

SPRINGSHINE

In which the land awakens when a magical Horn is heard to sing,
and the madcap Scatterdance of Spring begins.

Once upon a New Year's Day, over the hills and faraway, in a little village called Merry May, the villagers awoke to find their fields and gardens full of froaks.

All along the valley of Merryvale, where ifflepinns in roundy-houses dwell, doors and windows opened in excitement at the sight. Inside his Ifflesnug, young Iffleplum awakened suddenly startled in his bed. The sound of froaksong echoed in his head. And soon his sleepy soft-brown button eyes began to shine—*for now he realised what day it was!* And his fat face dimpled in a curling grin, around his pale mauve oval nose—peculiar to the ifflepinn.

At a glance it could be seen that Iffleplum was no ordinary ifflepinn: but then—no ifflepinn ever is.

“At last!” he cried. “It’s *Froaksday!* And the *First of Spring!*” His little lilac nose grew rosy with delight. And with a whoop and a bound he cartwheeled out of bed. Throwing his bedroom window wide, he looked out upon the Merryvale. On every side, as far as the eye could see, like round green rubber bouncing balls, all over the lawn and across the fields beyond the stream, the froaks were all a-frolicking!

For miles around a quagmire choir of croaky voices resounded in the frosty air. *Ko-ac! Ko-ac! Ko-ac!* the froaks all sang. And the din they made was deafening! It echoed in the woody hills and dales as far as the Mauven Mountains in the west. And not an early bird was heard above

the noise. But the country folk around all found the croaking sounds far sweeter than the song of birds that day: for now they knew that spring had come at last.

For when the water-froaks awakened from their winter sleep (beneath the ice and windy snows) and rose upon the surface of the rivers and the streams, then spring had truly come. And the *First of Spring* was New Year's Day ¹—in the land of Ælfylon. In fact, they could not have a New Year's Day, until the froaks awoke.

But now, without a doubt the froaks were out! Here, there and everywhere—from ponds and pools and water-tubs, they peeped with cheeky grins, their skins all smooth and new: and they hopped about and chortled with the joys of spring—you know, the way they do.

Iffle-mother Mumkin, busy baking pastries in the oven, heard Iffleplum bouncing around his bedroom overhead. “*Plumkin!* It's brekker-time!” she called. “Come you down?”

No way!—thought Iffleplum fancifully—*For I know full well the goblin cook has poisoned the porridge! O! Thou scurvy knave! Thou shalt not catch Sir Plumkin unawares!* “Coming, Mumkin!” he called out, as he and his fiery dream-horse came galloping down the stairs.

“*Sunny New Spring!*” said Mumkin, as he cantered into the kitchen.

“*May Springshine make your heart sing!*” said Iffleplum, correctly answering.

As always, Mumkin looked a treat. The tufty-topknot on her head and her long and floppy peachbloom ears, were washed and brushed and neat. A simple necklet made of fancy wooden beads was all the finery she

¹ This is usually around 15th March in Ælfylon (pronounced *el-fa-lon* or *el-fuh-lon*).

cared to wear, except for a polka-dotted pink pinafore and a pair of woolly winter frostboots on her feet.

She pressed her warm and floury nose to Iffleplum's rosy one in greeting and wrapped him in a loving hug. "O Mumkin!" said Iffleplum happily. "The froaks are out! They *only* are! Is Erf about?"

"Well, I've not yet heard his special croak. So I suppose he's still asleeping in the water butt. Let's you and I go out and look."



The family froak had wintered in a wooden water-barrel beneath the thatch, outside the snugger of ifflepinns. An *iffle-snug* is a kind of roundy-house, shaped somewhat like an old-fashioned kitchen pepper pot, with whitewashed walls and latticed windows and a roof of plaited straw. In the middle was a brightly orange-painted oval door, which opened at the top and bottom, for visitors both large and small. And here

Ole Ifflepaw (the father of the family) liked to lean upon the bottom half and smoke his pipe, and gaze across the orchard to the brook. Within the arch above the door, there hung a wooden sign on which the cottage name was carved in curly letters:

Ifflenook

The very last of winter's frost was steaming from the thatch. Dewdrops dankly dripped from the cottage eaves into the barrel of water below, which already was filled to its mildewed brim. Iffleplum tried peering in. But it was too dark and green to see a thing. And the water chilled his rosy nose to a paler shade of mauve.

