

The Frog Who Did Not Turn Into a Prince

There was this frog. Large and green, he was what is commonly known as a bullfrog. You should understand the difference between bullfrogs and, say, toad frogs, horned frogs, and tree frogs. Compared to those other species, the bullfrog is a large and handsome fellow, an expert underwater swimmer, a vocalist of considerable power, and, sad to say, his long and muscular legs are sought-after as a dinner-table treat in France and in some parts of these United States.

Like all frogs in all fables, Our Frog spent much of his time sitting on a lily pad. Actually, the lily pad rested on a small tree stump just under the water. He learned, after several attempts, that lily pads just love to dump frogs back in the water when frogs try to sit on them. So he found one that grew over a stump and staked his claim to it. Most of the other frogs in the pond sat on the bank near the water, or in the water where it was very shallow, near the bank. So Our Frog was sort of special, sitting a couple of feet away from the bank like that. And he *felt* special because of it. It just may be that it was this feeling of being special that got him into so much trouble.

Our Frog looked pretty much like the other bullfrogs, except perhaps he was a little longer and thinner. Lean and lank, he liked to think of himself. And he had somewhat sharper features, a head that was not quite so rounded as the average frog. Lean and lank but not very handsome by frog standards. Sort of Abe Lincolnish, he liked to tell himself, taking pride in that because although Abe Lincoln may have been

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the ugliest president, he also was far and away the *best* president. This made Our Frog feel a little bit important, and maybe it was this feeling of being a little bit important that got him into so much trouble.

Most of his life, and he had already lived a considerable time by frog reckoning, he spent the daylight hours sleeping with one eye open to keep himself just alert enough to dart out that highly accurate and ever-so-swift tongue of his to catch those little flying insects that always hover just over the top of the water. He was good at this. Very, very good, in fact, and the envy of many. He never, ever, went to bed hungry, and often he shared his catch with other less talented frogs.

After a day spent sleeping and catching flies, by the early evenings he was usually ready to howl – or to croak, as frogs do. He was especially proud of his distinctive croak, a long, low, deep *hararumph* that was the envy of the other frogs. And it just may be that it was his pride in his *hararumph* that got him into so much trouble.

It used to be that Our Frog led a very contented life, sleeping and catching flies by day and *hararumphing* the night away. But lately he had grown discontent. This discontent probably grew out of the education he was getting, visiting from his lily pad perch not just with the other frogs but with an assortment of fish that occasionally rose to the surface to look around, with a few friendly turtles, and with herons and kingfishers and other water birds, all of whom traveled about a great deal more than frogs do and thus knew quite a lot about the world.

But there was another, bigger element to Our Frog's discontent. This was the stream of people that walked by Our Frog's home in the pond. Our Frog did not *choose*

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for his home pond to be right in the middle of the most popular park in the city. He used to think as a young frog that if he could have chosen, he would have chosen a pond in the wilderness where every day would have been an adventure, where he had to defend himself and his neighbors against bears and lions and maybe elephants and even crocodiles. He was confident that he would have had enough courage and cunning to survive and grow strong and probably famous defending all of frogdom from such enemies. But, alas, it is the fate of all frogs to live out their lives in the pond where they are hatched. For Our Frog, this was the Pond in the Park.

That word “hatched” always bothered Our Frog. There simply is no dignity to it. On the few occasions when he explored a hundred yards or so up the creek that fed the pond, he told everyone he met there that he was “to the Park Pond born.” He sensed, quite rightly, that no one ever would have remembered that famous phrase from literature if it had been written “to the manor hatched” instead of “to the manor born.” There is absolutely no dignity to being hatched. If one is going to be remembered, he must first be born.

Whether Our Frog would have become famous if he had been hatched or even born in a wilderness pond is pure conjecture. But it is almost certain that if he had spent his life outwitting bears and lions and elephants and crocodiles in a wilderness pond he would not have gotten himself into the trouble that befell him in the Pond in the Park. For it was the stream of people that led to his calamity.

