



Frogolina

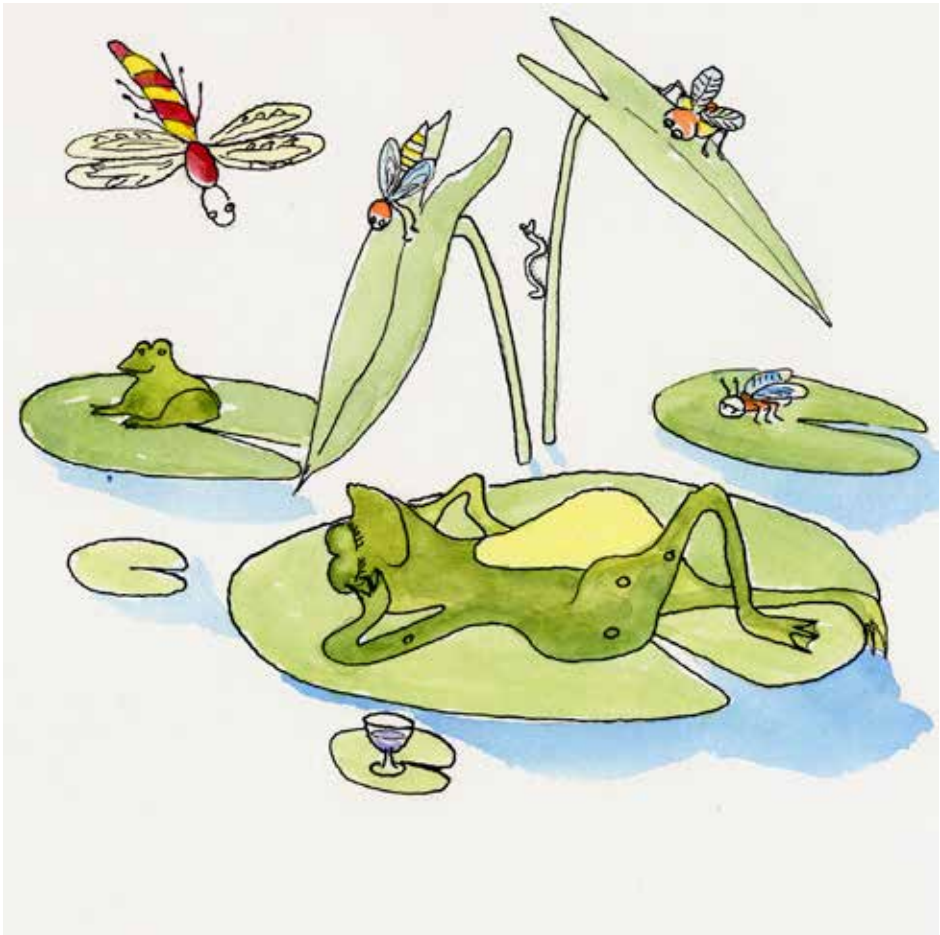
The Princess and the Frog

Tam Fairlie

the fl@ubert duck series

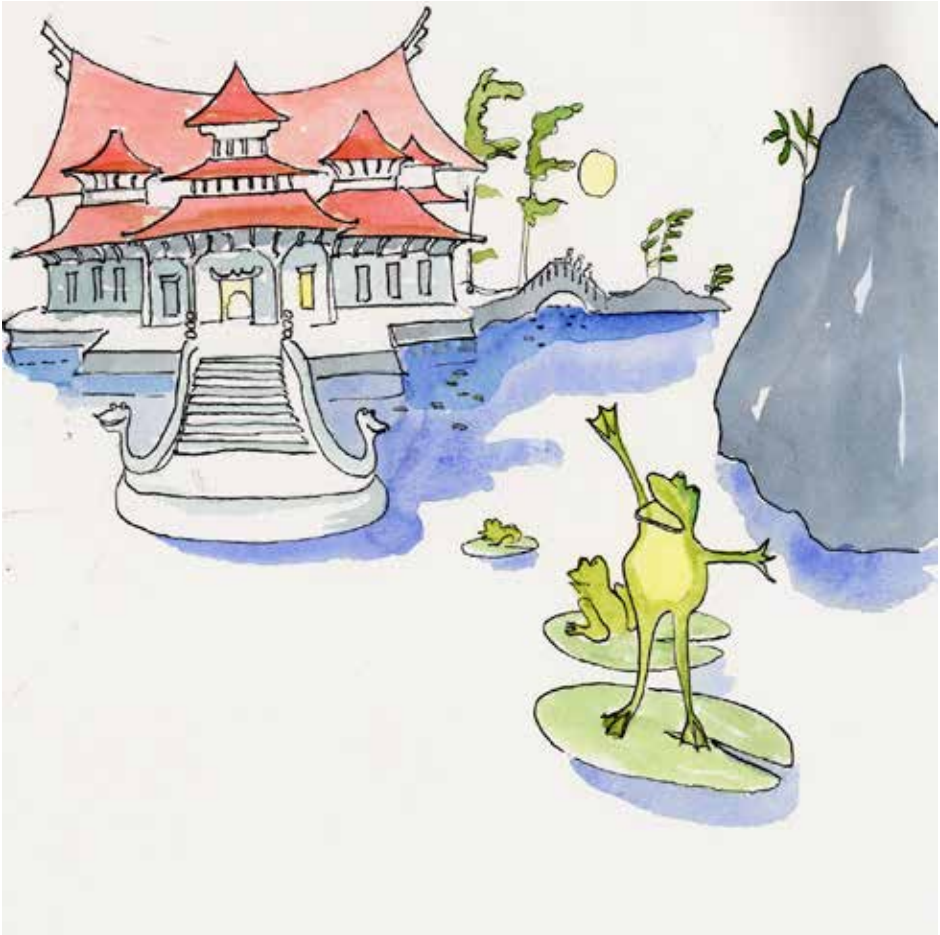


for MEMC



Frogelino, a young and eligible frog, lived in a spectacular Lily Pond, which was the delight of the Princess Marva's garden. The pond was bordered by host of flowers that blossomed throughout the summer.

Frogelino pursued a blissful life surrounded by everything that a frog might wish to pursue. The still waters of his pond were covered with a golden swathe of lotus lilies that in the early months of the summer would attract a range of flies in colours to suit any taste.



The splendid Pagoda of the Princess had a Serpentine walk down to a tiny jetty by the waters edge. Here Frogelino lurked daily, hoping to catch a glimpse of the fabled inhabitant of the Pagoda.

On sunny days he would hop up and down the lower steps of the Serpent Promenade waving gaily to imaginary courtiers and an adulating public.

One fateful day as he was sunning himself on the jetty, his keen ear caught the sound of the swish of material accompanied by a tuneful humming sound. Frogelino realized that the Princess Marva had at last ventured to the jetty. The Princess skipped lightly down the steps followed by a retinue of rabbits. She was dressed in a strange outfit that was made up of a patchwork of materials resembling animal skins.

Frogelino was “gob-smacked” (as the saying goes in frog parlance). He had never imagined that a princess could be so lovely - or so substantial! He looked in despair at his own pallid green skin with the purportedly ‘delightful’ little freckles that had so appealed to his parents and compared them unfavorably with the unblemished purity of the vision parading before him. Princess Marva’s flowing golden locks were extremely uncommon among his amphibian acquaintances.



It was at that moment that Frogelino realized that his destiny lay in dedicating himself chivalrously to the service of the Princess.

He rushed back home, gulped down a hasty dinner, and retired to the library where he dragged out all of his distantly-remembered tadhood tales which connected frogs and princesses, carefully noting the before and after conditions of the protagonists. He went out into his water garden and harvested pondweed - contriving an unlikely thatch to assess the effect that such flowing locks might have on his own appearance.

From his literary studies it appeared that a declaration of devotion sealed with a kiss from the princess was a prerequisite foundation for most frog-princess alliances. He also noted that the heroic frogs were not without accomplishments or a suitable range of finery, sweeping hats with feathers and the like which could be doffed with magnificent sweeping gestures, finely pointed flipperwear with silver spurs(- oh the silver spurs which could transform even the most non-descript creature of the depths into a paragon of courant fashion.)

His appetite for adventure quickened. Flipping ravenously through his books and magazines he quickly realized the amplitude of the world that lay beyond his humble pond.





Now a frog is a creature of the moment. It is very rare that you encounter a frog that is planning a comfortable retirement or venerable old age. Frogelino was a great believer in “Carpe Diem” or seizing opportunities as they arise. So it was not surprising that he immediately launched himself into a rigorous regime of self-improvement.

