
THE ANT AND THE GRASSHOPPER BY JOHN PRESTON (WITH APPOLOGIES TO AESOP)

One fine summer day, a grasshopper was enjoying the sunshine and blue sky. He was thinking about how to describe its beauty in a poem or song when an ant came by, dragging a large piece of food. "Good day to you!" called the grasshopper. The ant grunted and muttered something under his breath about lazy grasshoppers and continued on his way.

The next day, the same thing happened but this time, the grasshopper asked the ant if he could help with the ant's heavy load. The ant replied that he didn't need help and the grasshopper would just slow him down. He had to get enough food stored away for the winter and there was no time to waste.

That winter, when the ground was frozen and there was no fresh grass to eat, the ant and his family were snug beneath the ground in their nest with plenty of food and the ant was very proud of himself. But all was not well in the ant family.

"I'm booooooord" complained the ant's son. "There's nothing to do!" echoed his sister. The ant was about to scold them for being ungrateful when there was a knock at the door. Since the ant had few friends that weren't other ants who were snug in their nests where all right-thinking ants should be, he couldn't imagine who it might be.

The ant opened the door and there was the grasshopper, with a bright colored scarf wrapped around his neck, carrying a guitar!

"Hello, Mr. Ant;" he said. "I was thinking about you and your family and how you might like to hear a song about the sunshine and blue sky on this dreary winter day."

Before the ant could assure the grasshopper that he certainly did not, his wife and children exclaimed; "Yes, we would love to have something bright and cheerful to think about!" "Please come in," said the ant's wife.

For the next hour, the grasshopper entertained the ant family with songs, poems, and stories about sunshine, blue sky, and his travels. Then Mrs. Ant insisted that he stay for dinner.

All this time, the ant was scowling because he knew that this must be a trick by the grasshopper to get an invitation to stay for the winter and eat the ant's hard earned food for free. He had to figure out a way to get rid of him without upsetting his wife and children who were having such a good time.

After dinner, the ant's fears were confirmed when his wife suggested that the grasshopper stay the night and the children chorused "yeah!" but before he could put a stop to this foolishness, the grasshopper held up his hand and said; "I'm sorry but I already have a commitment to spend a few days with the badger and then with the bear and her cubs. I just stopped by because I was concerned that you might need cheering up.

Before he went, he pulled the ant to the side and whispered, "Next summer, if you want to take a few minutes each day, I'll show you how to play the guitar and I can loan you my old one so that next winter, you can bring songs of sunshine and blue sky to your family and maybe show them how to make music and tell stories."

The ant didn't know what to say but managed to mutter his thanks before the grasshopper left. Later that night, he lay in bed thinking about his life. He knew that hard work and gathering food for the winter was important but now he realized that there might be more to life than just work. He didn't think he could ever learn to play the guitar, but maybe one of his children might.

The moral: Food makes life possible, but living requires art.

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