

KNEE-HIGH TO A GRASSHOPPER • KNOCK ON WOOD

By Carole L. Cooney

This American expression was first recorded in 1814 as “knee-high to a toad.” Some people said knee-high to a mosquito, bumblebee or duck. “Grasshopper” caught on about 1850 because they definitely have knees, and the saying stuck. If someone was as tall as the knee of a grasshopper, one would be less than an inch tall! No one is certain where “knock on wood” came from. Some experts think it came from the time of the ancient Druids, in Ireland and Britain. Whatever the origin, people knock on wood to keep away bad luck.

Setting: A Birthday Party at the Circle K Ranch

Characters:

Narrator

Ma

Pa

Lulabelle

Shawn

Auntie May

Jimmie

Uncle James

Narrator: It was Lulabelle’s birthday. She was so excited because there was going to be a big party to celebrate.

Ma: Pa, what time did Auntie May say she was coming?

Pa: Around high noon, I expect.

Shawn: Is Auntie May bringing Uncle James and Jimmie?

Pa: Yes, I expect.

Shawn: I guess there’s going to be lots of presents, huh?

Ma: Now Shawn, don’t you go getting jealous. You know your sister has been mighty sick this past year. It’s a wonder she’s grown an inch with all her sickness.

Narrator: A red, shiny car drives in at the entrance of the Circle K Ranch. Shawn and Lulabelle dash up the road, laughing and squealing.

Lulabelle: Auntie May! Auntie May!

Narrator: Auntie May parks the car and the children run to each other.

Shawn: Hey, Jimmie! How was the ride?

Jimmie: It was all right, I guess. I kinda got carsick.

Lulabelle: Are you okay now? Do you want a drink of water?

Jimmie: Yeah, that would be great!

Narrator: The children run to the kitchen to get a drink of water as Ma and Pa greet Auntie May on the porch steps.

Auntie May: Well, would you look at Lulabelle! She's about knee-high to a grasshopper! Aren't you feeding her?

Ma: Now Auntie, you know Lulabelle's been sick this past year. She's got a good appetite but it doesn't seem to help her gain any inches.

Pa: Aw, she'll be all right, knock on wood. You remember when you was a little one, May. You were no bigger than our dog, Muffin. (laughing) And look at you now!

Auntie May: Now watch your mouth, brother dear.

Narrator: The children come running out of the house, down the road and into the tall corn field.

Pa: Will you look at them! They're going like lightning.

Ma: That little Jimmie is the looking just like his daddy. By the way, where is James?

Auntie May: He'll be coming in just a few minutes. He had a job to finish at the station. Now, let's unload the presents from the car before Lulabelle sees what we brought.

Narrator: Ma, Pa and Auntie May bring two boxes of presents into the dining room

Ma: No one would think of coming in here. Pa, ring the bell. Let's get those children washed up.

Narrator: A grey truck rumbles up the driveway. Uncle James steps out and saunters up the porch steps.

Lulabelle: Uncle James!

Uncle James: Lulabelle, did anyone ever tell you you're knee-high to a grasshopper?

Lulabelle: I don't think so, Uncle James.

Uncle James: Well, you're so cute; I think that saying fits you! Now how's about that party, May?

Narrator: The dining room is decorated with balloons and colorful place settings and presents. Lulabelle beams with joy as she enters. The family sings a rousing "Happy Birthday." They all sit and the party begins.