"Can't see anything," he said. "But I'm sure he's still asleep." He kicked the barrel peevishly. "Erf! You soggy sink-sponge of a froak! Come out of there!"

"O Plumkin!" said Iffle-mother chidingly. "Let him be. You were late yourself today. So wait until he wakes up properly."

"*Hur!*" grizzled Iffleplum. "If I don't wake him, he'll miss the Froaksday Fair again! Erf can sleep until the summer comes and dries up every drop of water in his tub. He *only* can!"

"Why that's a mercy then!" said Granpaw, coming up behind. "That'll be one less daft doolally froak to muck up all the seed-beds I just made. I spent half the mornin' a-fixin' up froak-nets to keep 'em orf. And the other half gettin' out froaks and other froggy folk what got themselves trapped inside."

“G’morning Gramps!” said Iffleplum. “A Sunny New Spring to you!” The old ifflepinn pressed his wrinkled snout to Plumkin’s nose in greeting, as all the *Ummals*² of Ælfylon do.



Granpaw was a white-whiskered old gardener, who loved nothing more than ‘messaging about in muck’ as he called it. And since he lost his snuggle-mate, he chose to live alone in the potting shed among his beloved plants. “May your little heart sing,” he replied. “But you best let sleeping froaks lie—deep in their barrel-beds, say I.”

² *Ummals* are the talking animals of Ælfylon; and *dummals* are those who can only bark, or whinny, or cackle or bleat, or gobble or grunt, or bubble and squeak.

“No way!” said Iffleplum. “I want him out! You know last year, I waited by his barrel—for a wasting week I did. Until the frolic and the feasting was all done. And then he woke at last—espeshly *last!* He woke and cried: ‘*Surprise! Surprise! Am I too soon?*’—Some joke. My mauven nose had frosted blue by then, like the bloom of a new-picked plum.”

“*Arr!* He were no more than a froakling then,” said Granpaw. “Now he’s growed. He’ll know it’s Froaksday soon enough, you’ll see.”

“*Hur!* he had better!” grunted Iffleplum. “But where’s Ole Ifflepaw? He should be here when Erf wakes up.”

Iffle-mother Mumkin looked troubled suddenly. “Where do you think?” she said. She tipped her head towards the hill that rose beyond the garden gate. “I fear he’s up there on *The Rise* again. While you were still abed, he’s been out with his sailor’s-eye spyglass since *froakrise* in the early morn. As anxious as a mother duck he is today.”

“O gripes!” groaned Iffleplum. “Not on Froaksday too! He’ll miss the Scatterdance and all the fun. He *only* will.” His little lilac nose dimmed down to a pearly shade of pale.

All through the winter long he had watched his father growing gloomier every day. For every morning, noon and night, he went away alone upon the hill and scanned the roads and river with his spyglass: forever watching out for some strange and worrisome thing he thought was on the way. It was not very comforting. But what it was he would not say.

Iffle-mother’s nose had also grown a little grey. “Well, while we’re waiting for our dozy froak to wake,” she said, distracting him from gloomy thoughts, “why don’t you nip up there and fetch your father down?”

“O! But I smell baking cakes!” said Iffleplum. “I’ve just got up! I haven’t even had my *Wakes*.”³

Iffle-mother whisked back in and brought him out a bulgy little bag. Plumkin’s nose went pink with pleasure at the smell.

“Gingerbread froaks!” he cried. “Still oven warm!” And he set off munching happily.

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Meanwhile, Ole Ifflepaw took the telescope from his eye and sighed. He pushed his Captain’s cap to the back of his head and wrinkled his snout in perplexity. From where he stood, on top of *The Rise*, he had a clear view of the countryside for miles around. But there was nothing new to see. At first he had looked the right way, then the wrong way down his telescope: but it made no difference. Big or small, the view was still the same.

No sign of anything unusual.

