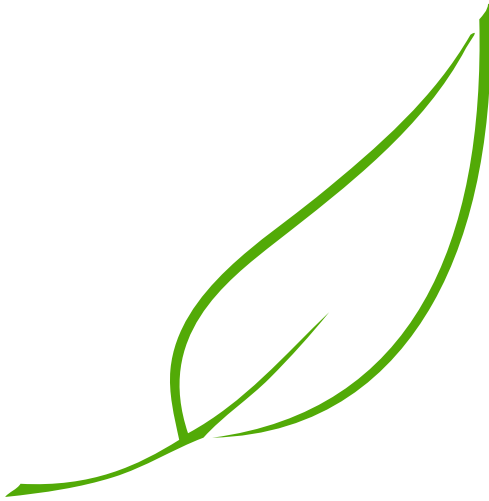


RIBBIT

by Ken Bradbury



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(Two frogs, Gumph and Harold, sit upon their haunches at the side of a pond. Their big eyes blink lazily and their jaws move in a bored up and down motion. Occasionally, one frog will take a huge breath, extending his belly fully, then exhaling. This goes on for some time before either frog speaks.)

Gumph: Ribbitt.

Harold: *(after a pause, slowly turns his head to Gumph)*
What?

Gumph: *(stares at him a moment, then)* I said,
“Ribbitt.”

Harold: I know what you said. I heard you. Now what did you mean?

Gumph: *(a take, then)* Mean? It doesn’t mean anything, Harold. You ever ask a dog what “Arf!” means? He doesn’t know. He’s a dog. I’m a frog. I say Ribbitt. There’s no explanation, just a sound. I’m just a Ribbitt kind of guy. OK? Now leave me alone!

Harold: *(after a long take as Gumph just sits there and Harold sneaks a few glances at him to see if he’s still mad)*
What’s the matter now?

Gumph: I don’t even feel like ribbitting now. You had to bring it up. It’s like riding a bike. Once you think about, you fall off.

Harold: *(a beat, then)* Frogs don’t ride bikes.

Gumph: You’re missing the point.

Harold: Sorry.

Gumph: Why do you always have to criticize everything I do? Look out there. This pond can’t be more than ten feet across! We’re the only two frogs! A two-frog pond! Two frogs and we can’t even get along.

Harold: Why are you getting so upset?

Gumph: You ruined my ribbitt.

Harold: I did not!

Gumph: You ... you drew my attention to it! I feel ... *(embarrassed)* ... well, I feel stupid ribbitting now. Makes me sound like a ... like a Frog!

Harold: Oh. *(thinks a minute, then)* Huh?

Gumph: Don't tell me. I *am* a frog!

Harold: Yeh. But that's not the point. I've been giving a lot of thought to this lately.

Gumph: To what? Being a frog? How can you give a lot of thought to being a frog? I mean, it takes like two seconds. *(thinking, then)* "I'm a frog!" End of the matter!

Harold: But if a frog really thought that all he was, was a frog, then ... well then ... I mean, life would be so ... so pointless.

Gumph: First you ruin my ribbitt and now you're calling me pointless?

Harold: Not exactly. It's just when you're so ... so limited by your frogness.

Gumph: I am? We are? ... Huh?

Harold: Any living thing's gotta believe they're more than they are, don't you know that? Cats gotta believe they're lions ... inside every earthworm there's a python just screaming to get out!

Gumph: I'll bet that hurts.

Harold: Can't you think on a higher level?

Gumph: How? I'm a frog!

Harold: Every living thing has this burning desire to improve himself! To reach for the highest flower on the lilypad.

Gumph: I do? The low ones are easier to reach. Are humans like this, too?

Harold: They're the worst. Every boy that comes to this fishing hole is dreaming of being something bigger.

Gumph: I thought they were tryin' to catch fish.

Harold: *(ignoring him)* Every girl, every grownup ... all of 'em! After all, Gumph, can't you dream just a little?

Gumph: Dream? How can I? You reminded me of my ... frogness! You made me think about my ribbitt! Dream? I'm lucky I still swim! Go jump in a lake. *(Harold looks at him.)* OK, forget that. We are in a lake ... go jump somewhere else. *(watches a fly go by, follows it closely with his eyes then suddenly lashes out with his tongue and grabs it, reeling it in quickly, smacking his lips and chewing, then finally swallowing with a pleased look on his face)*

Harold: Do you have to do that?

Gumph: What?

Harold: Eating flies. That is really disgusting.

Gumph: Listen fella, I'm a frog. I'm a frog kinda guy! That's the kinda things frogs do, get it? Don't you eat flies?

Harold: Once. Back in my ... my less enlightened days. Back before I saw the light at the end of the pond. *(sighs)* I'm sorry. I just thought ...

Gumph: What?

Harold: I just thought you dreamed of being ... I don't know ... being more.

Gumph: I did! Until a minute ago!

Harold: How can you ever hope to raise yourself up out of frogdom as long as you insist on behaving like a ... like a ...

Gumph: Go ahead and say it. "Like a frog."

Harold: Well ... yes. You see! It's sounds so ... so base ... so common and every day.

Gumph: So? I'm an every day frog! Every day I wake up, look at my reflection in the water and say, "Yep! Frog again!"

Harold: But ...

Gumph: "No change! Same old buggy eyes! Same old webbed feet! Same old frog!" Whadaya expect? A Swan?

Harold: No, but ...

Gumph: Maybe I should look again! *(looks into the pond, with sarcasm)* "Oh Gosh! Look at me! Green warts all over my body, an ugly red tongue, a belly that bloats in and out when I breathe ... but by golly! I think I'm a Swan! Sort of an ugly Swan, but a Swan!"

Harold: You're making fun of me now.

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