

OUR TRAVELS TO THE ENCHANTED KINGDOM

(An interactive book to share with the very young)

BOOK I

THE KIDNAPPED FROG-PRINCE

by

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Did you know that there is a magic kingdom on our little planet? Not once upon a time, but now, right now, it exists and is filled with merry, enchanted creatures. It is a place where the sun never sets. Can you guess where it might be? Close your eyes and we will go there together, you and I, and meet all kinds of wonderful beings. Can you feel a warm place in your heart? Take yourself right there, because that is where our journey begins.

Did you know that inside of you, you are like a giant blue sky? Did you know that when you look up at the sky you can see for many, many miles? Well, that is how you and I are made deep inside. We are as big as the sky, and the Enchanted Kingdom we are going to visit is farther than the farthest cloud but closer to you than your big toe.

And now, feel yourself rise like a kite carried away by the wind, and join me on our first adventure in the Enchanted Kingdom.

CHAPTER ONE

The first thing you see when you enter the Enchanted Kingdom is a great big meadow full of flowers of all kinds. If you look to your left or to your right or behind you, you will see nothing but little round hills covered by this meadow. Look above you. The sky is so blue and bright. Maybe we have floated closer to the sun and that is why everything shines so brightly. But I like to think that it is because everything in the Kingdom is alive and smiles the way you do on Christmas morning or on your birthday.

Look! The sky is smiling at you and me. I'll bet you didn't know the sky

could smile, did you? Well, I didn't either until I found myself in this meadow. Did I tell you the reason why we can see nothing but this beautiful rainbow-colored meadow around us? It's because we are standing in the middle of it. That's right, we just popped right into the middle of this amazing place. Isn't it funny that we don't feel lost? That's because it's so warm and comfortable, and everything is so beautiful and peaceful that we know we are at home here, even if we've never seen this place before.

Look, to your right, a large bird is flying in our direction. He is happy to see us. Notice the twinkle in his eyes. My goodness, he comes to land right next to us and is as tall as one of those grown up persons we've left below. Don't be bashful. Say hello to him. "Hello, Sir Bird." He bows his beak gracefully to welcome us. He will be our guide. You didn't think that I would be able to show you this enchanted world by myself, did you? All I can do is stare in wonder, just like you. And smell the flowers. Can you smell them?

Look, that large red tulip is leaning toward us so that we can sniff her perfume. Breathe deeply. It's so sweet and gentle! That, my dear companion, is the scent of Love! Whenever you smell a flower, or even plain old grass (and I'm sure you know how good grass smells when it's wet), you are meeting Love itself. And who is this Love that you can meet in the scent of a flower or the aroma of freshly cut grass? Why, it's the Great Gardener, of course! And that is His way of saying "Hello!" to us. But it's only one of His many wonderful ways of greeting us. Let me tell you a special secret, just between you and me.

The Great Gardener is only one of His names. He is also the King of this Enchanted Kingdom we are visiting. But, at this very moment, He is also that generous tulip which is waving at us with her soft petals. You see, that's the special secret: the Great Gardener has many disguises. Even if He is disguised as a tiny raindrop on the end of a leaf, we can still recognize Him if we look very closely. In fact, if you look really carefully, you can see Him just about everywhere. I can see Him right now shining in your eyes, especially when you're smiling.

Let me ask you a scientific question: have you every opened your eyes under water? Well, if you haven't, you're lucky because it stings. But if you have, you might notice that you don't see the water! Even when you're completely covered and surrounded by it! Well, that's how it is with the Great Gardener here in this Enchanted Kingdom. He is everywhere around us,

but we can't exactly see Him. We can only see His wonderful work.

Sir Bird is waiting for us, so we better follow him. Hey, what is he doing? Look, he has flattened out his wings and is bending down. I think he wants us to climb up on his back. It looks like there is enough room, but...do you think we should? I don't know. I'm a little scared. Aren't you? No? What do you mean you'll go without me? Who's going to tell the rest of this story if I don't come along? Allright, I'll climb on just for you. But you sit in front. Remember, Sir Bird has no ears to hang onto, so you will just have to hold your legs tight around his neck. It won't hurt him. Are you ready? Heeeere we go!

