

(2) Giraffes Can't Dance

Gerald the giraffe was incredibly tall, with long, thin legs that bent in unusual ways. He enjoyed stretching his neck to nibble on the leaves at the tops of the tallest trees, and he loved watching the bright blue sky above. Gerald was proud to be a giraffe, but there was one thing he wished more than anything: to be able to dance. "I just want to dance like the other animals," Gerald whispered. "But my legs are too long, and I always stumble and fall."

As in each year, the jungle animals gathered for the Jungle Dance, a big celebration filled with music, laughter, and incredible dancing. "This is the best night ever!" cheered the rhinos. "I've been practicing all week!" said the lions. But Gerald didn't feel excited—he felt nervous and unsure. He stood quietly, watching as the animals began to show off their moves. The lions performed smooth steps, the chimps spun through an energetic cha-cha, and even the warthogs danced with surprising grace.

Taking a deep breath, Gerald stepped forward. "I guess it's my turn now," he said, trying to sound confident. As the music played, he began to move, but his long legs shook and tangled. In just a few seconds, he tripped and fell hard on the ground. The animals burst out laughing. "Look at Gerald!" they shouted. "Giraffes can't dance!" Embarrassed and heartbroken, Gerald lowered his head and slowly walked away from the crowd, tears forming in his eyes.

Just then, a calm voice broke the silence. "Why do you look so sad, Gerald?" asked a cricket, sitting on a nearby rock. "I tried to dance," Gerald replied, his voice trembling. "But I fell, and everyone laughed. They said giraffes aren't meant to dance." The cricket gave him a kind smile.

"Maybe you're just listening to the wrong music," he said. "Close your eyes. Listen to the trees, the breeze, and the rhythm of the night. Sometimes, the best music is the one that speaks only to you."

Gerald closed his eyes and stood very still. He heard the soft rustle of leaves, the whisper of wind, and the steady beat of his own heart. Slowly, he began to sway. Then he twirled, turned, and moved with smooth, graceful steps. His long legs floated across the grass. He felt light, powerful, and free. The cricket clapped his tiny hands. “Now *that* is dancing!” Gerald kept dancing with joy. He felt like he was part of the wind, part of the stars above. He didn’t need a loud beat or a crowded dance floor. He had found his rhythm.

Suddenly, the other animals appeared. They had followed the mysterious music and were shocked to see Gerald spinning and leaping beautifully.

“Is that Gerald?” asked the zebra.

“He’s incredible!” said the lions.

“How is he dancing like that?” gasped the chimps.

Gerald finished with a big twirl and smiled proudly.

“We’re so sorry,” the animals said. “We didn’t know you could dance like that.”

Gerald nodded. “I couldn’t dance your way,” he said gently, “but I found my own way. “The cricket bowed and said, “Everyone can dance, as long as they find the music that makes their heart sing.”

From that night on, Gerald never doubted himself again. He knew that being different wasn’t something to be ashamed of—it was something to celebrate. And whenever he danced, he danced with all his heart.