The Pond in the Park was a most beautiful setting, and in the warm days of spring and autumn dozens, sometimes even hundreds, of people strolled by. Even in his

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adolescence, when his parents kept a watchful restraint on his wanderings, Our Frog was fascinated by people. Sometimes, before his mother called him back, he would take a few exploratory hops toward the path the people walked on, just to see them better. His eyes, of course, were keen frog's eyes, accustomed to spotting even the tiniest gnat in flight; so, when he hopped within a few feet of humans, it was like examining them with a telescope. He was fascinated by the great variety of clothes they wore, and by the changing of their styles. His grandfather, Old Roué Frog, told him about the old days when the boys and young men often had their heads shaved, leaving just a stripe of close-cropped hair down the middle, in Comanche style. And then, according to Roué, they started wearing it long and uncombed, about the same time the girls stepped out in mini skirts. According to Roué, if you dared to hop up close enough, the frog's-eye view of those mini skirts was simply astounding.

By the time Our Frog came onto the scene, the mini skirts were gone and the boys wore a mishmash of styles, including pants whose seat hung down to their knees and the legs spilled over their shoes and their shoe laces were always untied. "Abomination," cried Our Frog the first time he spotted those trousers. He longed for the days Roué had told him about, when boys were men, so to speak, and wore their hair in a crew cut with rippling T-shirts and tight jeans. **INSTEAD OF EAR RINGS, AND NOSE RINGS, AND TONGUE STUDS.** Our Frog cringed each time he thought about trying to catch a dragonfly with a tongue weighted down by one of those studs.

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The girls, though, Our Frog noted, looked cute in just about anything they chose to wear – or NOT to wear. And that may be what caused Our Frog to get into so much trouble.

One warm late-spring day, just before dusk, a group of happy, chattering teenagers spread blankets on the ground and opened baskets and coolers for a picnic. This was not unusual, for people of all ages frequently picnicked on the banks of the pond. Our Frog and most of his neighbors watched, as usual, because groups at a picnic often sing songs and play games and tell stories that add much to a frog's education. On this day, however, there seemed to be no other people in the park and the games the boys and girls played included a lot of hugging and kissing and rolling around on the blankets and the grass, and a lot of opening of the coolers. Our Frog could hear giggles, and laughter, and every now and then, "Johnny, don't!" or "Ted, stop it!" Eventually one of the boys stood, took off his shirt, and issued some kind of challenge to the others. Things got real hushed and Our Frog heard some murmurs of "no" and "not me" and "count me out." Several of the group gathered their blankets and baskets and left. Soon only the boy who took off his shirt, two other boys, and two girls remained.

To the astonishment of Our Frog, all three boys quickly took off all their clothes, right there in the open. The two girls scooted behind some bushes, out of the sight of the boys but not of the frog population, and removed *their* clothes. For the first time in his life, Our Frog had trouble breathing, to the point that he began to feel like he had stayed under water too long. By this time the boys had already stepped into the pond. The girls came out of the bushes clutching their clothes in front of them as they scurried

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down to the water's edge. Then they turned their backs to the boys, dropped their clothes, and waded carefully into the water, giggling all the time.

At first the boys and girls jumped around a lot, splashing water and ducking one another's heads, which were perfectly reasonable ways to have fun in the water. Then they grew quieter and moved closer together. This was curious. Our Frog whispered to his nearest neighbor, "What are they doing?" The neighbor replied, "Beats me. Wanna go and see?" That was all the invitation Our Frog needed. The two of them slipped quietly under the water and swam toward the curious goings-on. Before they had gone 10 feet they could see they were being joined by about two-thirds the frog population of their part of the pond. Although it was nearly dark, frogs are nighttime creatures and can see under the water at dusk almost as well as they see above the water in midday. It's just that *what* they saw made absolutely no sense to frogs, for the people were rubbing their hands all over one another's bodies and pressing their lips together in ways that frogs would never think about doing. And the people must have stayed under water too long, because they seemed to be having as much trouble breathing as Our Frog was having.

Later, the male frogs all gathered around the Old Log Meeting Place for their nightly bullfrog session. The strange doings of the people was the only topic of discussion, but no one had any insight to offer. Before that night Our Frog thought that people lived just on land. Now he knew that they are amphibians, just like frogs. But why did they rub one another that way, and press their lips and bodies together? Frogs

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don't do anything like that. It may be that the curiosity that stuck in Our Frog's head that night is what got him into so much trouble.

