

## CHAPTER 13 - THE TRUTH POND

It seems a long time since we have heard anything of the Frogman and Cayke the Cookie Cook, who had left the Yip Country in search of the diamond-studded dishpan which had been mysteriously stolen the same night that Ozma had disappeared from the Emerald City. But you must remember that while the Frogman and the Cookie Cook were preparing to descend from their mountaintop, and even while on their way to the farmhouse of Wiljon the Winkie, Dorothy and the Wizard and their friends were encountering the adventures we have just related.

So it was that on the very morning when the travelers from the Emerald City bade farewell to the Czarover of the City of Herku, Cayke and the Frogman awoke in a grove in which they had passed the night sleeping on beds of leaves. There were plenty of farmhouses in the neighborhood, but no one seemed to welcome the puffy, haughty Frogman or the little dried-up Cookie Cook, and so they slept comfortably enough underneath the trees of the grove. The Frogman wakened first on this morning, and after going to the tree where Cayke slept and finding her still wrapped in slumber, he decided to take a little walk and seek some breakfast. Coming to the edge of the grove, he observed half a mile away a pretty yellow house that was surrounded by a yellow picket fence, so he walked toward this house and on entering the yard found a Winkie woman picking up sticks with which to build a fire to cook her morning meal.

"For goodness sake!" she exclaimed on seeing the Frogman. "What are you doing out of your frog-pond?"

"I am traveling in search of a jeweled gold dishpan, my good woman," he replied with an air of great dignity.

"You won't find it here, then," said she. "Our dishpans are tin, and they're good enough for anybody. So go back to your pond and leave me alone." She spoke rather crossly and with a lack of respect that greatly annoyed the Frogman.

"Allow me to tell you, madam," said he, "that although I am a frog, I am the Greatest and Wisest Frog in all the world. I may add that I possess much more wisdom than any Winkie--man or woman--in this land. Wherever I go, people fall on their knees before me and render homage to the Great Frogman! No one else knows so much as I; no one else is so grand, so magnificent!"

"If you know so much," she retorted, "why don't you know where your dishpan is instead of chasing around the country after it?"

"Presently," he answered, "I am going where it is, but just now I am traveling and have had no breakfast. Therefore I honor you by asking you for something to eat."

"Oho! The Great Frogman is hungry as any tramp, is he? Then pick up these sticks and help me to build the fire," said the woman contemptuously.

"Me! The Great Frogman pick up sticks?" he exclaimed in horror. "In the Yip Country where I am more honored and powerful than any King could be, people weep with joy when I ask them to feed me."

"Then that's the place to go for your breakfast," declared the woman.

"I fear you do not realize my importance," urged the Frogman. "Exceeding wisdom renders me superior to menial duties."

"It's a great wonder to me," remarked the woman, carrying her sticks to the house, "that your wisdom doesn't inform you that you'll get no breakfast here." And she went in and slammed the door behind her.

The Frogman felt he had been insulted, so he gave a loud croak of indignation and turned away. After going a short distance, he came upon a faint path which led across a meadow in the direction of a grove of pretty trees, and thinking this circle of evergreens must surround a house where perhaps he would be kindly received, he decided to follow the path. And by and by he came to the trees, which were set close together, and pushing aside some branches he found no house inside the circle, but instead a very beautiful pond of clear water.

Now the Frogman, although he was so big and well educated and now aped the ways and customs of human beings, was still a frog. As he gazed at this solitary, deserted pond, his love for water returned to him with irresistible force. "If I cannot get a breakfast, I may at least have a fine swim," said he, and pushing his way between the trees, he reached the bank. There he took off his fine clothing, laying his shiny purple hat and his gold-headed cane beside it. A moment later, he sprang with one leap into the water and dived to the very bottom of the pond.

The water was deliciously cool and grateful to his thick, rough skin, and the Frogman swam around the pond several times before he stopped to rest. Then

he floated upon the surface and examined the pond with The bottom and sides were all lined with glossy tiles of a light pink color; just one place in the bottom where the water bubbled up from a hidden spring had been left free. On the banks, the green grass grew to the edge of the pink tiling. And now, as the Frogman examined the place, he found that on one side of the pool, just above the water line, had been set a golden plate on which some words were deeply engraved. He swam toward this plate, and on reaching it read the following inscription:

This is THE TRUTH POND Whoever bathes in this water must always afterward tell THE TRUTH.

This statement startled the Frogman. It even worried him, so that he leaped upon the bank and hurriedly began to dress himself. "A great misfortune has befallen me," he told himself, "for hereafter I cannot tell people I am wise, since it is not the truth. The truth is that my boasted wisdom is all a sham, assumed by me to deceive people and make them defer to me. In truth, no living creature can know much more than his fellows, for one may know one thing, and another know another thing, so that wisdom is evenly scattered throughout the world. But--ah me!--what a terrible fate will now be mine. Even Cayke the Cookie Cook will soon discover that my knowledge is no greater than her own, for having bathed in the enchanted water of the Truth Pond, I can no longer deceive her or tell a lie."

More humbled than he had been for many years, the Frogman went back to the grove where he had left Cayke and found the woman now awake and washing her face in a tiny brook. "Where has Your Honor been?" she asked.

"To a farmhouse to ask for something to eat," said he, "but the woman refused me."

"How dreadful!" she exclaimed. "But never mind, there are other houses where the people will be glad to feed the Wisest Creature in all the World."

"Do you mean yourself?" he asked.

"No, I mean you."

The Frogman felt strongly impelled to tell the truth, but struggled hard against it. His reason told him there was no use in letting Cayke know he was not wise, for then she would lose much respect for him, but each time he opened his mouth to speak, he realized he was about to tell the truth and shut it again as quickly as possible. He tried to talk about something else, but the

words necessary to undeceive the woman would force themselves to his lips in spite of all his struggles. Finally, knowing that he must either remain dumb or let the truth prevail, he gave a low groan of despair and said, "Cayke, I am NOT the Wisest Creature in all the World; I am not wise at all."

"Oh, you must be!" she protested. "You told me so yourself, only last evening."

"Then last evening I failed to tell you the truth," he admitted, looking very shamefaced for a frog. "I am sorry I told you this lie, my good Cayke, but if you must know the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, I am not really as wise as you are."

The Cookie Cook was greatly shocked to hear this, for it shattered one of her most pleasing illusions. She looked at the gorgeously dressed Frogman in amazement. "What has caused you to change your mind so suddenly?" she inquired.

"I have bathed in the Truth Pond," he said, "and whoever bathes in that water is ever afterward obliged to tell the truth."

"You were foolish to do that," declared the woman.

"It is often very embarrassing to tell the truth. I'm glad I didn't bathe in that dreadful water!"

The Frogman looked at his companion thoughtfully. "Cayke," said he, "I want you to go to the Truth Pond and take a bath in its water. For if we are to travel together and encounter unknown adventures, it would not be fair that I alone must always tell you the truth, while you could tell me whatever you pleased. If we both dip in the enchanted water, there will be no chance in the future of our deceiving one another."

"No," she asserted, shaking her head positively, "I won't do it, Your Honor. For if I told you the truth, I'm sure you wouldn't like me. No Truth Pond for me. I'll be just as I am, an honest woman who can say what she wants to without hurting anyone's feelings."

With this decision the Frogman was forced to be content, although he was sorry the Cookie Cook would not listen to his advice.