



A Picnic For the Tortoise Family

English folktale retold by Karen Jameyson , [illustrated by Cheryl Orsini](#)

ONCE UPON A TIME Mother Tortoise, Father Tortoise and Baby Tortoise decided to have themselves a lovely picnic. Now tortoises are not known for speed, so it took them some time to plan where to have the picnic. But finally they decided on a pretty little park, even though it was quite a way away. Then they organised the things they needed to take along.

Baby Tortoise went to find a blanket to go on the ground. Father and Mother Tortoise got the picnic hamper out. Then they filled it with all their goodies: lemonade, strawberries, grapes, hard-boiled eggs, sandwiches, carrots, cheese, bread and tinned applesauce. They added some carrot cake and chocolate brownies too. After about three months, they were finally ready to go.

Off they went. They walked. They walked. They walked some more. (Did I mention that tortoises aren't too quick?) They kept walking. After about a year, they needed a break and stopped under a shady old tree.

Once they were rested, they set off again and walked and walked and walked.

Finally, in a few years, they got to the pretty little park and put the hamper down.

'Whew!' said Father. 'All that walking has made me very hungry.'

'Well, it won't be long now,' Mother Tortoise told him.

'We'll just get these delicious things unpacked.'

So they took everything out and put it all on the picnic blanket. Did I say everything? Well, almost everything. Unfortunately, they'd forgotten to bring the plates.

'Oh dear!' exclaimed Mother Tortoise. 'Well, Baby Tortoise, you'll just have to go fetch them for us. We can't enjoy our picnic without plates.'

'But I don't want to go back all the way!' whined Baby Tortoise. 'You'll eat everything before I get back!'

'Of course we won't,' Father Tortoise told him. 'We promise we'll wait for you.'

'Oh well,' sighed Baby Tortoise. 'If you promise ...' And off he went across the grass.

As they'd said, Mother and Father waited. They waited a month. They waited a year. They waited three years!

'My goodness, my tummy is rumbling,' said Mother Tortoise. 'But I know we promised to wait.'

So they waited some more. After five years, Father Tortoise said, 'I wonder if he decided to have a snack at home before coming back? Well, we're hungry too. Perhaps we can have just a few strawberries while we wait.'

'Yes,' agreed Mother Tortoise. 'Surely a few strawberries won't matter.'

So they reached for the strawberries. But just as they were about to pop a few in their mouths, they heard a familiar voice.

'I knew you wouldn't wait for me!' It was Baby Tortoise, who'd been hiding behind a rock all that time. 'Just as well I didn't go back to get those plates!'