The wide brown river Elventear wound slowly round the foot of *The Rise* below, and went on flowing like a swollen slow-worm down the

³ **Wakes**—is the first food of the day for ifflepinns; just a little bit of something and a hot cup as they rise (hardly counted). This is followed soon by breakfast—called ‘breakfirsts’ if there is a chance of break-seconds available. Then comes **Minch**, the mid-morning meal, and later **Muncheon** at midday. And just about mid-afternoon comes **Tiffin**-time, with muffins, toast or cake. Then later on, the evening meal at sunset into twilight, is known as **Wyning** (from dining at the waning of the day.) And lastly there was **Snug**: a lightweight bedsack round the fire (to stave off the grumbles of a hard night’s hibernation). These are the *main* meals of the day.

vale. There was only a lonely Umbelope in a rowing boat and roister of River-Pogs out for a sail.

The waiting was getting on his nerves.

He stared moodily down the river, absently sucking the ends of his floppy ears for comfort. But they were numb with cold. So he rolled them up and tucked them under his Captain's cap for warmth. He had never even seen the sea: but it was a cap he always wore when watching the boats sail to and fro.

He began to chunter to himself, in his rich slow-speaking country voice. "Now look you here Ole Ifflepaw—just what do you think you're awaiting for? You can't be *sure* that something dreadful's on the way. Well, that's what Iffle-mother said."

He could hear her arguefying in his head: "You might be right, me dear," he told himself. "Doddering old dimwit that I am. I don't even know if I got the message right. That there Soothsayer—who *warned* me with his words of woe—might well have been as witless as a Wim-Wom. Who's to know? I must be soft as muck to be taken up with such a tale." He frowned and thought again.

"But I dunno," he muttered, "somehow what he said seemed true at the time. Though Mumkin seems to take it with a pinch of salt. But then, she wasn't *there*. She never saw the strange look in his staring yellow eyes! Fair gave me the creeps it did. So better safe than sorry is what I say. I reckon it's wiser to keep on a-watching out awhile longer, till the danger's past. And something strange is in the air today."

He turned away from the river and raised the telescope again. His gaze swept over the cottage roof and the Ifflebrook, across the fields and up to the village of Bumble-on-the-Hill, where the Wossle Wood began. And higher still, to where a tall stone tower, overgrown with ivy, rose out of the ridge of wintry treetops, its conical cap of coloured tiles sparkling

in the bright spring sun. There his friend Wood-Warden Cuppicks lived. He focussed on the windows of his den. Normally he could always see him scribing at his desk. But now the old Umbelope himself was nowhere to be seen. Even at that distance, in the clear morning air, Ifflepaw could faintly hear the rooks from the rookery cawing round the tower.

He swivelled round and followed the river Elventear downstream again. All along the length of Merryvale he peered, until it disappeared around a bend. From there the river went beyond his ken. It slowly gathered speed and rushed and wound through many a rocky roaring gorge, before it burst from the mountains out into the wild and unknown lower lands beyond, on its way to the Silver Sea. But Ifflepaw knew no more of the Outlands than the tales that travellers told.

Above the snowy Mauven Mountain peaks he spied a golden eagle circling on the wind and watched it for a while. Then he swung his spyglass slowly down to where the mountains dwindled into woody hills, which came roundly rolling down in smaller mounds to the meadowlands below. With winter woods upon their backs, the huddled hills lay crouched like giant hedgehogs steaming in the morning sun. Around their feet ran a ribbon of road from the riverside village of Merry May. All along it he could now see streams of excited ifflepinns and other oddling ummal-folk. Crowds were swarming out to the Festive Field from every whichaway.

What in Ælfylon, was going on? He focussed clearly on the field. Brightly coloured booths and tents were going up. Flags and pennants were wormling in the breeze. He could see jugglers, clowns and acrobats, all practising, preparing for the Froaksday Fair. “My hat!” he cried. “The fair’s already on! I clean forgot! It’s *Froaksday*! What will Plumkin say if I’m not there before the Scatterhorn is blown?”