Days passed and people came and went. Our Frog watched all the people intently. Sadly, none of them ever took their clothes off or came in the water again. But occasionally a boy and a girl would lie on the grass and do that mysterious rubbing, just like the skinny dippers (for word had come to Frogdom that this is the name people use for that pleasant activity that so endeared them to Our Frog's heart) had done. It was apparent the people liked this rubbing, for now and then they would moan or gasp in pleasure. It was all most intriguing, so much so that one day when Serenity Frog was visiting Our Frog, as many of the female frogs were prone to do, Our Frog reached over and rubbed her with his strong right hind foot – just to see how it felt.

“How dare you touch me there,” Serenity said as she squirted water in Our Frog's face and swam quickly away, and she did not come visit him again for a week.

All of this puzzled Our Frog greatly, and he spent most of his days watching for people and pondering the mystery. He had this strong idea that if someone would rub him in just the right way he too would moan with pleasure. This became an obsession with him, so much so that he often went all day without remembering to catch a single fly. He began to lose weight.

And so the long summer passed as a time of anxious waiting. Soon the weather turned cooler and few people came to walk in the park. Our Frog grew disconsolate, though he never did understand exactly why. It was just this vague feeling that life could be so much better if only something – an undefined something having to do with a female

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person – would happen. Because so few people walked by and he did not dare miss any opportunity, during much of each day he forsook his lily pad and perched on a flat rock just a few feet from the people path. It was a dangerous thing to do, for if an owl or a hawk or even a crow came along, Our Frog could become an easy meal. He understood the danger. But still he waited.

And then, early one evening, Our Frog saw a very strange sight. Down the pathway came a group of creatures that were the size and shape of people but looked extremely strange. Some had hideous faces with long fangs, one had a face that was round and painted with a very large nose, and one was just a skeleton. But also in their midst was a very pretty girl in a white flowing dress, and with translucent wings growing out of her shoulders. The group were such an intriguing sight that Our Frog foolishly forgot to be cautious. Instead of hopping back to the safety of the water's edge, he sat mesmerized on his rock.

By the time the group came even with his rock, Our Frog had solved part of the mystery. The pretty girl that fascinated him so had to be a fairy princess. For the sake of safety, Our Frog sat very still, and the strange group quickly passed him by. Except for the Fairy Princess, who trailed a few feet behind. Looking at her, Our Frog knew he had never seen anything so beautiful. And then, just as men have always done, Our Frog lost his head over a pretty girl. Quite without knowing what he was doing, he sounded a melodious *harararumph*. At this, the Fairy Princess stopped, looked all about, and spotted Our Frog on the rock. She came slowly toward him. Despite the danger, Our

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Frog remained unable to move. To make matters worse, instead of hopping away as any other frog would have done, he sounded yet another *harararumph*.

The Fairy Princess fairly beamed. “Oh, my, what a darling you are,” she exclaimed. Slowly, in order not to scare him, she walked closer to Our Frog. “Trick or treat, Mister Frog,” she sang. Our Frog blinked rapidly but still did not move. Something about the musical quality of the girl’s voice charmed him the way a tune on a flute charms a cobra. Without even knowing why, he filled his throat with air and responded to the girl’s voice with the most magnificent *har-rar-rar-umph* that has ever been heard. So powerful and so magical was it that all over the Pond in the Park other frogs were compelled by reflex to reply with their best *harumphs*, so that the air was filled with the music of frog voices echoing through the trees.

Although they were several yards away by now, the little band of ghosts and trolls and clowns and skeletons stopped in their tracks to marvel at the sound. And the Fairy Princess stood almost breathless. Finally, in a sweet low voice she exclaimed, “Oh, my, how wonderful.” Then she extended her magic wand over the head of Our Frog and pronounced, “For that glorious treat, Sir Frog, I am going to cast a magic spell over you. One day a beautiful girl will come and kiss you and you will be changed into a handsome Football Star and you will marry a cheerleader and live happily ever after.”

With that, the Fairy Princess turned away and hurried after her group of trick-or-treaters. Impulsively, Our Frog followed after her as fast as he could hop, but she was quickly lost beyond the trees. So he returned to the rock where the magic had happened and sat there in wonder until at last the insistent croaking of hundreds of relatives and

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friends compelled him to return to the pond. Head Frog called a special Bullfrog Session to discuss this happening that was so remarkable even Old Roué Frog could not recall anything to equal it.

As the meeting started there was so much chattering that Head Frog could barely be heard calling for order. Finally, he summoned his deepest and most-commanding “*c-r-o-o-o-a-k*,” and the chattering stopped. “My fellow frogs,” he said, “we are here to discuss a most important development in the life of our Pond, and to take appropriate action if action is called for. Is there any frog who did not witness the development, or does not already know about the development, and therefore may wish to have it summarized?”

