

Frog Heaven (by Ute Maria Sproulle)

Fergal and Freddie were two frogs who lived in a very small pond. But they were happy. Yes, the pond was small and they didn't have that much room to swim around but at least it was wet.

Then one day another frog hopped into their pond. Splash! Now it was crowded.

"Hello! I'm Finella. Who are you? And why are you living in this pokey pond?"

"Oh," croaked Fergal. "Hello. I'm Fergal and this is Freddie. Croak hello, Freddie."

"Croak," Freddie managed for he was a shy frog. "You're pretty," he added.

"I know," said Finella, flicking her head. "But seriously, why are you in this pond when there's a really large one next door?"

Fergal reflected. "We've always been here. Ever since Mr Smith put this plastic window box into the ground and filled it with water."

"That was nice of him," said Freddie. "We were looking for a home."

"Well, look no further. Come with me and see where I live." Finella hopped over the hedge, expecting the other two frogs to follow her. Which they did.

Fergal and Freddie were amazed at what they saw. An enormous garden, covered with flowers and in the middle a large, circular pond, ringed with bricks and stones. Floating in the pond were strands of pond weed and lily pads.

"Mrs Smythe had this built specially. I heard her say she wanted lots of frogs. So far, there's only me. So, come and jump in." Finella dove into the water and swam with graceful strokes.

Fergal and Freddie were impressed. There was so much room, so many plants, so many insects landing on the plants, ready to be munched. Usually they had to forage in their small garden for food. Here it was delivered to you!

“And they feed you!” exclaimed Finella. “Mr Smythe comes out with leftovers from dinner.”

“Wow!” said Fergal. “More food?”

“Yes, I heard Mrs Smythe say she wants fat frogs. She thinks we croak louder if we’re bigger.”

“This is so amazing,” said Fergal, hoping they could stay.

Freddie looked around the pond. He looked up and down. “What is that grey thing up there in the sky?”

“Look out! Dive!” Finella’s croak was practically a shriek.

Fergal and Freddie did as they were told. From underneath the water they saw a large, grey bird glide past.

“What was that?” asked Fergal, poking his head above the water.

“A heron,” said Finella. “They eat frogs. If you see one, you dive. Quickly.”

The frogs from over the hedge said they would. It seemed the sensible thing to do.

The next few days passed happily, swimming, sunning themselves and eating the food Mrs Smythe put out. They heard her telling Mr Smythe how much louder the frog in the pond was croaking now. She did not realise that Fergal and Freddie were joining in.

Until one day she did. “Look! Two more frogs!” she screamed at Mr Smythe. “I told you if we put out food, more frogs would come. But we need more food!”

They were, of course, getting nice and fat. Freddie didn't know what they were eating, but he was missing the flies next door. He had enjoyed jumping up and seeing how many he could catch rather than just floating around.

Fergal and Finella, however, were at their happiest floating around, sunning themselves, just being lazy. They couldn't understand why Freddie wanted to explore the garden and jump in and out of the pond catching flies. They felt he should just relax.

Sometimes Freddie would see the grey heron flying overhead, his sharp, shiny beak pointing downwards. Then Freddie would scuttle back to the pond, ready to dive. Once he nearly didn't make it. Just as he dove into the water, he felt the breeze from the heron's wings swish past.

Then Freddie announced he wanted to go home. He was missing their little pond - it was cosy and had enough flies. And it was definitely easier to hide in.

Fergal and Finella couldn't believe what they were hearing. "Why?" Fergal asked. "It's great here, plenty of room. We get fed. And we don't have to leap up and catch bugs. You're just being silly."

"Oh, let him go," said Finella. "It will be much more peaceful then. Not so much hopping and splashing."

So, Freddie croaked good-bye and hopped back over the hedge. As he did, he saw Mrs Smythe bring out another big plate of food and scatter it in the pond.

Freddie's pond was still there, full of water. Someone had even put some pond weed in, dangling over the edge. Perhaps Mr Smith had missed his frogs and hoped they would return.

Freddie was happy to be home. He hopped about the small garden, plopped into his little pond, which now seemed big enough. The insects and bugs he caught were just right, nice and juicy.

Fergal stayed with Finella in their big, beautiful pond with the grey heron flying overhead. They got fatter and fatter.

And eventually they got eaten.