He rummaged in his Hatbag and pulled one out. The villagers of Merry May had a whiskery joke that Ole Ifflepaw had let hats go to his head. For he always wore a special hat for every different deed he did. This helped him on his dreamy-noddled way about. Whenever he was out and found his wits a-wandering, he simply tipped his hat to see which one he wore, then went upon his way once more, remembering the job in hand the hat was for. At home he kept a treasure trunk, crammed full to the brim with a jumble of curious hats collected down the years: a hat for every need. The old gold key he wore on a chain around his neck, was a fit for the lock of the lid to his trunk of delight.

Quickly doffing his Captain's cap, he swapped it for his 'Home-Going' hat, to remind him which way he was bound. Folding up his telescope Ifflepaw set off briskly down the hill.

Iffleplum came up and met him halfway down. As he ran to press his father's nose in greeting, he saw its lilac colour had now grown grey with worry. A sudden sadness rose in Plumkin's breast, for there seemed to be no Springshine in the heart of Ifflepaw. "Cheer up Iffykins, my dear old Dad!" said he. "Don't look so sad. It's *New Year's Day!* And your *Second Breakfast's* on the way. There's still a chance to eat again, before they start the Scatterdance! Come on!" He took his father by the waist and huggingly they ambled down.

Inside a clump of brittle bracken-fronds nearby, a wide-eyed something watched them closely as they passed. The fronds were stealthily pushed aside and a pair of staring yellow eyes peered out. They watched until the ifflepinns were out of sight. Then a hairy creature all wrapped around in ragged black, slipped silently out behind them. Creeping from rock to bush, and hedge to tree, it followed them unseen, right down as far the garden gate. As soon as the ifflepinns went inside,

it wriggled its way under the border hedge and searched for a place to hide and spy.

While the ifflepinns were heartily tucking-in to their second breakfast, or *Minch*—the mid-morning meal, a frisky ring of froaks outside were making merry round the water-butt. In a ring-o’rosie circle dance, they sang a Froak-Arousing song and beat upon the barrel-boards with their tiny wet-webbed fists. Then they scampered away laughing in froggy-throated glee, *Oich! Oich! Oich!*

Inside the barrel, Erf slowly unwrinkled his mind from Wintersleep and wondered if he was awake. He yawned: a most unwise breath to take when sitting on the bottom of a brimful butt. But he did: and his cheeks chubbed out and smothered his shout with a mouthful of icy wet. He gave a hiccup, somersaulted and rose feet first from the water, bobbing about the barrel like an apple.

“*Stroofpt!* I fink I’ve woken up!” he cried and tried a froaky *oich!* or two. Beyond the thatch above his head, the sky was blue and the sun shone warmly down. Erf splashed about and floated idly on his back, sunning his upturned apricot tum with newt-like limbs outspread. And all around was the *perfect* sound of froaks and frogs and warty toads, with melodiously odious voices, all belching from pond to pond. The birds were trilling in the trees and *O!* but it was a glorious morning! He heard the creak of the kitchen window open wide and scrumptious pie-and-cakey baking smell came wafting warmly to his nose. Erf sniffed the air in ecstasy.

And suddenly a soggy slop of leafy sludge fell *splat!* across his snout.

Hee-hee-hee! a merry shout of glee was heard not far above his head. A cluster of coal-black eyes shone down a-twinkle in the shadow of the

eaves. The fringe of muggy, moist and tunnelled thatch was thickly overrun with squirmy little things.

They had wings like bats and ears as large as cabbage leaves. These were the Eavesdroppers who lived in cluttery holes in the riddled roof. Unluckily they had chosen today to set about playfully cleaning them out—and Erf was in the way.

Now when just waking up from a weary Wintersleep, such springtime silliness disgruntled him. (And he was never *very* grunted at the best of times).

He rolled around to rinse himself. And right away another shower of soggy sweepings fell *splat!* upon his head. He let out such a frightful yell that eavesdroppers came swiftly dropping from the eaves. Yittering like flittermice on flimsy wings, they zoomed about and snortled through their roomy noses, leaving little trails of frosty vapours in the air.

“Filfy fings!” cried Erf. “You filfy icky leaves-droppers!”

