



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Three Frogs

Louise M. Alcott

Hop, Croak, and Splash were three little frogs who lived in a pleasant river, and had merry times swimming about or hopping on the green grass. At night they sat on the bank and sung together, very sweetly they thought; and if boats came by they skipped into the water, heels over head, with a great splashing and noise.

Hop was not content with this quiet life; he wanted to see the world, and kept asking his brother Croak to go and travel with him.

"I'm tired of poking about in this stupid river, with no fun but leap-frog and singing. I want to know what is over that hill, and I'm going to find out. You can stay and doze in the mud if you please. I've got more spirit than that, and I'm off."

So away went Hop.

His good little sister Splash begged him to stay, for the world was full of danger and he was too young to go alone. But Hop told her not to worry. His friend Turtle had invited him to go; and if such a slow chap as Creeper could start on a journey, of course the best jumper in the river would get on all right.

While he was saying goodbye, the turtle had crept up the bank and was well on his way to the road beyond. Hop skipped after him; and when they had got to the hill-top they stopped to rest,--Creeper in the road on the warm sand, and Hop among some daisies close by.

"How big the world is!" he said, staring with his great eyes; for he had never seen houses before, and the village looked as grand to him as London would to us. "I like it, and I know I shall have a splendid time. Come on, slow coach! I see fountains over there, and want a good drink."

Just as he spoke a cart came by; and before poor Creeper could get out of the way, a wheel crushed him to death.

"Mercy on us! What horrid monsters those are!" cried Hop, leaping as fast as his legs could take him into a garden near by, where he lay trembling and scared half out of his wits. He thought the cart was a creature; and every time he heard the rumble of wheels his heart beat and he clasped his hands in fear as he sat under the burdock leaves. At last it seemed so quiet he ventured out, and had a

lovely time in the nasturtium-bed, catching flies and playing bo-peep with a little bird. Then he hopped to the grass-plot, where the sprinkler was whizzing round, and took a refreshing bath. He was just puffing his skin out and winking with pleasure when a fat toad, who lived under the piazza, told him very crossly to "clear out."

"You are a very rude old person, and I shall do as I like. This is not your garden; so you don't need to goggle at me," answered saucy Hop, opening his wide mouth to laugh at the toad, who was so fat he couldn't take long leaps like the lively frog.

"Very well, I shall call the cat; and she will make you skip, unless you want that fine green jacket torn off your back by her sharp claws," said the toad, hopping slowly away to the sunny corner where a gray cat lay dozing.

"I'm not afraid," said Hop; for he had never seen a cat, and thought the toad made it all up.

So he took a leisurely stroll, looking around him as if he owned the whole garden. He saw a pretty little creature playing with leaves, and hurried on to speak to it, being eager to find friends in this pleasant place. You see, when the toad told the cat about the stranger, the cat only gaped and went to sleep again, not caring to play with any one. But the kitten who lay beside her was curious to see a frog, and ran off at once to find him. Hop did not know that this was the cat's daughter, till kitty pounced on him as if he had been a mouse, and instead of playing some nice game and telling all about the new world, as Hop expected, she clawed and bit him, tossed him up, and let him bump down again on the hard ground. He tried to get away, but she let him hop a little and then pounced again, cuffing him with her paws, and dragging him about till he was half dead.

He believed the old toad now, and thought the end of the world had come. It would have been the end of the world for him, if a dog had not bounced into the garden and made kitty fly up a tree, spitting and glaring like a little dragon. Poor Hop crept under a gooseberry bush, and lay there longing for gentle Splash to tie up his wounds and comfort his pain with spearmint from the river side and a cool lily-pad for a wet sheet to pack him in.

"It is an awful world, and I wish I was safe at home," he sighed, as the sun grew hot, the water was turned off, and the wind stopped blowing.

But he was too feeble to hop away, and lay there panting till night, when a shower saved his life; and early in the morning he started to find the river before he got into any more troubles.

He went very slowly, being lame and sore; but got out of the garden and was just planning to give one tremendous leap over the road, for fear he should get

crushed as Creeper did, when he heard a soft rustling behind him, and saw a long, slender gray thing, with very bright eyes and a little tongue that darted out and in like a flash.

"I see no cruel claws; so it can't be a cat," thought Hop, feeling timid now about making new friends.

"Come here and talk to me," hissed the snake, longing to eat the nice little froggie.

Hop felt rather nervous, but wished to be polite; so he let the stranger coil lovingly round him and look right into his face while listening to the tale of woe he gladly told. But then he found he could not stir at all, nor move his eyes from the fiery eyes before him, and the darting tongue seemed ready to sting. Then he was frightened, and tried to escape; but he only gave one leap, for the snake caught him by the hind legs and held him fast, while swallowing him slowly down.

"Help, help!" cried Hop, in despair. "Croak! Splash! oh, come and save me, save me!"

But there was no help; and in a few moments there was no frog, for the last leg had vanished down the snake's throat. Poor little Hop!