CHAPTER TWO

Isn't this a beautiful sight? It looks like we're flying through rainbows. All those colorful flowers are watching us from below. They must be really surprised. Of course, they look at the sky all the time, so they must see a lot of strange things fly by. Look down over there, on your left, way in the distance. Can you see that shadow in the meadow? Let's have Sir Bird take us there.

"Sir Bird, that way please."

Why, I think it's a castle. Have you ever been to a real live castle before? There used to be a lot of them in the old days, before you and I were born, and before there were shopping malls. Now you can only find most of them where we are, in the Enchanted Kingdom. But few people know how to get here, unless you tell them. And I'm sure not going to tell anyone. It's a secret just between you and me. Nobody knows where we are, and even if we told them they wouldn't believe us. So we are safe, here on top of Sir Bird, way up in this warm sky.

Careful now, we are coming in for a landing. Be sure to swallow so your ears don't plug up. That happens to me every time I fly around on a bird. Especially eagles because they like to dive down at full speed and swoop back up above the highest mountain top. Wow! We're going to land right on top of a flagpole! Don't get off yet, I think Sir Bird is stopping so that we can have a bird's eye view of the castle. I hope you are not afraid of heights because it is a long way down. Let's just peak over the wing. Magnificent! Can you say magnificent? I know it's one of those big words that can make

the tongue tired very quickly, but the view is good enough for such a hard word.

Magnificent! The castle is all made out of white stone. I think it's called marble. Have you ever seen marble before? It's very shiny and white and feels like glass. That big square below us must be the courtyard. That's where people play when they aren't running around in the meadow. See, in the corner on the right, there's a family of frogs playing musical chairs. Can that be possible? They seem to think so. They're not like any frogs I've met before. These crazy frogs have clothes on! Look! The littlest frog is pointing at us. He's jumping up and down. I think he wants us to come down and play with him. What do you think? Should we? It's getting kind of uncomfortable sitting on top of a flagpole. Why don't you ask Sir Bird to take us down there? Heere we go!

"Thank you, Sir Bird, that was a very pleasant trip."

Here comes the little frog hopping toward us. Goodness, he has a wig on. A red wig.

"Hello, little frog with a red wig on."

"Nice of you to drop in. My name is Prince Frederick."

"Are you a real prince?"

"Certainly. But what kind of bird are you?"

"We're not birds. We're humans."

"What's that?"

I'm not really sure how to tell him. Do you know how to describe a human? We can't tell him that we are talking creatures, because he is too. I've got it! We can travel to the Enchanted Kingdom and back again, and he is stuck here. That makes us different.

"Why...Little frog, I mean, Prince Frederick, what are you doing on your knees? Your white pants will get all muddy."

"You must help me, my strange flying friends. Help me, please."

Boy, he sure looks upset, doesn't he?

"I am a prisoner here..."

"A prisoner? But you looked so happy playing musical chairs."

"I have been kidnapped!"

"Kidnapped?"

"Yes, kidnapped. My home is on a lovely pond far on the other side of the mountains. You should visit sometime. The King has gone to supervise the building of another castle. And he has left Harold-the-Nasty in charge. And Harold is doing terrible, terrible things."

"Like what?"

"Like kidnapping all the frog-princes. Even though he doesn't even like water, he wants to be the boss of the pond. He wants all the attention. You see, it makes him very jealous when the crickets and the lizards and especially the butterflies bow to anybody else but him. Oh no! Here he comes. I must hop back and pretend to play."

Poor Prince Frederick. So far from his peaceful pond. And forced to play musical chairs when he doesn't even feel like it. Don't you think we should help him? But how? Look, there's Prince Harold-the-Nasty. He looks a lot like a mean gerbil I once knew. Except that mine didn't have a mustache and rings on his pinkies.

What a strange French poodle he has by his side. Have you ever seen a French poodle wearing an ostrich feather in his cap? How gracefully he dances on his hind legs. Let's hide behind this large barrel before they see us. Hurry, bend down! Prince Harold is looking this way! Did you see those mean little eyes? They're all red, except for a tiny black dot in the middle. It gives me the shivers just to look at him. And did you see those two sharp front teeth hanging over his lower lip?

I wonder why the King would leave such an unpleasant fellow to watch over his gentle creatures? Can you figure it out? I sure can't...Unless He wants us to learn how to care for each other during difficult situations. And Prince Harold-the-Nasty is a difficult situation! Don't you have a strong desire to help that nice frog-prince so that he can return to his peaceful pond where the lilly pads are so soft?