Inside the roundy-house, the ifflepinns heard the wroth of a woken froak in full croak, cursing the play of eavesdroppers. “He’s woken up!” cried Iffleplum. “Hooray!” He jumped up quickly from the table. Grabbing a birch-broom by the door, he holloped to the rescue, waving it on high. *Fear not, good friend! O faithful froak!* thought he. *Here comes Sir Plumkin of the Vale! His gallant heart shalt smite the foe! Have at ye, varlets!* And his make-believe battle-axe swirled about his head as he hewed the fleeing foe. The air cleared as the eavesdroppers scrambled for their holes, deftly avoiding the sting of the birch-broom on their bottoms.

“Sunny New Spring!” said Plumkin in a cheery way (which is actually the correct thing to say to someone who has just woken from a Wintersleep.)

“*Burp!*” said Erf (which is a very bad habit froaks have: frogs are just the same. You can’t take them anywhere).

“Sunny New Spring!” cried three voices from behind, as the family gathered round to greet him.

“May Springshine fill all your hearts!” said Erf warmly. “And may it shrivel up certain fings wif beady-eyes, wot flies and lives in eaves.” He glared meaningfully towards the thatch. And the thatch snickered softly to itself.

“And how’s my Sunny-New-Spring froak?” said Ifflepaw. “Okey-doke? How did the winter go with you?”

“How should I know?” said Erf. “I’ve been asleep. Apart from frozen nose and knees, and toes and tail and teef—I’m fine.”

Iffle-mother stood him on the barrel-rim and kissed the crown of his icy head. “*Hoo! You are cold!*” she said, rubbing him briskly down with her apron-front (which delightfully smelled of mother-warm, baking and hot-buttered toast).

“Should fink I am!” retorted Erf. “You’d be too! if you slept froo the winter in a tub of fick ice! You might have fort to put it somewhere warm.”

“Oh you poor little frozling,” said Iffle-mother, tweaking his tiny tail. “Well howzabout a tiny tot of something hot, to keep away the chill. You are looking rather green about the gills.”

“It’s only slime,” said Erf contentedly. “It grows on you in time. But fankyou, Mumkin. It’s hard to wait the Winterlong before your breakfast in the Spring. And my tum tells me it’s time for Wakes.”

“And Wakes it is!” said Iffleplum, as Mumkin bustled back indoors. He numbly fumbled in his pockets, which was odd, as ifflepinns have no clothes.

But then they do have what they call ‘pouch-pockets’ in their skin: and slotted in the very trouser-pocket place they need to be. So anyone with frosty paws had a handy ever warm and wetproof pocket-pouch to put them in. “Here we are!” said Iffleplum. “A speshly freshly baked sunflower seed and pondweed cake. Mumkin made it when she saw the *froakrise* on the Ifflebrook early on.”

As Iffle-mother brewed a bowl of hot toddy on the stove, Ole Ifflepaw softly sidled by with his brassbound telescope beneath his arm. His eyes were glazed like someone walking in his sleep.

“Oh no! Not *again!*” said Mumkin, catching sight of the Captain’s cap he wore. “It’s too much!” But Ifflepaw seemed not to hear and dreamily opened the back kitchen door.

“Iffy!” cried Mumkin in alarm. She clapped her hands together with a smack. Startled, Ifflepaw awakened from his trance. He looked at her bewilderedly. She pointed to his head. Feeling with his fingers, he felt the peak of his Captain’s cap. “Oh,” he said sheepishly. Then, suddenly noticing the telescope, he tried to hide it behind his back.

“I didn’t realise I was off again,” said he. “That hairy old creature’s warning is preying on my mind, I guess. I suppose I was on my way to have a last lookout. Just in case, eh?” He gave an unconvincing wink and grin.

“But you’ve already been up there half the morning!” scolded Mumkin. “Why not forget it for today? Come on—*eh?* Enjoy your silly self for once. And put that worrisome thing away. At least on Froaksday cast your cares aside.”

