was the talk of the town! And that was just one letter! Imagine how popular we’d be if we stretch out our letters!”

“Then what are we waiting for, Er?” Uh asked, running into the clinic. “Let’s get some long vowels!”

Er followed Uh and the two little words went up to the front desk and asked for long vowels. The letter stretcher took a good look at the words and apologized. She didn’t think Uh or Er would look good with long vowels, but she’d be more than happy to stretch out their consonants. Uh and Er placed all the money they’d saved up for the movies and asked her to stretch out their consonants as far as they could go. The letter--stretcher decided to give them a discount since they were such small words.

When she finished, Uh and Er examined themselves in one of the clinic’s mirrors. Their letters were so long and they were such huge words that they didn’t even need those extra Ms to be popular. The next day, Uh and Er went into school showing off their long, stretched letters. All the other words were rolling on the floor in laughter.

“What should we call you now?” Dog teased, “‘Uhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh’ and ‘Errrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr?’”

“You sound really dumb now with those consonants stretched out!” Kid laughed.

“Maybe ‘Both’ could become ‘Booth’ and ‘Princes’ could become ‘Princess,’”

Study said snidely, “But you sure can’t do that!”

Uh and Er were teased mercilessly until school was over. Er’s parents, Please and Thanks, decided to have Uh over for dinner to cheer them up.

“You were just fine without stretching out the H and R,” Thanks said, cutting off

a piece of chicken, “You shouldn’t have to change yourselves for other words.”

“But nobody listens to us! Nobody pays attention to us! Nobody likes us!” Uh said, picking at the greens, “They don’t even think we’re real words!”

“Well, of course you’re real words,” Please said, giving Uh a good friendly pat, “Maybe you’re not fancy or long words like ‘Loquaciousness’ or ‘Pedantic,’ but you don’t have to be. You’re both wonderful in your own unique way.”

“I don’t want to be unique!” Er whined, “I want to be a word!”

After another delicious dinner, Uh spent the night at Er’s house. That night they dreamed their names were Left and Right and everyone loved them.

Uh and Er had another terrible day at school. Sticks and Stones chased them around the school and threw them into Dumpster, and by the time they both got out, they missed lunch and smelled terrible. Nobody would talk to them except to tease them, not even Like and Ain’t, and the teachers wouldn’t let them in their classrooms because they stank so much. They couldn’t even show off their stretched letters because the H and R had shrunken back to their original sizes.

Uh and Er had had enough! If nobody thought they were real words, then they wouldn’t even live with words. They went back to their dictionaries and gathered up their clothes, toys, snacks and all the money they had into two big backpacks. Then they both ran out of their houses, and went into the woods. Uh and Er had been camping before, so they figured they knew enough to live in the woods for the rest of their lives.

The funny thing about a word is that even when they’re going about their everyday life, people are using them all the time. Even from the moment a word is born

people are using it. But when words leave their homes, people can't find them. And when people can't find the words to say what they mean, they sure can't use those words either.