



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The little tadpole

Katharine Pyle

The brook flows down past the field, around the hill, and through the wood. There are all sorts of things in the brook: water cress and snails, and little darting fishes, eelgrass and crawfish, and under a stone where the water is cool and deep a little brown lizard used to live.

The lizard was a busy little thing, always anxious about something or other. She told the crawfish when to shed their shells; she showed the snails where to find dead leaves; and she attended to every one else's business as well as her own.

One day when she was crawling up the stream, she saw a tadpole lying in a sunny shallow, with its nose almost out of the water. "That tadpole shouldn't be lying in the sun," said the lizard to herself. "It's too warm. I think I'll tell him."

So she crawled up to where the tadpole was lying. As she came nearer she heard the tadpole whispering softly to himself. "Oh, how beautiful! how beautiful!" he was saying. "What is so beautiful?" asked the lizard curiously, looking about her. "That singing!" cried the tadpole. "Don't you hear it?" And now that the lizard listened, she did indeed hear a perfect chorus of birds singing their morning songs in wood and field and thicket. "Yes, it's pretty enough," said the lizard. "But you shouldn't be lying here in the hot sun. You'll make yourself sick."



The tadpole only wriggled impatiently, and then lay still, listening. But then he turned his little dull eyes on the lizard. "I suppose you have often seen birds coming down to the stream to bathe," he said. "Do you think I look anything like one?" "Like a bird!" cried the lizard. "No, you don't." "Well, I don't see why not," said the tadpole. "To be sure, I don't have any legs, but I have a tail." "Yes," said the lizard, "but birds have beaks and feathers and wings as well, and you haven't anything but a body and a tail." "That is true," said the tadpole, and he sighed heavily.

As the lizard had said, it was warm up in the shallow where the tadpole lay; but she was curious now as to why the tadpole should want to look like a bird, so she settled herself down more comfortably and went on talking. "Now, I would like to know," she said, "why you want to look like a bird." At first the tadpole didn't answer; he seemed to be either shy or dull, but when the lizard asked him again, he said: "I don't know." Then he was silent again; and the lizard was about to go away when the tadpole suddenly went on: "It's because there seems to be something inside of me that must sing, and I've tried and tried, until all the fishes and even the snails laugh at me, and I can't make a sound. I think if I only had legs, and could hop about like a bird, I could do it."

"But I don't see why you should want to sing," said the lizard. "I never did."

Still, the tadpole seemed so grieved about it that she felt sorry for him, and stayed there in the shallow talking to him for quite a long time; and the next morning she went to see him again. This was the beginning of a friendship between the two; and though the lizard could not understand why the tadpole would want to sing, she never made fun of him, but tried to think of some plan so he might learn to do it. Once she suggested that if he would be on the shore he might be able to do something about it. So he wriggled himself up half out of the water; but almost immediately he grew so sick that the lizard had to pull him back again by his tail, feeling terribly frightened.

It was the very next morning that the lizard found the tadpole in a state of wild excitement. "Oh, Lizard, Lizard!" he cried, shaking all over from his nose to his tail. "Look at me! I'm getting legs." It was true. There they were, still very small and weak, but really legs. The lizard and the tadpole had been too busy talking over how to make them grow to notice that they were already budding. They were even more excited when, soon after, they saw near the front part of the tadpole's body two more little buds; and the lizard was sure these would be wings. It was a terrible blow to them when they found these were not wings at all, but more legs.



"Now it's all over," cried the tadpole. "It was bad enough not to have wings; but now that I'm getting legs this way, there's no knowing where it'll end." The lizard, too, was almost hopeless, until suddenly she remembered a crawfish she had known who had lost one of his legs in a fight, and it had hardly hurt him at all. She said perhaps she could pull the tadpole's front legs off the same way. He was quite willing for her to try, but at the first twitch she gave he cried out,

"Ouch! that hurts!" so the lizard had to stop.

She still thought, however, that something could have been done about it if the tadpole had not been such a coward and had let her pull harder. One morning, before the lizard was up, the tadpole came wriggling over to the door of her house. "Lizard, Lizard, come out here," he cried. Then, as soon as she came out, he begged her to get a piece of eelgrass and measure his tail. "I've been afraid it was shrinking for some time," he said, "and now I'm almost sure of it. I have such strange feelings, too. Sometimes I feel as though I must have air, and I get up on a stone so that I'm almost out of the water, and only then am I comfortable."

Hastily the lizard got the eelgrass and measured. Then they sat staring at each other. The tail was almost gone! Still, the lizard would not give up all hope. That same crawfish that had lost a leg lived farther down the stream, and he was very old and wise. She would get him to come and look at the tadpole and give his advice. So the little lizard bustled away, and soon she came back, to where the tadpole was lying, and the crawfish came with her, twiddling his feelers, and staring both ways with his goggle eyes. "Sick tadpole!" he cried. "This is no tadpole!" Then, coming closer, the crawfish went on: "Why are you lying here? Why aren't you over in the swamp singing with all the rest of them? Don't you know you are a frog?" "A frog!" cried the lizard.

But the young tadpole frog leaped clear out of the brook with a joyous cry. "A frog!" he shouted. "Why, that's the best of all! If that's true I must say goodbye, little Lizard. Goodbye, little friend, goodbye! I will never forget what you have done for me." So the frog went away to join his brothers. The little lizard felt quite lonely for a while after the frog had gone; but she comforted herself by thinking how happy he must be.



Often in the twilight, or when the moon was bright, she listened to the chorus of frogs as they sang over in the swamp, and wondered if the one who sang so much louder and deeper than the rest was the little frog who had tried so hard to be a bird. "After all," she said to herself, "there are more ways of singing than one."



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