He contrived an elegant appearance from what was to hand trusting that he would be able to improvise refinements as the situation developed. With gauntlets of cardinal flower and a cocked hat of milkweed husk he was able to achieve a semblance of the desired cavalier appearance.

He next worked up a poignant troubadour’s ballad and that evening the shores of the pond echoed with the anguish of a love-lorn frog. The other pond life rolled their eyes in disbelief at such unconventional behaviour.

“The problem with all of you is that you allow the frog norm to define your ambitions and expectations in this world. You narrow your dreams and enslave yourselves to conventional routines. But I – I refuse to be defined by what has been the norm. My destiny lies at the furthest horizons that I can glimpse, and I know that the view of these horizons must be much better from Princess Marva’s tower.”



The next morning, donning his princely attire to mingle inconspicuously with other courtiers Frogelino hopped up the grand serpentine stair to the gate of the Pagoda. His brave spirits were undaunted by so many precipitous steps though he was a little breathless on reaching the top. Since there was no response to the authoritative knock of his beribboned reed cane, he slid through a crack under the door and carefully readjusted his finery on the other side in a pier glass.

The grandeur of the Pagoda exceeded even his expectations. A great hall led to an imposing staircase up to the princess's tower. Reluctant to essay another flight of steps so soon, Frogelino slipped into the left side room.





He suddenly flinched as he felt the weight of hundreds of hungry, unblinking eyes. He shrank back to the wall, looked more carefully, and then exhaled cautiously in utter astonishment. Lining the walls of the gallery was a vast collection of animals, many creatures of fantasy such as he had never seen before – all labeled and lauded with endearing little poems and tributes. He approached diffidently and gave the tigers tooth a swift kick in passing to demonstrate his growing confidence.



“She’s an animal lover,” he murmured approvingly as he moved up and down the ranks. The Princess had assembled a Noah’s ark with all of creation represented – or almost all. His eyes ran up and down the mustered phalanx of creatures searching for something - but surely there was one obvious and glaring exception – look as he might there was not one single frog included in the vast collection. There were needle eyed cobras, full size buffaloes, and many rabbits of a cloyingly adorable mien. There were fearsome foxes, silly over-stuffed armadillos and howler monkeys – but not a single denizen of his own amphibian world.

“ Well that must be the problem. The Princess is apparently unaware of the evolutionary triumphs of the amphibian world - and she clearly does not know about Frogs. Well, this can be rectified!”

With super amphibian confidence he swaggered past the mighty African Elephant and assumed a position draped languorously around the fangs of the blue-eyed Siberian Tiger adopting the self-possessed pose that befits a valourous frog.

Suddenly the door swept open. Again he heard a tune-ful humming – a song that seemed to have no beginning and no end. Frogelino glimpsed the approach of Princess Marva from the corner of his eye. How he envied even the repulsively fat Walrus that she swept up into a great hug. “Just think – that could be me!”

Princess Marva passed down the ranks of her treasures picking up different animals in turn and rearranging their attitudes. She approached the tiger, paused and then suddenly let out a horrible screech –

“Yick – a nasty, slimy frog – AND no endearing tribute either. How could it have got in here?”

Imagine Frogelino’s immense surprise at being swept up hat, plume, gauntlets and all by the same delicate hand that had just cosseted a full scale walrus, and extended by one toe from the window of the Pagoda.





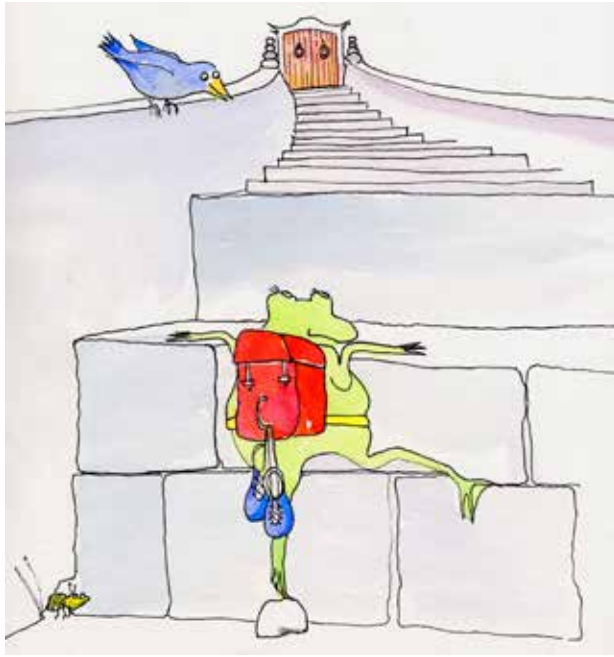
"PLOP"

– he dropped back into the lily pond.