“But Mumkin-mine! Don’t you realise? By *Froaksday* it was due to come. That’s what the Soothsayer said: ‘*Ere the fearful Day of Froak is done!*’ And that’s *today!* The *last* day of the prophecy.” Ifflepaw frowned. “It might come upon us anytime. We have to be prepared. I’ve a mind to tell young Iffleplum at last. We don’t know *where* he’ll be today.”

“Oh *please!*” said Iffle-mother. “Not just yet. He’s been so looking forward to the fair. Let him have his fun and play awhile first. It would be a shame to scarify our Plumkin too, on such a larky day. And who’s to say that crystal-gazing creature wasn’t as crazy as a cuckoo in the spring? And nothing’s happened yet, for all your watching and a-worriting.”

“Not yet, maybe,” said Ifflepaw darkly. “But I feel anxious in my bones. At least we ought to see that Iffleplum is on his guard today.”

“But even if the tale was true,” said Iffle-mother, “I can’t see what the likes of us could do against a thing like that—can you?”

“Look, I’m a-doing what I can!” retorted Ifflepaw. “Don’t you understand? That’s why I’m watching out. If we can see it from afar, we might have time to get away. But if we don’t tell our Iffleplum—well you know what he’s like—he’ll run towards it when it comes, and not the other way!”

“All right,” said Mumkin, “but let me break it to him gently then. I’ll try to tell him in a way he won’t be worried. And if he stays among the crowds at Froaksday Fair, no harm can come to him among the ummals there. Now you just go and put your ‘*Sunny-New-Spring*’ hat back on, and then we’ll—”

But as she spoke, from faraway over the forested hills, came the sound of a Wondrous Horn. Its deep and mellow song was magical. And the swelling sound came rolling over the land like an unseen tide. It gambolled over hills and vales and thrilled the grasses in the fields below

as if it was a breeze. And as it came the skies were of a sudden filled with startled birds. It boomed along the Merryvale and the villagers all paused, or scrambled out of doors with shining eyes. For it tingled in the hearts and toes of everyone who heard.

And every heart was gladdened as it came.

A thrumming hum of aftersound came running like a thundery river underground, arousing every growing thing around with a song of rising sap. Sleepy flower-eyes slowly opened in the greening meadows as the Hornsong rolled on by. It rippled upwards through the roots of trees towards their crowns. And with the sound their woody winter-sleeping hearts awoke. Beneath the bark of beech and birch and mighty oak, lay drowsy wood-fays dreaming of the spring: webwoven in the wooden dark. Now awakened in surprise, the faery-deevers of the trees sprang up and dashed the dusty cobwebs from their eyes. Quickly then they crept from musty cracks and holes wide-eyed, to watch the giddy goings-on outside.

Hark! Hark! The Scatterhorn resounds! the folk all cried, and set aside their chores to dance. Then everywhere the ground began to sprout with pinky wrinkled snouts and the tiny hairy heads of the last of the weary winter lie-abeds. Up came dozy dormice, hedgehogs, Meadow-Pogs and moles, peering bleary and bewilder-eyed about their holes at all the noise. Now other horns were sounding down the vale, for the mountain-folk had blown their own, like a herd of lost cows lowing in the hills. And all across the countryside, from every burrow, hamlet, hole and hill, the ummals and the dummals all took up the cry. *HAROOOM!* they sang in echo of the Mighty Horn of Spring, which awakens every living thing in the Ummal-land of Ælfylon.

It was impossible to feel down when the sound of the Horn thrilled through the land. Even Ole Ifflepaw forgot his fears awhile. He slapped his Sunny-New-Spring hat back on his head and hurried out with a trayful of steaming toddy bowls. “You wrap your chilly chops round that, my froaky lad,” he said. “It’ll make your hairs curl.”

Erf had only two hairs on his head. But they were long, for a froak, and he was proud of them.

Ifflepaw raised his toddy bowl: “*All hail—*”

“*Wassail!*” cried the others heartily, as they clunked their wooden cups together and tossed the hot stuff down their throats. And then they too began to caper round, as springtime silly as the froaks.

