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The Frog's Galliard

Edna Kovacs

The grasshopper's going to be married,
he asks the mosquito's daughter;
The beetle wants to be best man,
The flea jumps, too, and wants to be chief
witness;
All the bugs want to be guests.
- from Béla Barótk's The Hungarian Folk Song.

These were the words I couldn't help but overhear as I sat in August's alabaster dusk,
admiring the wild huckleberries.

Soon I espy ants and ladybugs scurrying out of
logs and mounds. Caterpillars leap from the
mouths of jays; caddis-flies from the gullets of
tROUT. Grasses part for the queen bee and her
loyal workers.

Along the fence, where creeping tansy proliferates,
a procession of earwigs, termites, and
katydids emerge towards a glen of spruce where
the nuptial ceremony is about to take place.

There, standing debonair and proud, is the
grasshopper and his clan. On a bed of sequestered
pine needles, the mosquito's daughter sits preening,
while her mother flits to and fro.

Hidden in the harebell, I watch them. Nearby,
a caddis-worm builds a house out of sticks and
stones.

"Aren't you going to the wedding?" I inquire.
"Sorry. I'm too bashful," he responds.

Bustling troubadours sing from the woods. I
bid farewell to the industrious caddis-worm, to
my ishmus amid the willowherb and sage, and,
feeling lighthearted, I set off to follow that
highway of bugs that are gradually making their
ascent over the knotted-pine fence.

It takes more than three attempts at leaping
before I can make my way over the fence
successfully. I confess, I've grown a bit paunchy
from too many evenings of lingering, witnessing
beautiful sunsets.

Other frogs tease me. They say I should be out
courting. My sister tells me it's time I be getting
married.

"I'm too busy for marriage," I tell her.
"Too busy for marriage? How's that?" my
brothers and sisters curiously pry.

"I'm making detailed observations of our
environment."
"Our what?"
"Environment."
"Trivial. Foolish. Why?"
"I'm studying the changes in our territory.
Today we may jump freely, but do you realize
that since last summer not only has the pond
grown murkier, but jolly Mr. Badger no longer
plants peas in his garden, and Mrs. Porcupine has
moved away.

"Did you know they've taken robin's nest
away? She's feeling most forlorn these days. And
all the ladybugs have flown away.

"But that's not the least of it. I hear men now
-- men. And if I'm not mistaken, they seem to be
digging and working with something they call
machines. I heard them say they were making a
road."

"A road. What's a road?" my fellow frogs
bellow in unison.

"Ridiculous!" shouts my
oldest sister. "Who's ever
heard of a tame frog?"

I'm compiling a dictionary. I pull out my note
pad and put on my bifocals prior to answering.
"Road. R-o-a-d. An open way, generally public,
for the passage of vehicles, persons, and animals."
"Animals with people?" my sister chortles.
"Nonsense."
"People eat animals."
Hmmp. Such were their remarks.
"That's why I'm a vegetarian," I tell them.
"You see, the bugs don't fear me. rather, they
have tamed me."
"Ridiculous!" shouts my oldest sister. "Who's
ever heard of a tame frog?"

In all seriousness I continue.
"If we're to coexist on this earth, we must learn
to be sensible. Mushroom soup and cabbage stew
are good enough for me. Perhaps a taste of linzer tart with fresh berries every now and then. . . . But now, if you’ll excuse me, I’m off to a wedding!

The frogs chuckle after me with mocking amusement. Strangers creep like buttercups. How could I explain to them the gravity of the situation?

When I approached the wild wood, any feelings of forlornness would have entirely disappeared upon seeing my friends and neighbors heartily congratulating the grasshopper groom and his mosquito bride.

There was much backslapping and wing poking, festive buzzing and droning, but in the distance I could hear chain saws and voices.

I always keep my notebook with me to record pertinent data. In it, I also keep a calendar.

Hmm . . . let’s see. Today’s Saturday, the eleventh of August. Men never used to work on Saturdays until now. Now I understand the meaning of overtime.

With my binoculars, I witness fire opal clouds usher in from my favorite blueberry ravine. Oh dear! This means slashing and burning -- a sure sign of development.

I see the great repast. I hear the crickets sing, the owl hoot.

“Mrs. Mosquito!” I yelp as loud as I possibly can.

“The mother of the bride flits from flower to pine cone, acorn to berry, hovering around her betrothed daughter.

“Mrs. Mosquito, do you smell men?”

She does indeed, and hears my summonings. She dashes out to scout the environs as soon as she can make an oblique exit. She, as well as I, wishes not to disturb the wedding party.

With my binoculars, I watch with horrific awe as pine and spruce fall to the ground. The earth shakes. The earth trembles. Mrs. Mosquito returns with a worried expression which confirms my own fears and doubts.

Dusky gray-blue grouse cry Whoop! Whoop! Whoop! And the gray-cheeked thrush calls Chuck! Chuck!

Bees drink the last nectar of summer’s paling room. The wood grows frosty with a thrumming chill.

“Attention! Attention!” I herald them. And I admit, with respect, my command is adhered to.

All the wood Creatures and bugs fall silent then. Even the ravens stop their barking across dusk’s sky cimmaron.

“Listen, my friends and neighbors. When I leap, I like to make a good splash. But not when a caravan of machines is in such close proximity, all but tearing up out front gates.

“It’s time to put a fermata on this gaiety and make a complete exodus. I suggest paddling downstream, taking wind, riding on the backside of a companion, or scrambling away just as fast as you can.”

Prior to departing, the grasshopper kisses his bride. All flee like Noah’s creatures before the storm. I alone remain in the forest, along with the bracket fungus.

It’s my custom to record the mileu daily. My studies are mapped and plotted with accuracy. Included in my data are the following:

- Date, time of day, water quality, temperature, precipitation (if any), air pollution index, forecast, and other miscellaneous information which may include such tidbits as squirrel having a tea party with sparrow, crickets sleeping in the jo-pye weed, or olive-brown boletus spotted among the hemlock.

Today, as I stood on my forelegs in contemplation, about to record the day’s observations, a man who came on quiet feet picked me up in palm of his hand and spoke.

“Come, my brave frog and born naturalist. I will show you the ways of man. take your notebook with you, for you will need it as well as your keenness.”

It was Janos, the mystic storyteller. I recognized his voice when he told me, “In this life, you’re a frog. In the next, you shall be a prince.”

And that was the last I saw of the wild wood.