Now most frogs of our acquaintance would feel deflated at such treatment and possibly abandon a project that seemed clearly unpromising. But Frogelino was made of different mettle. He realized that his battle to win the heart of the Princess Marva would be not without incident.

“If Princess Marva is not overwhelmed by a vision of a frog in the prime of life, then perhaps it is her mind I should be addressing.” He doffed his soggy courtiers bedizenments. From his wardrobe he selected a more *‘ultimo grito’* outfit of denim reed cloth, carefully contriving a very ‘Today’ look.





Again he essayed the grand stairway, temporarily shedding his fashionable pants that, with their dangling seat, impeded progress considerably. Now familiar with entry procedures, he slipped again under the door, praising the architect's forethought, and reassembled himself on the inside.

Avoiding the ill-fated bestiary on his left, he turned instead into a room on the right and discovered to his surprise an enormous picture gallery. In the middle of the room there was a somewhat messy table covered with papers, pens and brushes of all descriptions. Over the table fixed to the wall was a vast poster declaiming "FREE THE ANIMALS NOW" Such sentiments are calculated to warm the heart of any freedom-loving frog.

On closer inspection he discovered that almost all of the drawings contained some message of rebellion and determination to righting injustices of the animal world.

“Princess Marva is clearly a crusader for animal rights and a better pond”.

Such a realization of kindred ambitions brought a tear to a frog’s eye. Even the more overlooked aspects of Creation such as clams were enjoined to shuck their inhibiting shells to join the movement. (This was somewhat perplexing to him because he had never considered clams as proactive.)





The direction of his new mission became instantly clear. He leapt upon the table and grabbed a colossal brush, which he plunged into a plate of metallic ink. The sheet he worked had been neatly laid out to cover most of the center of the table.

While the message seemed compelling, it required embellishment and his eyes fell on the mountains of glues, sequins, and discarded candy wrappers around the perimeter of the paper. The creative inner frog began to emerge and in no time he was to be found scaling the heights and importing intriguing artifacts to weave into the texture. As a final touch he carefully embedded all available pens and brushes into a zigzag border, spreading glue liberally.

Scientifically with wool strands slung over thumbtacks he raised his composition into a position of prominence and stood back to admire the effect – only slightly uncertain about alternative spellings for FREEDOM, but much pleased with the general effect of the numerous “F’s” (which were definitely his most practiced letter.)

***Frog-Frendly**

Fredom

Federation

Fights

Far-flung

Frightfulness”.

Under this message he had drawn a platoon of frog marching amphibians with a selection of pens slung over their shoulders, intended to dignify themselves as intellectuals. All this seemed in keeping with the general pro-active messages of the placards that he had glimpsed around him.

Lost in admiration for the poignancy of his message, Frogelino was unaware that the glue that he had been spreading so liberally with all four feet had rooted him firmly to the tablecloth.

What at first might have proven to be a considerable embarrassment soon struck him as an opportunity to meet the Princess and be acclaimed as the author of this work. Nevertheless feeling a little foolish, he resolved to make the best of the situation (as frogs tend to do) by drawing a large heart with the pink paint brush clamped firmly in his lips. Carefully he shaded it in around his feet. He composed himself to await developments.





The familiar humming of the Princess could be heard approaching from afar. She entered the room, tossed her coat and satchel of books negligently onto the floor and surveyed the room.

Suddenly she froze and let out a wail of anguish. “Who has ruined my project and all my pens?” Here eyes dropped from the poster and narrowed on the little frog below who had assumed the air of innocent insouciance, shaking his head sagely.

“Guck! It’s that nasty, horrible frog again!” Before Frogelino could begin to blurt out a mollifying response he found himself whirled up into a vortex of tablecloth, poster pens and wet glue.

"PLOP"

Again a frog's dreams were ejected from the window of the pagoda. The tablecloth and poster spread wide over the surface of the pond and numerous flies alighted to examine developments with some interest.