Now for his brother Croak. Croak was a noisy fellow, and kept up a great racket trying to sing louder than any of the other frogs; for he was very proud of his voice, and sat on a log at night saying, "Ker honk! ker honk!" till every one was tired of hearing him.

The old ones told him not to wear his throat out till his voice was stronger; but he thought they envied him its power and sweetness, and croaked away louder than ever.

The boys who came to the river to bathe used to mock him, and try to see which frog sung so loud. This pleased him; and instead of keeping still and staying among his friends, silly Croak went and sat on a rock alone, that all might see and hear the great singer.

"Now," said the boys, "we can catch him and keep him in a tub; and when we are tired of his noise we can rap him on the head and make him be still."

So while the vain frog sat croaking at the top of his voice, two of the boys swam up to the rock and threw a net over him. He kicked and struggled; but they had him fast, and tied him up in a bundle till they got to the tub, and there they left him with a little grass, saying,--

"Now sing away, old fellow, and make yourself comfortable."

But Croak could not sing, he was so frightened and unhappy; for he was hungry and tired, and they didn't give him the right things to eat, nor any mossy log to rest on. They poked him with sticks, took him up to look at his funny toes, opened his big mouth, and held him by one leg to see him kick. He tried to climb out; but the sides of the tub were slippery, and he had to give it up. He kept swimming and floating till he was tired out, and ate bread-crumbs and grass to keep from starving; but he was very miserable, though children came to hear him sing, and he had nothing else to do.

Among the children was one kind little girl who pitied the poor frog, and one day when she was alone took him up carefully and put him on the grass, saying,--

"Run away, froggie, home to your mamma, and don't tell the boys I set you free."

"Thank you, my dear; those bad boys will never see or hear me again," answered Croak, hopping off as fast as he could go, never minding in his hurry that he was not taking the road to the river.

After he had gone a long way he came to a tank where a great many frogs seemed to be having a very nice time; for there was plenty of food, stones to sit on, and fresh water flowing in all the time.

"Ah! these must be very elegant people to live in this luxurious way. They sing pretty well, but not one has a splendid deep voice like mine. I'll jump in and astonish them with my best song," said Croak, after he had watched and listened for a while.

If he had only known that these frogs were kept there to be fattened for an old French gentleman to eat, he would have skipped away and saved his life; but he was so anxious to show off his voice, that he gave a jump and went splash into the tank, startling the others and making a great commotion. He liked that; and getting up on the highest stone, gave them his favorite "Ker honk" song, till the air rang with the sound.

The other frogs were much impressed, for they thought it fine music; so they gathered round, and shook hands and welcomed the stranger, sure that he must be a distinguished musician, he put on such airs. Now Croak was in his glory, and puffed himself out, and goggled at the lady-frogs till they put up their fans of green flag to hide their smiles. The young fellows tried to imitate him, till the tank was such a noisy place the old gentleman said to his cook,--

"Kill off a dozen of the fattest for dinner."

The frogs had told Croak that every now and then some of them were chosen to go and live in the great house; and all were eager to find out what good fortune had happened to their friends, for none ever came back to tell the sad truth. So

when they saw the man in the white cap and apron come to the tank and look down at them, they all began to skip and prance, hoping to be chosen.

With a long-handled net the cook picked out the fattest and put them in a covered pail till he had his dozen. Croak had not been there long enough to get very plump, so he would have escaped that time if he had held his tongue. But he couldn't keep still, and made such a terrible noise the cook said,--

"I must catch and quiet that rascal." So he held the net open; and that silly frog hopped in, little dreaming that he had sung his last song.

Croak was disappointed when he saw nothing but pots and pans and a great fire; for the vain fellow really thought he was chosen to sing before some fine people. But his disappointment turned to horror when he saw his friends taken out one by one and their poor little legs cut off to fry for dinner. That was the only part the cook used, and the rest he threw away. Croak was left to the last, as he was not to be eaten; and while he waited his turn, he dashed distractedly round and round the pail, trying to get away, and croaking so dismally it was a wonder the cook did not take pity on him. But he did not, and was just going toward the pail with the big knife in his hand, when the old gentleman came down to see if his orders were obeyed, for he thought a great deal of his dinner. All the poor little legs lay in the pan ready to cook; and he was so pleased that he said, looking at the thin frog swimming about in that lively way,--

"Ah! this is a very brisk fellow. I will put him in my aquarium; the gold-fish and the crab will like a little society, I think."

Then, catching Croak by one leg, he carried him upstairs and threw him into the great glass box where several pretty gold-fish and one cross crab lived together. Croak was so glad to escape frying that he was very quiet, humble, and good; and though his new home was a prison, he tried to be contented, and never complained when the lovely fish called him ugly and the cross crab nipped his toes. He was homesick, and longed sadly for the pleasant river, the jolly games he used to have, and his dear little sister. He never sang now, fearing to be killed if he did; but when the windows stood open through the summer night and he heard the music of his friends, he put his hands before his face and cried such bitter tears that the water grew quite salt. He bore it as long as he could; but his heart broke at last, and one day poor Croak was found floating on the top of the tank quite dead. So that was the end of him.