There was no response. “Very well,” said Head Frog, “we will dispense with the summary and move straight to the rules violations. I call on the Chief Clerk.”

The Chief Clerk then mounted the log beside Head Frog. He stated in his most official manner, “Chapter 3, paragraph 4 (a) of the Rules and Regulations Governing Conduct of the Pond in the Park states, as follows: ‘No frog shall with deliberate intent expose the population of the Pond to danger by attracting unnecessary attention from known enemies of Frogdom.’ I submit,” he said, “that the conduct of Our Frog this day brought us to the attention of humans, a species that has been known to impale frogs on cruel instruments called ‘gigs’ and thereafter to sever their legs and fry them in a skillet over a fire.”

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You could almost hear the sound of sizzling, and many a frog thought he felt a burning sensation in his legs. Immediately there arose a chorus of groans accompanied by shudders. A lengthy debate followed on the seriousness of the infraction. Things looked bad for Our Frog. Of course, his parents defended him by exclaiming that he was hardly more than a boy and that he hardly could have anticipated that any harm might come from his conduct. But it was the testimony of old Roué Frog, followed by the logical arguments of Serenity and Felicity and half a dozen others among the young and unattached female frogs, that won the night in Our Frog's favor. Roué Frog pointed out that it was scarcely conceivable the humans could be unaware that the Pond in the Park belonged to Frogdom; yet never in the history of the Pond had any human brought a frog gig to the premises or shown any intent more hostile than the casting of stones by young boys, boys who couldn't even hit a turtle sleeping on a log. And the young female frogs, each casting a flirtatious eye toward the defendant, pointed out that all Our Frog had done was "harumph" in an especially melodious manner, following which practically every other male frog in the pond had followed suit. It was Serenity who cleverly implied, without actually accusing anyone, that it might be mere jealousy of that magnificent "harumph" that led to the charges brought against Our Frog.

With chagrin, many a bullfrog who had been vociferous in accusation just five minutes previous now held his tongue. The meeting concluded with a mild censure of Our Frog for "foolish endangerment" and a strong recommendation that he seek the counsel of Elder Frog to assist him in mending his foolish ways. And it could be that the

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mildness of that rebuke by his peers, coupled with the sympathetic response of the pretty young female frogs, is what led Our Frog to get into so much trouble.

He sought the counsel of Elder Frog at early-rising the next day, which is about 2 p.m. by human time. After the preliminary investigative matters had been addressed, and Our Frog had fully explained the magic spell cast by the fairy princess, Elder Frog rendered his counsel.

“Yours is a most unusual case,” he said. “I could tell you histories of half a dozen frogs who thought they were something more than ordinary frogs. But never have I heard of a frog who thought he could become human, or who would want to do so. You see, that is a very old legend that a few of us have known since we were tadpoles, but you are the first one ever to believe the legend was real and that *he* was that frog.” Elder Frog paused, and Our Frog was too disheartened to say a word. “You have two choices,” Elder finally said. “You can spend the rest of your life hoping that the legend is real. Or you can put it behind you, be glad that you had a mostly happy experience very rare in frogdom, and go on with your life as one of the best-respected frogs in our pond.

“If you choose the second course, as I hope you will,” he continued, “I can assure you that one day you will be happy again. You *will* get over it.”

Then Elder Frog added, “Just a word of advice, my boy. You are quite old enough to start a family of your own. And I have seen the way both Sincerity and Felicity take every opportunity to speak for you and to work their way into your presence. They both are very comely young frogs, well suited to laying eggs, and a body could do a

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lot worse than choose one of them for his wife.” With that, Elder Frog submerged out of sight and quickly swam away.

Disconsolate, Our Frog swam sluggishly back to his lily pad. That night he stayed away from the bullfrog session and kept silent all through the melodious croaking that followed. The next day, as soon as the sun had warmed the grass a bit, he hopped slowly back to his perch on Magic Rock and waited. Someday, surely, the pretty cheerleader would come walking down the path.

And so he waited, day after day, while another frog took command of the best lily pad in the pond, the pad where Our Frog used to sit and around which the prettiest female frogs cavorted daily.

Even as the nights grew longer and the days turned cold, still he waited.

And waited.

The end.