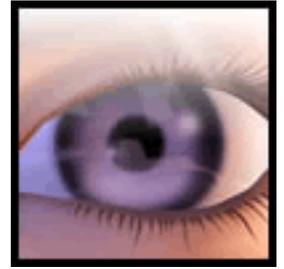


# Meg's Story (working title)-The opening of my first novel

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Published on Stories Space on 01 Feb 2015

A true story of one hell of a life...

<https://www.storiesspace.com/stories/memoirs/megs-story-working-titlethe-opening.aspx>

Meg's Story (Working title) – first part of Chapter 1 1930 “You little scamp!” I actually yelled out loud at him (if we were at home, I'd have been in trouble for that). I had to think and think fast. The river was usually like home to us but of course I knew what lurked beneath the smoky emerald: the reed-beds. The murky, murderous reed-beds that had claimed many prizes in my life-time but for some reason we never saw the danger lurking in wait. “Help! Meg!” screeched my terrified baby brother. Arty was fighting the reeds for his life and swallowing copious amounts of algae and water rather than air - he spluttered and choked as I panicked. The current began to join in the brawl, enjoying the contest with the little lad; my Arty was losing this particular battle and I didn't know where I was going to find the strength or wherewithal to help him. The colour drained from my already pale skin: I was so white I could almost feel it. I tried to scream reassurance and encouragement to little Arty but I was mute: my mouth so dry that the words evaded me. I couldn't understand it; the river-bank had been so calm and lush just a few minutes before: a haven that had never threatened or worried us. Yet now, I feared this magical place was about to become Arty's grave. I was just eight years old and my first nightmare was being born. Sisterly instinct struck somewhere inside me and I threw myself off the steep embankment in to the shallow, shadowy reed bed below. The reed-beds: so common on the fen land: common but deadly. They were not going to drag the life out of Arty. Not today. Not any day. Shocked at how cold the water was considering the heat of the sun, I yelped but soon remembered the job I had to do. I felt the current swirling around my ankles and the reeds tickling my shins: that very feeling almost froze me to the spot. “Arty! Arty, can you hear me? Can you see me?” Nothing. His previous screeches had been claimed by the river. I frantically waved my arms around underneath the surface of the foggy water and could only feel eels and crabs scrape my skin – no Arty. With a sudden surge the reeds pushed Arty within my grasp, it was so sudden I had no time to prepare my grip and he was gone. Would he even be breathing now? Had I left it too long to jump in after him? Mother would be sure to banish me to the outhouse for this. “Arty!!!” I forced his name out, determined to let him know I was here. I didn't even know if the current was dragging me in the same direction as it had hauled my brother. I didn't even know where I was in relation to the bank, to our

little picnic that was now distant happiness (I had to beg Mother for some warm bread to bring out with us; a little treat for our little trip). Frenetically, I bobbed under the water, scanning for Arty, I could hardly breathe. So much river water was now running in to my lungs that I couldn't even cough. I couldn't believe how silent it was. There was no shouting or screaming here. The fish carried on with their day: no creature could fight for us. No creature could fight the current and win, so they passed us – left us for dead. I really was our only hope, and I was not going to die at the hands of this spider web of reeds. Determined the reeds were not going to drag the life from my baby brother, I breathlessly hauled more than my own, slight weight as I fought with the reeds for the sibling prize. The shrewd reeds had been here before: many times. I could sense Arty and his flailing limbs – had he given up hope of me rescuing him? Had this river taken his last breath? I began an underwater dance that only the reeds were a partner to. I forced my legs to grow, to achieve farther than their own length knowing that Arty could be the treasure. Suddenly, I felt a cold lump at the end of my tiny foot (my shoes were long gone) and I tried with utter desperation to hook my brother like some prize at the fun-fair. As Arty dangled between my knees, I pulled him with my numb fingers, his jumper becoming the umbilical cord between us. I found a foothold somewhere at the base of a clump of reeds and kicked upwards – silt surrounded us, a last attempt of the river to become the victor; this was never going to happen. I began pulling on the reeds, making the enemy my comrade and using them to get Arty and myself to the muddy verge. Grabbing a tree stump, I heaved my weight and that of the sodden green jumper up on to the riverside. Gasping, I had to find Arty's head from underneath the ripped garments and there it was: a colour I had never witnessed before. Blue didn't even describe it. Grey? Purple? Dead? I reached his dark, hidden mouth and breathed my life in to his with a might I never knew I possessed. I even tried punching on his chest in sheer desperation. Nothing. He needed more of my breath and I had so little of it left. Knowing Mother would want Arty alive if there was a choice between the two of us, I puffed and wheezed in to his little chest until it lifted and suddenly he spluttered a mouthful of the murderous water in to my own. I knew he was alive at last! I shook him lightly and remembered to roll him over allowing more water and vomit to pour on to the rocks beneath us. "Meggy, is that you?" were his first words. "Yes, Arty, it's me and you are going to be fine, I promise" I reassured him as I flung my weakened arms around him. I had saved my little brother from drowning. I suppose I could say I had saved his life, in fact I had brought him back from the dead and that made me smile. Copyright 2015 S J Whatling