

THE ADVENTURES OF JERRY MUSKRAT

CHAPTER 9: THE LAUGHING BROOK STOPS LAUGHING



BY THORNTON W. BURGESS

There was something wrong. Grandfather Frog knew it the very minute he got up that morning. At first he couldn't think what it was. He sat with just his head out of water and blinked his great goggly eyes, as he tried to think what it was that was wrong. Suddenly Grandfather Frog realized how still it was. It was a different kind of stillness from anything he could ever remember. He missed something, and he couldn't think what it was. It wasn't the song of Mr. Redwing. There were many times when he didn't hear that. It was—Grandfather Frog gave a startled jump out on to the shore. "Chugarum! It's the Laughing Brook! The Laughing Brook has stopped laughing!" cried Grandfather Frog.

Could it be? Who ever heard of such a thing, excepting when Jack Frost bound the Laughing Brook with hard black ice? Why, in the spring and in the summer and in the fall the Laughing Brook had laughed—such a merry, happy laugh—ever since Grandfather Frog could remember, and you know he can remember way back in the long ago. For he is very old and very wise. Never once in all that time had the Laughing Brook failed to laugh. It couldn't be true now! Grandfather Frog put a hand behind one ear and listened and listened, but not a sound could he hear.

"Chugarum! It must be me," said Grandfather Frog. "It must be that I am growing old and deaf. I'll go over and ask Jerry Muskrat."

So Grandfather Frog dove into the water and swam out to the middle of the Smiling Pool, on his way to Jerry Muskrat's house. It was then that he first fully realized the truth of what Jerry Muskrat and Little Joe Otter had told him the day before—that there was something very, very wrong with the Smiling Pool. He stopped swimming to look around, and it seemed as if his great goggly eyes would pop right out of his head. Yes, Sir, it seemed as if those great goggly eyes certainly would pop right out of Grandfather Frog's head. The Smiling Pool had grown so small that there wasn't enough of it left to smile!

"Where are you going, Grandfather Frog?" asked a voice over his head.

Grandfather Frog looked up. Looking down on him from over the edge of the Big Rock was Jerry Muskrat. The edge of the Big Rock was twice as high above the water as Grandfather Frog had ever seen it before.

"I—I—was going to swim over to your house to see you," replied Grandfather Frog.

"It's of no use," replied Jerry, "because I'm not there. Besides, you couldn't swim there, anyway."

"Why not?" demanded Grandfather Frog in great surprise.

“Because it isn’t in the water any longer; it’s way up on dry land,” said Jerry Muskrat in the most mournful voice.

“What’s that you say?” cried Grandfather Frog, as if he couldn’t believe his own ears.

“It’s just as true as that I’m sitting here,” replied Jerry sadly.

“Listen, Jerry Muskrat, and tell me truly; is the Laughing Brook laughing?” cried Grandfather Frog sharply.

“No,” replied Jerry, “the Laughing Brook has stopped laughing, and the Smiling Pool has stopped smiling, and I think the world is upside down.”