

The Frog Hunt

Jerry Mitchell

The night spoke of coming autumn. The breeze off the warm water invited us to don sweaters and boots and go frog hunting. The acrid smells of the outboard motor and the gasoline lantern blended with the soft smells of the earth and the water as the shore-line drifted away from our boat.

We seemed to stand motionless out in the middle of the still, black water while the tree-lined west end of the lake moved toward us. With it came the slow, booming "Glumph" that the bullfrogs intermittently proclaimed; the rhythmic song of stars, moon, and marsh grass that the smaller frogs sang; the staccato poly-harmony that was added by the unbelievably small "peeper" frogs. If we concentrated on them, we could also isolate the mosquitos' hum and crickets' fiddling.

When the shadowy trees had reached us, we entered the small channel where we were to find our evening's adventure. We could no longer use the motor, but began to pockmark the water with the slow, silent dipping of oars. Eerie shadows cast by the trees in the bright lantern light formed the roof and walls of a cavern that glided over us. Occasionally a turtle would splash hurriedly into the water, or a bird would flip his fish, breaking the silence. Meanwhile, I crouched sentinel-like in the prow sweeping the bank with the stabbing rays from a flash light and scanning the entire area for the tell-tale gleam of the white or yellow throat.

Frogs perch freely on the woolly blankets of weed or on slick lily pads, on knobby sticks or on great mossy logs, on grassy knolls or on sparkling gravel. Sometimes they will be gathered for their singing lesson, but many times they are sitting all alone, pouting or practicing. Bullfrogs may grow so large that I am unable to grasp them firmly enough to hold them, while some of the other frogs are so tiny that we eat their bones if fried crisply enough.

Frogs will sit like statues for you as long as a light is focused on their eyes, but a firm kick of their sinewy hind legs will send them out of a half-closed hand. A frog's skin feels cool and moist and sends off a musky, yet inoffensive odor peculiar to the frog. His throbbing throat and palpitating heart tell of his excitement, which is matched by the hunter's thrill at the hand-to-foot combat. As we churned home, talking excitedly of our success for the next day's meal and the big one that got away, the frogs croaked their despair from the half-filled bag.