“If Princess Marva is not overwhelmed by a vision of a frog with mettle and a crusading temperament, and cannot see a princely soul within, then perhaps it is her imagination I should be addressing.”

The flies encircling him on his lily pad nodded less-than-heartfelt agreement. (In his efforts to shape himself into a worthy friend of the Princess, the benign messages noted in the Crusader’s hall had not gone disregarded. Frogelino had adopted a strict vegetarian diet.)



From his wardrobe Frogelino selected a cloak of basic black in a severe cut. He fashioned a reed cane and carefully wrapped it in foil to set off his muted apparel.

“Aah! Froglet, Prince of Fenmarsh
- to Be or Not To Be,
- and I DO know the Answer by the way”.

He then repaired to his study, sharpened his quill pen and like a frog possessed he set about composing a set of conundrums to captivate the Princess Marva’s imagination. In no time at all he had filled up all his lily pads with pithy riddles.

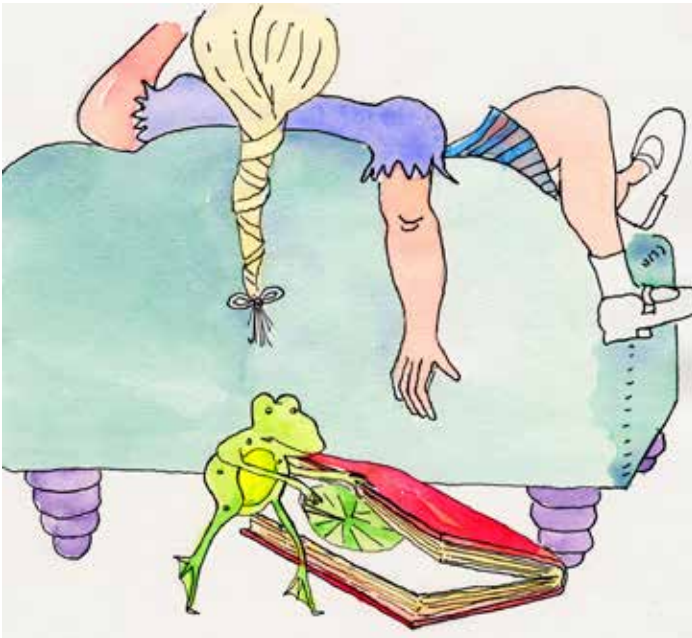


Again he ascended the stone steps dragging the pads after him and again he slid with practiced nimbleness under the door.

Ahead of him by the grand stair lay the third untried door, which he approached with some apprehension. He squeezed through a crack into a large room completely surrounded in books. In the middle was a comfortable sofa facing the window and a book had been dropped carelessly on the floor alongside. Her crept over to inspect the title. There was a picture of a stoat on the cover brandishing a sword which confirmed an obsession with animal welfare and reinforced his researches to date.

Carefully putting his plan into action, nimble flippers slid his first riddle into the book and returned it to its discarded position. He withdrew under the sofa to await developments. It was not long before a listless hand dropped down to reclaim the book. There was a sudden stillness to the room as the princess encountered the insert into her book. He heard her reading it out loud in a hesitant voice.

*“While the World extols the Green
To curb pollution that’s obscene
Look ‘round yourself and you will see
I’m just the sort you’re meant to be.
Seek this lynch pin of ecosystem,
Lest you regret one day you missed ‘im.”*



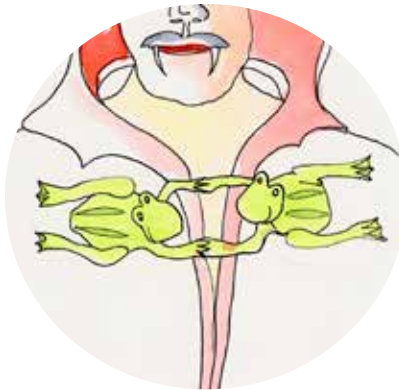


The Princess seemed very perplexed and threw a nervous glance over the back of her sofa. He suspected that the time was not yet ripe for self-revelation.

Frogelino then repaired to the bedroom and carefully pinned his second conundrum to a discarded cloak, lying in an unprincess-like heap on the floor.

It was not long before he found the princess puzzling over this next riddle, muttering the words under her breath, regarding the cloak suspiciously.