Good little Splash lived at home all safe and happy, and was so kind to every one that her neighbors loved her dearly and sung her praises at their evening concerts.

Now, the Frog Prince wished to marry, and was looking about for a wife, as he was very particular. So he wrapped himself up in a dead-leaf cloak, put an empty

nut-shell on his head for a hood, and leaning on a bulrush staff, went hobbling along by the river like a poor old woman, begging at the different houses, that he might see how the lady-frogs behaved at home.

When he rode out as the Prince on a field-mouse, with flags flying, and all his court about him, the young lady-frogs stood modestly by their mammas, all in their best, and curtsied sweetly as he went by. But now he came to the back doors, a poor beggar, and it was very different. Some were lazy and lay late in their beds of river weeds, while the mothers did the work; some were greedy and ate all the best flies themselves; others slapped and scolded their little brothers and sisters instead of taking care of them; and nearly all were vain. The Prince caught many looking at their bright eyes in still pools, or putting on crowns of water flowers, or bathing in dew to keep the freckles from their faces. They were always ready to dance at balls, to go boating, or sing at the concerts where all could hear them; but few were busy, sweet, and dutiful at home, and the Prince nowhere found the bride he wanted. He was very fond of music; so he listened to the concerts, and soon began to wonder why they all sang a song with this chorus,--

"Who is the fairest that swims on our river?
Who is the dearest frog under the sun?
Whose life is full of the sweetest endeavour?
Who is our busiest, happiest one?
Splash, Splash, darling thing!
All delight her praise to sing."

"I must find this lovely creature and see if she is all they say, because if she is I'll make a Princess of her in the twinkling of an eye," said the Prince; and he set off to look for Splash, for he was a very energetic frog.

He soon found her, for she was always busy doing something for her neighbors; and he watched her teaching the little tadpoles to swim, helping the old frogs out to sit in the sun when damp weather gave them rheumatism, or taking care of the sick ones, or feeding the poor, or running errands for busy mammas with large families and lazy daughters.

In her own little home all was as neat as wax, but so lonely she did not like to stay there much. All day she helped others, and at evening sat at her door and thought sadly of her lost brothers. She was very pretty in her neat, gray gown



and white apron, with her bright eyes, gentle face, and sweet voice; though she seldom sung, except lullabies to the little frogs and the sick folks.

She was rocking a small tadpole to sleep in this way one day, when the disguised Prince came hobbling along, and asked for a bit to eat. Putting little Wiggle in his cobweb hammock, Splash said kindly,--

"Yes, old mother, come in and rest while I get you some dinner. Here 's a soft cushion of moss, and a leaf of water fresh from the spring."

The Prince sat a long time talking with her, and hearing about her brothers, and seeing how sweet she was. He made up his mind to marry at once; for frogs don't spend a long time and much money getting ready,--they just wash up their green and gray suits, and invite their friends to the wedding. The bride can always find a delicate cobweb on the grass for a veil, and that is all she needs.

The Prince thought he would try one thing more; so he said to her,--

"I'm very lame; will you take me to the palace? I want to see the Prince. Do you know him?"

"No; I'm only a humble creature, and he wouldn't care to know me," said Splash, modestly. "But I admire him very much, he is so brave and just and good. I love to see him go by, and always peep behind my curtain, he is such a splendid sight."

The Prince blushed under the nut-shell cap at such praise, and was sure, from the way Splash spoke, that she loved him a little bit. So he was very happy and wanted to dance, but kept quiet and leaned on her arm as she led him down the bank, put him nicely on a lily-pad, and rowed away, smiling at him and talking so sweetly he got fonder and fonder of her every moment.

At last they came to the palace, all made of white water-lilies, with red cardinal-flowers for flags, floors of green moss, and pink toadstool tables spread with acorn cups of honey, berries, and all the dainties frogs love; for the Prince had sent a telegram by the wind to have a feast ready.

"Come in. I have something for you in return for your kindness to me. I'm not what I seem, and in a moment you shall see who your new friend is," said the Prince, leading her into the great hall where the throne was.

Then he left her, wondering what was to happen, while he hurried to throw off his old things and to put on his green velvet suit, his crown of cowslip, and the tall rush that was his sceptre. He looked very splendid, with white silk stockings on his long legs, his fine eyes shining, and his speckled waistcoat puffed out with the joy of his heart.

The trumpets sounded; all the frogs of the court came marching in, with the

Prince at the head; and when they were seated at the tables, he took astonished Splash by the hand, and said in a loud voice,--

"This is your Queen,--the best, the loveliest in the land! Bring the wedding veil; let the bells ring, and shout with me, 'Hurrah! hurrah for Queen Splash!'"

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