

TELL ME A STORY
THE GRASSHOPPER
AND THE TOAD a fable
from Southern Africa
adapted by Amy Friedman and illustrated by Jillian Gilliland

Once upon a time, long ago, all the animals of the forest were friends, and closest of all were elegant grasshopper and handsome green toad. They loved and admired each other. Toad especially loved grasshopper's beautiful colors -- his cape of many colors, his stripes and swirls. And grasshopper was very impressed by toad's flat body and the way he could spend most of his time in the water, with only his eyes and nose sticking out. They shared other traits too -- they both were fun-loving and energetic, and sometimes when toad called out to his friends, he sounded almost exactly like cricket sounded when he rubbed his legs together.

Time passed, and each time they saw each other in the bush, they spoke of their affection for each other. One day toad awoke with a marvelous idea, and he called to his wife.

"Let us invite grasshopper and his wife to supper tonight. We'll have a feast! What do you say?"

"If you like," said toad's wife warily. "We don't know them well, of course, but if he's as fine a fellow as you say, then I'm sure we'll enjoy their company."

Toad was overjoyed, and so he hopped along, looking for his friend. When he found grasshopper dozing, he woke him up and said excitedly, "Come to supper tonight, grasshopper -- you and your wife. Please, my wife and I invite you to join us."

So that evening grasshopper and his wife traveled to the pond to share a meal with toad. Before they sat down to eat, toad announced, "First we shall wash our feet, of course," and he washed his forelegs.

"Of course," grasshopper said, and he too rubbed his forelegs together, and so did his wife. As they did, the silent pond was suddenly full of the sound of grasshoppers' chirping.

"Oh!" squeaked toad's wife, startled by the sound. "What a terrible racket! Please don't do that again!"

"Yes," toad agreed, "making such loud noises before supper is considered rude. Now, let us eat!" He reached for the suffle of spider.

Grasshopper reached too, but soon he discovered that he could not eat without chirping, for to grasp the food, he had to rub his legs together.

"Quiet!" toad cried. "Quiet, please! This is no time for making such a racket! I can't eat!"

The Grasshopper and the Toad



Grasshopper and his wife stopped eating, and the air around them grew quiet. When toad and his wife had finished eating, grasshopper said uneasily, "Tomorrow you shall have to come to our house to share our supper."

"That sounds wonderful," toad said.

The next evening toad and his wife, wearing her favorite necklace, arrived at grasshopper's hut. Once inside they saw a steaming pot of insect stew, and toad's stomach rumbled with pleasure.

"Before we eat," grasshopper said, "please wash your feet." He pointed out a water jar that sat outside.

"Of course," toad said, and he hopped outside and washed his feet. Then he hopped back inside to join the feast. He was just about to reach for the platters when grasshopper cried, "Toad, please! Don't put your dirty feet into the food. Look at the mud! Please, go wash."

Toad quickly hopped back to the water jar, washed again, and returned to the food.

Now toad was really hungry, and he reached to take a ladle full of food, but once again grasshopper cried, "Look at your feet!"

Sure enough, toad's feet were dirty from hopping back across the ground.

"Now look here," said toad, "this is ridiculous. You're trying to embarrass me. You know very well that I must use my feet to hop about, and if they get dirty between the water jar and the food, there's nothing that I can do to fix that!"

Grasshopper frowned. "You started this argument," he said, sullenly. "You embarrassed me!"

"I did?" toad said, startled by this accusation. "I did nothing of the sort!"

"You know very well," grasshopper said, "that I cannot eat without rubbing my legs together, and when I rub my legs together, I cannot help but make the chirping sound."

"Very well, then! Let us agree never to share a meal again!" toad said.

"That sounds right to me," grasshopper said. "And better still, I renounce our friendship from this day on."

"And I do, too!" said toad.

So toad and his wife hopped away. After that, grasshopper and toad were never again friends.

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