

Don't Pee in the Stream

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Welcome to Once Upon a Meadow. Our stories are written for the ear, so for those able, we recommend listening while reading along. Transcripts may contain minor errors; please check the audio before quoting.

Once upon a time, there lived a community of creatures, who shared a meadow, with a stream running through it. There was Bear, Beaver, Moose, and Mouse.

One day, Beaver was looking forward to a lovely morning swim. After having a breakfast of willow bark from alongside the stream, he started to wade into the pond behind his dam. And then he sniffed. His whiskers twitched and he scrunched up his nose. The water smelled terrible! Then Beaver took a sip from the pond and spit it out.

“Yuck,” he said, crinkling his nose and shuddering. The water tasted even worse than it smelled.

The pond had been slowly getting nastier throughout the summer, but now it was just awful. Beaver scratched his furry head with his hind paw while trying to figure out what was making the water so gross. Could it be that a skunk was bathing in the pond? No, skunks don't like getting in the water. Could it be that cattle were pooping in the pond? No, there weren't any cows nearby. Could it be that humans were dumping waste water from a factory? No, there weren't any factories upstream.

Beaver knew that the wetland around his pond filtered the stream and provided clean water. But maybe something was going on above the pond.

Beaver hid in an aspen grove to see if he could figure out why the water flowing into the pond was so yucky. Soon, his meadow friends came romping down to the cool, shady

streamside. Mouse scurried around the rocks, while Bear and Moose splashed into the water. Their fur coats made them hot in the summertime, and they loved wading in the wetland to cool off.

The three friends searched excitedly for ripe elderberries along the stream, with Moose eating the highest ones, Mouse nibbling the lowest ones, and Bear snarfing the ones in-between. Finally, each of them stopped foraging and had a big drink of water from the pond. But just like Beaver, they thought the water tasted awful. Bear shook his head back-and-forth and wiped his mouth with his paws. Moose snorted and rubbed her nose against her side. Mouse gave a shiver and scrunched her little nose. But they kept drinking because the day was very hot and they were very thirsty. It was sort of like how you'd eat something super icky if you were *really* hungry...but it would still taste terrible.

At last, after a couple of hours, Beaver solved the mystery of what had happened to their precious water. Not only did each animal take a drink, but they also left something behind.

That afternoon, Beaver called a meeting at the streamside. When the animals had gathered, he slapped his flat tail against the mud to get everyone's attention and announced: "We have a problem and something must be done. The pond is getting yucky."

"You're right," said Moose, who spent considerable time wading in the pond. "The water tastes gross."

"I agree," said Mouse and all the animals nodded.

Beaver climbed atop his dam to give himself a more important position. "Here's the problem," he announced. "Everyone goes down to the stream to drink in the morning and then... and then pees into the water."

The animals all muttered at this accusation. But they knew it was true.

"So what should we do?" asked Moose.

"You and Bear are great big animals, and you pee the most," said Mouse. "So *you* should fix the problem. I think you should pee in the meadow instead of the stream."

"Well, it would be better to pee in the meadow because it will soak in and fertilize the plants," said Moose.

Beaver started to nod agreement until Bear gave a big growl. He didn't like the idea of having to climb the steep hill to the meadow. And nobody is happy about being blamed for creating a problem.

“You can't make me pee in the meadow,” said Bear.

The animals realized that Bear was right. They couldn't *make* such a strong, fierce animal do anything. But they also knew that for all of his grouchiness, Bear had a big heart. And he would listen to his friends.

“Let's think about this,” said Beaver. He knew that all the animals needed to drink from the stream. “We all want clean water, so it's important that we all do our part,” he reminded everyone. “Each of us is being lazy in not taking the time to care for our shared resource — even me.”

“My little bit doesn't matter,” said Mouse. In one sense, she was right — at least her amount of pee was a drop in the bucket compared to that of the other animals. But in another sense, Mouse was mistaken.

“Actually, your little bit does matter,” said Beaver gently. He knew that encouragement was more effective than scolding. “If you don't pee in the stream, then it shows that we're all in this together. It shows that we're all willing to do our part, no matter how small or how big.”

The animals stared at each other. They weren't sure what to do next. And then, without a word, Moose started walking up the hill into the meadow, which was hard work because her legs were so long and awkward. At first, the animals thought Moose was leaving the meeting because she disagreed. But then, as the animals watched and wondered, Moose stopped and had a very long pee, which made Mouse snicker because she couldn't believe how much pee Moose could make. Next Bear started chuckling, and his big belly bounced, which made Beaver giggle. And soon all the animals were rolling on the ground laughing.

Suddenly, each of them stopped their howling and whooping. Their eyes grew large, and they scrambled to their feet, because you know what happens sometimes when you laugh really hard. As fast as they could, Bear lumbered, Beaver waddled, and Mouse scampered up into the meadow. They each found a spot in the grass where they could have a bit of privacy, and then each of them peed.

Then the animals came back to the streamside, feeling much relieved — and feeling like they were all part of a community. They had been cranky with one another, as sometimes happens with friends. But now they understood that each of them could contribute to making their home a cleaner, better place. Knowing that they were all in it together made them happy. So happy, that they made up a song:

Since everyone shares the earth
Whatever your height or your girth
We must all pull together
With skin, fur, or feather
Be part of the team
Don't pee in the stream!
All together now!
Don't pee in the stream!

Because we all need clean water
Whether bigger or smaller
You can do your own part
For a really good start
To earn our esteem
Don't pee in the stream!
All together now!
Don't pee in the stream!

A healthy meadow for all
Means that the short and the tall
To do whatever they should
With small paws or big hooves
Don't make your friends scream
Don't pee in the stream!
All together now!
Don't pee in the stream!

Sometimes, doing the right thing can be difficult. So, sometimes the animals grumbled to themselves about having to walk up to the meadow when they had to go really bad after taking a drink. And, sometimes one of the animals would not quite make it all the way to the meadow after a particularly large drink. But they each did their very best — and that's what matters. Because with everyone cooperating, after a few weeks, the water was as clear and sweet as ever.