On the hillside over Bumble way, a sudden crash of cymbals rent the air. Somewhere a brass band had begun to play. They could hear it *oomphing* uncertainly into tune. The blare of wobbly music came drifting down from the Wossle Wood. And very soon, over the brow of Bumble Hill, the players on parade came proudly stepping into view. But now a bright and merry music filled the air as they all came marching down.

Boomp! Crash! Boomp! Crash!

The drums and clashing cymbals excited stragglers everywhere to hurry on their way. Crowds of ummalkin were following on behind and other folk came rushing in to join them from the woods on either side.

“It’s the Bumble Umbelope’s Brass Band!” cried Iffleplum. “Come on! It’s Time! They’re going to start the Scatterdance!”

They scrambled for their Scatterbags and baskets full of leaves, stacked ready waiting in the woodshed for the Dance. Dried leaves for scattering across the land, in memory of the autumn trees reborn again

in spring. As the family dashed quickly in and out, a pair of owlish yellow eyes ducked down behind a stack of wood.

When the ifflepinns had gone, a hairy little creature warily crept out and stealthily followed them down the lane.

By now the band was at the bottom of the hill. The parade was passing by the old stone humpbacked bridge across the Ifflebrook, at the end of the little lane that led up to Ifflenook. A lively procession of bobbing heads came whirling and twirling on behind. The family hastily hurried down the lane to mingle with the merry throng.

But the ragged shadow was never far behind.

Sneaking along behind the hedgerows in the fields and hiding here and there, it secretly followed them all the way to the Froaksday Fair.

The Festive Field was already filled with ummalkin when the Bumble Umbelope's Band came marching in. Then all the people raised a cheer: "*The Daisy-Ringle Dance!*" they cried. "Now let's begin!" All over the field the ummal-folk were forming circles everywhere. The band struck up the *Oaky-Froaky* song, inviting everyone to sing along and join the *Scatterdance of Spring*.⁴

Iffleplum joined hands in a dancing ring—and skipped and twirled without a care.

But little did he know what the day would bring!

The Scatterdance

⁴ If you want to know how the Scatterdance is done, see after this chapter.

The *Scatterdance of Spring* was as old as the hills. The ummal-folk had danced this rousing Rite of Awakening each and every year since time out of mind. After the *Great Piper* had blown his Horn and wholly woken all the land, then—and *only* then—the *Scatterdance of Spring* began.

Throughout the land the folk linked hands and did the *Daisy-Ringle Circle Dance*, now called the ‘*Oaky-Froaky*’ by the country folk. Although the tune remains somewhat the same, the words of long ago have changed and lost themselves along with the meaning of this sacred celebration. Its ancient beauty gone, the way they dance it nowadays is raucous, rustic and lots of fun. Firstly, all the dancers ring around a mound of autumn leaves and sing:

*“O we all do the Oaky-Froaky!
O we all do the Oaky-Froaky!
You throw your fat froak in!
And snuffle with your snout!
Sniff-snout! In-out!
Shakes the leaves about!
Seek out your Oaky-Froaky,
Twirl around and shout:
Hooray! all the froaks are out—Heigh!”*

And with the cry of *Heigh!* the nearest froak is *oops-a-daisied*, topsy-turvy head-over-heeled and hurled into the leaf pile. Then all the dancers shuffle inwards on their knees and thrust their snuffling snouts in and out of the leaves to the sway of the song. As soon as the froak is found again, they raise each other’s finger-twined paws and rise, step-skipping outwards in a widening ring: a movement known as ‘Opening the eye of Spring’ or ‘The Daisy Awakening.’ And then trolling like the cows come home, the clod-humping circle stumbles around, one way widdershins and then the other.

When the ringled froak escapes the whirling feet at last, the dancing daisy-ring unwinds. Then in a line the dancers peel away like a snake between the trees. And

this they call a 'Scatter-snake:' for as they dance—like merry farmers sowing seeds—
from baskets laden light with leaves, they cast the crispy old clothes of autumn trees
into the air upon the breeze. They say this shows the way the Wheel of Seasons rolls
around, for in the fall it strips the trees. And then all through the Winterlong the
fallow land swallows up the lifeless leaf and in the New Year pouts it greenly from
the ground again in a sudden sheen of spring.