

THE PICNIC

(Ages 3 to 8)

By Nancy Leake

“Wait for me! Wait for me!” cried Annie Ant to her big brother Amos and his friends who were marching toward the picnic table.

The park was full of people playing games, swinging, flying kites and eating all kinds of picnic foods. Of course, there are always plenty of hungry ants who want their share.

Annie tried to keep up to the others, but she is so small that she often falls behind. Amos and his friends sometimes tease her and tell her to stay home in the ant hill. They tell her she just slows them down and can't carry as much as they can.

“Aww, go on home Annie, we can't wait for you all day,” one of them called out to her.

“Yeah, stop tagging along, just go home to the ant hill and stay with the other babies,” another one yelled.

Amos, being the older and larger ant, had become the lead worker ant. He tried to discourage Annie from wanting to go along when they went out to look for food to bring back to the hill.

“Turn around and go back home Annie, we have a job to do. You are too small to be of much help,” said Amos in the kindest voice he could use.

“Oh, she's just a tag along pest, Amos. Let's just leave her behind to find her own way back,” said Al, one of the meaner ants.

As much as Amos hated to leave Annie, he knew they had to get to the park where they could find food to take back to the ant hill. Figuring they would probably meet her on the way

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back, he marched on with the colony following him. Annie kept right on going, no matter what they said. Even though they were out of sight now, she could still follow their trail. She was a very determined ant!

The ants were up on the picnic table eating crumbs they had found because they would need the strength to carry food back home. Most people keep their food covered tightly or inside a cooler, but there is always a clever ant that can find a way to get his share and tell the others. Today is no exception. Amos smelled a delicious cake in a box at the far end of the table. The lid was open just enough for him to squeeze through and help himself. Just as he was about to call his friends to come join him, a lady came back to the table for a glass of lemonade. When she moved the box with the cake in it to another spot, it caused the lid to close tightly...trapping Amos inside!

The other ants had scattered into hiding places when the lady came for the lemonade, but now she was gone so they came out to see where Amos was.

“Amos, where are you?” they called.

“I’m in the cake box, and I can’t get out!” cried Amos. “Can you try to pry a corner of the box open?”

Well, everyone knows that ants are hard working and can do mighty things when they work together, even though they are so small. But, try as they might, they couldn’t get that lid to budge! They kept working at it for a long time and it was getting later in the day when most of the people would be packing up and going home. If the cake box was taken home, Amos would be lost and never find his way home to the ant hill!

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That is when Annie finally caught up to them and asked, “Why is everyone in such a panic, and where is Amos?”

They told her what had happened and that Amos was trapped inside the cake box. No one knew what to do so they were talking about taking what food they had collected and going back to the hill.

“I’m not leaving Amos here alone!” Annie said as she stomped her foot.

“Go on home with the colony Annie, the hill needs the food. Don’t worry about me, I’ll be okay,” said Amos from inside the box.

“The rest of you can go back and take the food but I’m staying until I figure out a way to get Amos out of there.”

The other ants just shook their heads and told her it was hopeless.

“There’s nothing more we can do to get Amos out. We need to carry this food home and you should come with us,” said Al. “I’ll lead the colony back.”

“You go ahead, I’m staying here. Amos needs my help.” Annie replied.

Amos tried to talk her into going back with the others but she refused and soon they left without her.

Annie was deep in thought and finally said, “Amos, I have an idea. Remember our friend Wilson Woodpecker? I saw him in a tree on my way here. I’ll call to him. If he is still nearby, I know he will come to help us.”

“That’s a good idea Annie!”

So Annie began calling out to Wilson and it wasn’t long before he came swooping down on the table next to her.

“Wilson, Amos is trapped in that cake box and can’t get out. Can you help us?”

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“I’ll see what I can do, my little friend,” replied Wilson as he began pecking around the lid as quietly as he could.

Even though Wilson was a large bird, the cake box was larger and the lid stayed shut.

“Well, I’ll have to drill through it, but as soon as the people hear me drilling on this cake box, they are going to come running. So stand close Annie, and be ready to grab onto my foot. You too Amos, be ready to hang onto my beak once I break through. We’ll need to take off before the people get here and catch us.” warned Wilson.

Wilson took a deep breath and began hammering away on the top of the box. It made such a racket that poor Amos stuck his head right into the butter cream frosting to muffle the sound! Annie stood right next to Wilson’s big foot and clamped her hands over her ears. Of course the people heard all the noise and saw Wilson pecking on their cake box, so they started running to the picnic table.

Just as Wilson broke through the box, the people got to the table. Annie hopped onto Wilson’s foot and Amos, covered in butter cream, stuck himself to Wilson’s beak. Wilson flapped his strong wings and escaped without a moment to spare!

The people were yelling and shaking their fists in the air, but Wilson was already flying past the tree tops with his precious cargo. He flew them back to the ant hill where Al and the other ants were unloading the food they had carried home and telling the others how they couldn’t help Amos get out of the box.

Everyone was surprised and so happy to see Amos and Annie again. They asked how Amos had gotten out of the cake box.

“I’ll tell you in just a minute but first I need to get all this butter cream off of me!” said Amos.

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“Here, let me help you, Amos. You have brought back more food than any of us did!” said Al.

Annie and Amos thanked Wilson and watched him fly off, licking frosting off of his beak. The whole ant hill was celebrating the load of food they had found today and that Annie and Amos had returned home safely.

Al told Amos that leading the colony was a much harder job than he thought it would be, and he was glad Amos was back to continue leading them. Slowly he walked up to Annie and said, “I’m sorry I was so mean to you before, Annie. You are a hero, and you have proven to be smarter than all the rest of us. From now on, you are welcome to come with us wherever we go.”

And so the celebration continued far into the night with every “ant,” uncle, cousin and friend eating butter cream frosting!

Nancy Leake 2019