

# The Purple Plague — Part 1

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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.*

The next winter was hard for Rabbit. They didn't have much fat to provide warmth and energy during the cold, snowy months. And Honey Bee didn't have as much honey saved up as usual. By the time Maurice and his moms returned to their cabin the following summer, the animals had realized they would have to leave.

When they broke the news to Maurice, his eyes filled with tears.

"Oh no!" said Maurice. "You can't leave."

"We don't *want* to leave," said Honey Bee. "But Purple Frogweed has overrun the other plants. The baby bees in my hive get sick from Frogweed honey. And it doesn't provide nutritious leaves for Rabbit."

"We have to *do* something!" declared Maurice. "My moms have ruined the meadow."

"I'm sure that they meant no harm," said Honey Bee.

"Oh what *can* we do?" asked Maurice.

They all thought hard for a while. However, when you're upset, it can be tough to focus on solutions.

"Let's ask Elder Oak," suggested Rabbit. They led the others to the dappled shade beneath the tree. The animals sat quietly, waiting for the tree to speak.

"Transform your sorrow into action," said Elder Oak. "First, my two-legged friend: What can you do to restore the meadow? And remember, big changes begin with small steps."

"I could explain to my moms how the new plant bullied the others," said Maurice. "And we could start pulling up the Frogweed."

"Very good," said Elder Oak. "Now, what about you, my four-legged friend?"

"I'm good at digging," said Rabbit, their hind foot thumping with excitement. "Where the Frogweed has been pulled up, I'll prepare the soil for planting native seeds."

"Yes!" shouted Maurice, "My moms and I could go to another meadow and gather seeds from wild grasses and flowers."

"And what about you, my six-legged friend?" asked Elder Oak.

"I will tell all of the bees not to pollinate Purple Frogweed, so the plants won't produce seeds."

“Very good,” said the wise, old tree. “You have made a splendid plan. You’ve turned from blaming those who made a mistake to finding ways to fix what was broken.”

And so it was that they all went to work.

Maurice’s moms understood that even though they hadn’t meant to harm the meadow, they were responsible for fixing the mistake. All that summer, Maurice and his moms spent every morning pulling and cutting Purple Frogweed. Afternoons were dedicated to collecting native seeds from a nearby meadow. And after dinner, while his moms cleaned up the cabin, Maurice spread the seeds over the part of the meadow that Rabbit had dug up.

As he worked alongside his meadow friends, they sang a song:

This young man,  
He pulled one,  
He got prickles in his thumb,  
With a weed whack,  
Meadow knack,  
Give the grass a chance,  
This young man, he took a stance.

This young man,  
He pulled two,  
He knew just what he should do,  
With a weed whack,  
Meadow knack,  
Give the grass a chance,  
This young man, he took a stance.

This young man,  
He pulled three,  
He went on a helping spree,  
With a weed whack,  
Meadow knack,  
Give the grass a chance,  
This young man, he took a stance.

After all of the Purple Frogweed had been whacked and pulled, and the meadow had been replanted, Maurice’s moms turned their attention back to the garden. They planted lettuce for Rabbit and lavender for Honey Bee. They read that these plants wouldn’t spread and choke out the native vegetation. The family learned that gardening is a wonderful way to enjoy the natural world — when done with care.

Rabbit nibbled in the vegetable garden but was never greedy. Eating *all* of the lettuce wouldn’t be the way to thank the people for working so hard to restore the meadow. For her part, Honey Bee spent time in the flower garden pollinating the plants as her way of thanking the people.

Maurice and his moms knew it would take a long time before the land was fully restored. And they all understood that while the native plants and animals of the meadow could recover from the weed invasion, things had not worked out so well for the native people of America.

They still endured harms brought by those who took over the prairies, forests, and deserts. But Maurice's moms were pleased that their son had seen the connection between the land and its people. And they were proud that he taken a stand about their responsibility to fix — and learn from — their meadow mistake.