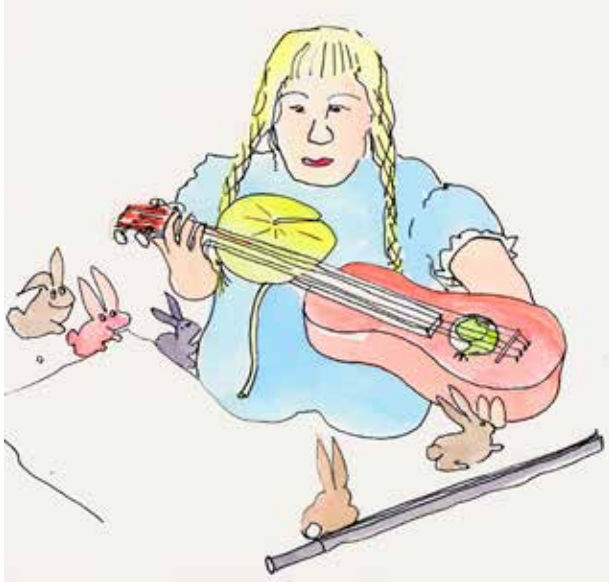
*“Some gallants want to look their best
And clutch me close unto their chest,
They peak of fashion and would gloat
To have me at (not in) their throat.
What clasp-like way are you supposed
To use to keep your garments closed?”*





Later that morning the Princess sat down reluctantly to study her French homework and was confronted by another strange message tucked into her reader.

*“The French whose language is so fine
Emulate a voice like mine.
And ‘mongst their other little whims
Profess great fondness for my limbs.
So join a world quite raffiné
Give such as me the time of day.”*



His next little challenge he placed next to a violin which had been tossed negligently on the floor. Intent on restoring this too visible reminder securely back in its box the Princess encountered another perplexing conundrum.

*“When someone tells you as a joke
They’d like to be there when you ‘croak’
They wish to see you just like me
Expressing self so musically.
Imagine then what true delight
To croak like me throughout the night.”*

His final poem, of which he was especially proud he carefully taped to a box of multi-flavoured vegetarian jelly beans left on the breakfast table.

*“If a flowery tale you ‘spin’
It is the present you are in.
But if in past the story ran
Why then they tend to say you ‘span’
But for many times in days long gone
There’s only one can say he’s ‘spawn’.*





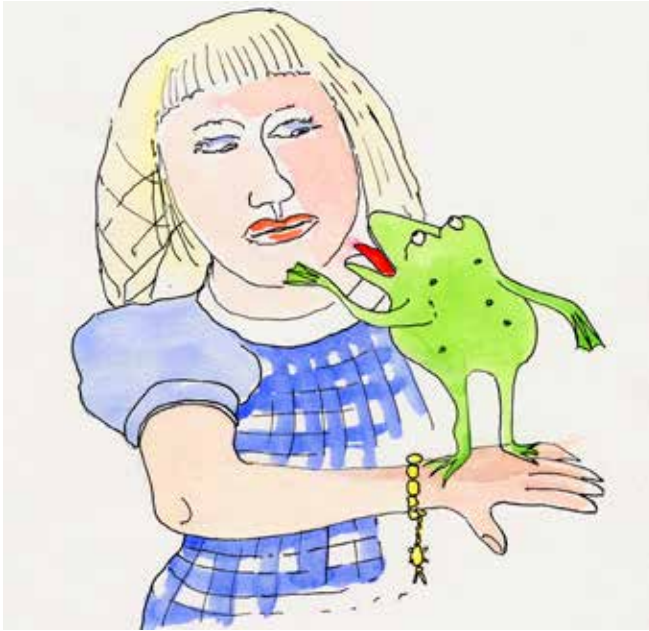
The princess sat there mumbling this riddle under her breath as she munched on her vegetarian jelly beans. Suddenly there was an explosion of beans flying about the room and an excited shriek.

“I’ve got it! It’s a FROG – it must be a FROG!”

As she fell back in self-congratulating satisfaction, Frogelino leapt out from behind the box almost falling into a milky bowl of frosties in his excitement, delivering his well-rehearsed line.

"Here I am !"





Colour drained from Princess Marva's complexion. She sucked in her breath and then with faltering courage she held out her hand.

