

AN AFTERNOON IN THE OUTER WORLD

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The rain falls heavily on the earth, soaking the ground with its life-giving powers. Buried beneath the roots of the grass, a small earthworm is working its way to the surface. The abundance of moisture held in the ground forces the worm to seek the open air. Stalks of grass laden with rain drops quiver as the reddish-brown, finger-shaped head emerges from between the blades. Slowly, and with great effort, the body of the earthworm is drawn out of the hole. The muddy ground of the surface engulfs the worm as it struggles to be free. A moment later a tiny "thuck" is heard as the tail leaves the opening of the worm's tunnel. Surrounded by tall, dripping blades of dark green grass and shallow puddles of rain, the earthworm begins its journey of an afternoon in the outer world.

Sluggishly, the worm makes its way through the lofty grass. The outer coating of slime on its body lets the earthworm glide easily over the muddy turf. In a rhythmic motion, the segmented body contracts and expands to move the worm along. Stretching to its full length, the body divisions grow larger and the worm covers about half a foot. The worm then compresses, the end segments shorten and move forward toward the head, pulling the worm onward. The round-bodied creature repeatedly stretches and compresses, working its way through the jungle of towering grass.

Laboriously, the earthworm travels over the saturated turf. In its next extending movement, the head encounters a sensation of a different surface. The worm stops. It raises its head, lifting up the first five segments of its body. The head of the earthworm gently waves to and fro as if scouting the misty area beyond. After sensing no signs of danger, the worm resumes its crawling position. The pavement is wet and gray, and the rusty-colored earthworm stands out against the unnatural background. As it moves, the worm leaves a thin silvery trail that glistens in the fading dusk. Halfway across the puddle-filled sidewalk the worm's rhythm is broken. The trail of freedom is halted. Safe from its water-logged home, the earthworm has become weary of its journey. So, for the night, the earthworm has settled within a shallow crack of the sidewalk.