

A Real Friend

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It was a beautiful day in the month of May in Woodlands Forest. The Bunny family was out for their morning hop.

“Is it okay if I go the pond today?” Junior asked his mom and dad.

“Sure, Junior,” answered his mom. “Just don’t forget about your hopping lesson at 3:00; be sure to be back by then and tell Fred the Frog we said hi!”

“Okay, I will! Thanks! Bye!” shouted Junior as he hopped away.

He took the trail past Mr. Owl’s tree and the Fox family’s den towards the small pond at the very edge of the forest. None of the animals liked to go there because of the smell and, although they never said it, the animals were not particularly fond of the frogs who lived by the pond. Junior was the only animal who ever visited the pond regularly. Mom and Dad had been sure to teach him that every animal in the forest deserved respect, even frogs. This is why they were happy when Junior came home one day and told them about his encounter with Fred the Frog. They had met after Junior, on one of his visits to the pond, scared away Fred the Frog’s breakfast. Junior felt so bad that he begged Fred the Frog to let him help catch something else. With Junior’s good eye, they had found the perfect horsefly and after that they became the best of friends and did everything together. They went exploring, Fred the Frog taught Junior how to swim, and Junior helped Fred the Frog catch flies. Fred the Frog didn’t know the forest very well, so Junior took him to his favorite spots. Junior even showed him the tallest and oldest tree in the forest. Junior came everyday to visit and play with Fred the Frog. Even if they did the same things they had done before, the fact they were together was what mattered. Fred the Frog loved Junior’s company, especially since no one ever came to that part of the forest.

One day as Junior was hopping towards the pond, the other bunnies from his class were all in a big huddle whispering and laughing.

“Hey, guys! What are you up to?” asked Junior as he hopped over.

“Oh, perfect! Junior, you know the way to the pond, right?” they asked.

Junior’s heart started to beat faster and he replied,

“Yeah, I know the way. Why do you want to go there?”

“We’re planning the perfect joke! We’re going to steal all the lily pads from the pond so those yucky frogs have nothing to hop on!”

Before Junior could stop the words from coming out of his mouth he shouted,

“Frogs are not yucky! Don’t say that about them!”

Questioning glances followed from the other bunnies, but they ignored him and began to hop towards the pond. Junior didn’t know what else to do but reluctantly follow them. He just hoped that Fred the Frog wouldn’t be there.

When they arrived to the pond the water was very still and only the faint sound of flies buzzing in the air could be heard. They all got down, low to the ground, and crept along until they reached the edge of the pond. Then one by one, they began to chew each lily pad away from its stem, throwing them out of the water and onto the ground.

Junior was watching, unsure of what to do, when all of a sudden he heard a familiar voice.

“HEY! What do you think you’re doing!” shouted Fred the Frog.

All the bunnies jumped and started hopping away into the woods, but Jack the Rabbit called to them. He was

the oldest of the bunnies in the burrow and the leader of the group.

“Why are you all hopping away so fast?” Jack the Rabbit asked. “What do you think this frog is going to do to you?”

Fred the Frog looked at Jack the Rabbit and then suddenly caught sight of Junior. His heart sank and he couldn't understand why Junior was with them and not trying to help him. Jack the Rabbit hopped toward Fred the Frog and started teasing him.

“What are you going to do? You're nothing but a little, yucky frog.”

Jack the Rabbit, while keeping one eye on Fred the Frog, started throwing out the lily pads from the pond again and the other bunnies started following. Fred the Frog watched helplessly as almost all of the lily pads disappeared from the surface of the pond. Fred the Frog looked back to where Junior had been watching, but he was gone. Just as he began to think that there would be no one to help him, Junior came hopping as fast as he could towards Jack the Rabbit. Fred the Frog gasped as he watched Junior throw a big pile of slimy, green algae that hit Jack the Rabbit straight in the nose.

“Now, everybody better leave the pond right now if you don't want a face full of algae!”

That was enough to convince most of them to hop back to the burrow, but Jack the Rabbit stared straight at Junior.

“What you're doing to Fred isn't nice.” Junior said.

“Why do you care so much about a yucky frog, Junior?” asked Jack.

“Fred is not yucky and he is my friend. That's why I care about him so much!”

“Junior, you can't be friends with frogs! They look funny and they're not clean. Bunnies aren't friends with frogs.” said Jack.

Junior looked at Jack and then looked at Fred the Frog. He turned back to Jack with a smile and said, “Well, he looks okay to me, and he's a very clean frog. Maybe not all bunnies are friends with frogs, but I am and that's never going to change!”

Rolling his eyes, Jack the Rabbit hopped away.

“Why did you do that?” Fred the Frog asked Junior. “They're going to make fun of you now.”

“Because a real friend is someone who thinks more about his friend and less about himself,” replied Junior.

After that, Fred the Frog and Junior were even better friends, and they taught everyone else in Woodlands Forest that no matter what kind of animal you are or where you live, you can always be a friend.