Look, the French poodle just tripped Prince Frederick and everybody is laughing at him. Do you know why everybody is laughing at that poor little frog? Because Harold-the-Nasty is laughing and everybody is afraid of him so they laugh to keep that ugly gerbil from getting mad at them! You know, I'm sure that when the good King returns, he is not going to be happy to find that nobody helped Prince Frederick. He will think that we are all as nasty as Harold-the-Nasty. That means that his tulips will no longer wave at us, and that Sir Bird might not come to give us a ride anymore.

I have a plan! You whistle for Sir Bird to fly down here. Sure, you can whistle. Just try it. And I'll run across the courtyard, grab Prince Frederick in my arms, and we'll jump onto Sir Bird and fly away. How does that sound? You would rather run across the courtyard and grab the Prince? Allright. But be careful, if that big nasty gerbil catches you, he might force you to play musical chairs all night. I whistle and you run, right? Are you ready? GO!

Here comes Sir Bird down from the sky! Hurry, the French poodle just saw you! Is Prince Frederick too heavy to carry? Put him on your shoulders. Oh no! Prince Harold-the-Nasty is coming toward you! He is raising his tiny arms and squeaking. I think he is really mad! Run! Run toward me! Sir Bird is about to land. Heavens! You've tripped and fallen! The French poodle is about to grab your ankle! I'm jumping onto Sir Bird. Grab onto my hand as we rise into the air. Hold tight! Prince Frederick is hanging onto your left foot. Heeeere we go, rising way high up into the sky! Look below, Prince Harold is shaking his fist at us and the French poodle is yapping naughty words (in a foreign language, luckily). Sir Bird is going to stop on the branch of that big tree in the meadow so that you and Prince Frederick can climb onto his back and join me. Are you allright? You look a little out of breath.

I must say, you were very courageous! I'm proud of you. How about you, Prince Frederick, are you allright?

"Ribbit!"

I think he is at a loss for words because he is so happy!

CHAPTER THREE

We are now flying over the mountains on the way to Prince Frederick's home. Look at the snow on top of those high peaks, and the forests spreading way down into the valleys. Can you imagine all the strange creatures that live in these mountains, in the caves and the woods, and underground? We'll have to visit there someday.

Listen to Prince Frederick. He's snoring. He has had a hard time being held captive. Don't you feel good about saving him? It is such a wonderful, warm feeling inside to do something for someone else and not to think about yourself. That's what makes people courageous and kind and loving. And you know what? This is another secret of the Enchanted Kingdom. This is what makes everything so gentle and warm and beautiful. Giving! The flowers give us their perfume. Sir Bird gives us his wings. The Great Gardener gives us the meadow and His castles, the sky and the mountains to visit so that we can learn about giving. He even gives us you and me. He brought us together so that we could take this trip and save Prince Frederick! Look, way down below, there is the lilly pond.

My goodness, do you see all those frogs hopping around on the lilly pads? There must be hundreds of them! And they are all waving at us. Why don't you shake Prince Frederick and wake him up?

"You are home, Prince Frederick."

"Home? Home!"

Have you ever seen a frog cry with happiness? Don't make a face because he's kissing you. It may be a little wet, but it's full of love. Sir Bird is circling lower and lower. Now we can see the faces of all those happy frogs. Look at the one who is bouncing up and down, higher than all the rest. He has a white beard and little glasses. He must Prince Frederick's dad. We are going to land.

Heere we go. Down, down, down, right onto a lilly pad in the middle of the pond. Prince Frederick hops off to hug his family. Isn't it wonderful to see so many happy frogs? Even Sir Bird is smiling, and that's hard to do with a beak. Look, to your left, there is a blue butterfly coming toward us. Hey, she is landing on your shoulder. Now don't be shy just because she kisses you on the cheek. Listen carefully, she is whispering something in your ear.

"Come back soon..."

Sir Bird is rising into the clear blue sky. He is taking us to the meadow beyond the mountains. It's time to go back to our world.

But remember, my dear companion, there are many more creatures to meet and many more adventures to share in the Enchanted Kingdom. It will always be here, waiting for our return. And do you know why? Because this magic kingdom was made for you and for me. It's like a summer home. And since it's always summer here, we can visit anytime. Just close your eyes, feel good inside, smile, and float away on the wings of your imagination.

THE END