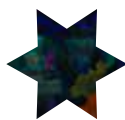
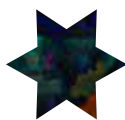
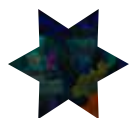
Frogelino stepped forward. He drew himself up to his full stature and tried to look as mysterious and poetic as possible under the circumstances which included a frostie in either hand.

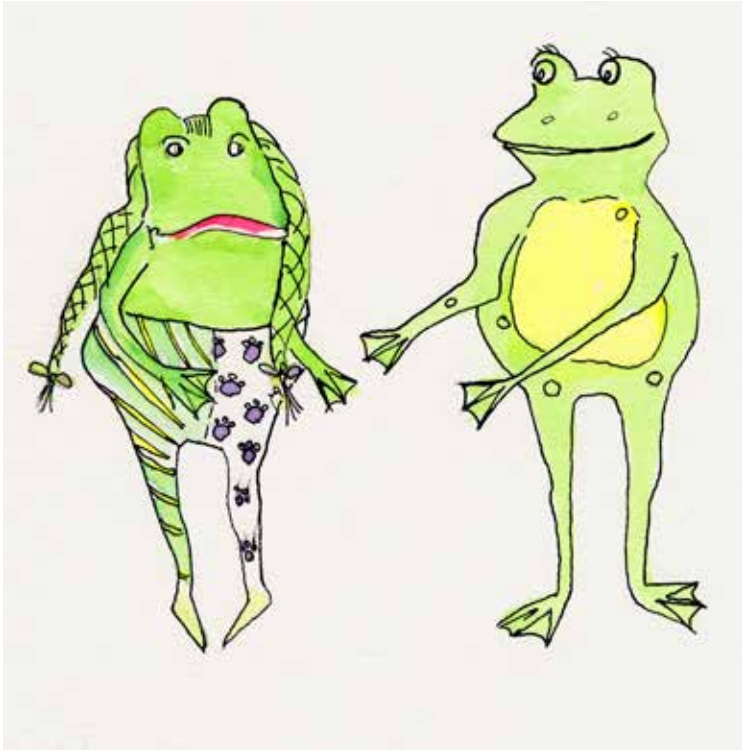
'Oh Little Frog – You are so persistent.' said the Princess doubtfully. Frogelino momentarily basked in this tentative approval – though beginning to feel somewhat self-conscious.

With a sudden surge he overcame his shyness. He puckered his ample lips and impulsively gave the Princess a smack on the cheek.

Now it is not in the nature of most recorded frog and princess liaisons for the frog to take such a bold, pre-emptive initiative, and this misapprehension on the part of Frogelino led to unforeseen developments.

There was a sudden and earsplitting thunderbolt. The royal pagoda lurched violently underfoot, great fissures ripped through the walls and they seemed to vaporize into an enveloping cloud of black smoke and slide off sideways into the lily pond in a tumble of rising steam and falling debris.



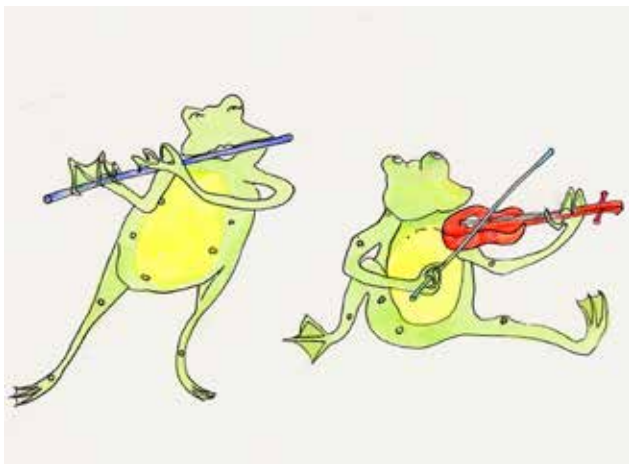


Emerging from this vortex of smoke and looking slightly dazed, Frogelino glimpsed standing before him the most beautiful frog that he had ever seen.

The Princess Marva had been transformed into the exquisitely featured Princess Frogelina, a creature of his dreams, her glowing skin a moist and delicate shade of puce, her long rippling green hair trailing Valkyrie-like in the whirling winds.

He bowed to her graciously and held out a chivalrous limb.

She extended her dainty webbed limb somewhat diffidently.



Finito



