

## *Little Tad Grows Up*



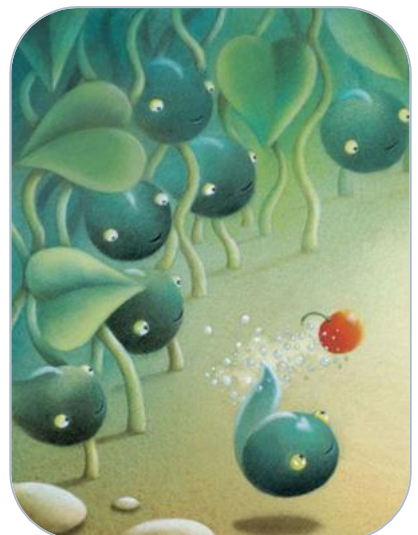
In the early Spring, Mother frog proudly laid her eggs in the pond where she lived. The small dark eggs floated so close together that they looked like a bunch of grapes. Each day, she checked and waited for them to hatch.

For hours, little Tad had been trying to think of a way to break out of his soft shell. Unexpectedly, the egg began to twist and shake. It shook faster and faster. It shook so fast that suddenly it exploded, and Tad was free!

When Tad looked around he realized that he wasn't alone. There were hundreds of tadpoles just like him. They wiggled their tails in all directions.

"Wow! This is wonderful!" Little Tad said, looking excitedly at his new world.

Tad's tail grew strong, and he learned to swim faster and faster. Day after day, his mother proudly watched him from her lily pad. Tad loved racing between the stems of the water plants. He was so fast that sometimes his wake sent the others into a somersault.



The pond where Tad lived was beautiful. He had lots of friends, and they played games together, like underwater baseball.

His tail was also very useful in getting him out of trouble or defending him against mean bullies which you can always find — even in a pond.

Little Tad thought his life was perfect. He never imagined that it would ever change...

One morning something terrible happened. At first Tad thought that he was dreaming. He had two strange things poking out of his body. Tad shook his head to try to wake up, but he was awake and they were still there.



"Something's wrong with me," he said in a panic. "Mom, I'm turning into a monster," Tad shouted.

"Those are just your legs," she said smiling. "Someday you'll be glad you have them."

Aunt Salamander overheard them. "There's nothing wrong with you," she said. "You are just growing up."



"I don't want to grow up." Tad said.

Tad's two new legs felt strange. And before he even had time to get used to them, two more appeared out of nowhere.

"Can't things get any worse?" Tad asked himself. Then he noticed that his tail was getting smaller.



"Grandpa," he said nervously. "My tail is shrinking. I'm turning into a freak."

But grandpa just grinned. "Losing your tail is completely normal, Tad" he said. "You're just growing up."

"But I can't do anything without my tail," Tad said. "I don't want to grow up."

Everyone in the pond was trying to reassure little Tad.

"You'll see. You won't need your tail any longer when you are big," said Cousin Newt.

"You can do amazing things with your legs," added the old Prawn while dancing to try to make Tad smile.

"Nobody seems to understand how I feel," Tad said sadly. "I really don't want to grow up!" and he began to cry.



Tad wandered around the pond feeling sadder than sad. Whenever he saw Tadpoles playing, he felt jealous of their long beautiful tails.

"You don't know how lucky you are," Tad said thinking about how things used to be when he was small like them.

Little Tad was so deeply absorbed in his thoughts that he did not take any notice of the long, dark shadow above him.

It was a snake.



"They are wrong. Legs are useless. Look at me. I don't have legs and I can move quicker than anyone I know," hissed the sly snake.

"I want my tail back," said Tad. "I can't swim fast without it. Can you help me?"

"Of course," answered the snake. "But there's a secret to it. Come a little closer to me."

Little Tad moved closer and the snake opened his jaw wide. As Tad stared deep in the snake's mouth, he was suddenly afraid. His heart began beating faster and his legs started to shake and suddenly the snake hissed loudly and launched towards Tad.

Tad's legs reacted naturally. With very little effort, he sprang high out of the water and landed beside the pond.

Everyone cheered.

"Wow!" Tad exclaimed. "My legs are really strong." As Tad looked around him, he was amazed at all the new things he saw.

"Maybe growing up isn't so bad after all." Tad said, jumping for joy.

