The Pool in the Jungle

Uma Anand
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Illustrator
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NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA
The Last of the Big Ones

The red-and-silver Dragonfly happily flitted across the pool:

"Zim, Zim, Zim,
    Over the water I skim.
Now dart in,
    Now dart out,
Dash across
    And turn about."

"Oh, bother," croaked a hoarse voice as with a plop, a large Bullfrog settled himself on a lily-pad. "A little less darting and dashing might be better all round. It's hot and dusty enough without your hovering above my head."
“Zim, Zim,
Listen to him
Grumble, grumble
Always grim.”

And the Dragonfly whizzed past.
“It’s no good talking to that one,” said a voice sharply.
The Bullfrog wheeled his big eyes around to the busy
bird pecking for worms by the edge of the pool. “Indeed,
it’s not. I see you’re as busy as ever.”

“A family to feed. No time for nonsense,” replied the
Hoopoe, as she dug the earth with her long curved beak,
her pretty black-and-white crest fanning out every time she
got a good mouthful.

“Things aren’t what they were,” grumbled the Bullfrog.
“My great grandfather used to say that in his day our pool
was a large lake with a dense jungle all around. Why, even
the Big Ones lived here.”
“Big Ones!” asked the Hoopoe, whose memory went back only two summers, “and where are the Big Ones now?”

“HERE!” A brown, furry object popped out of a burrow, sniffed the air cautiously, turned a somersault and fell with a thud on the ground.

“Hoo-po-po,” piped the Hoopoe flying up to the nearest branch.

“Awk!” croaked the Bullfrog diving into the pool.

“Ha! Ha!” laughed the newcomer, a large brown Hare.
“Really!” scolded the Hoopoe, “You are the silliest fellow I've ever come across.”

“One of these days,” croaked the Bullfrog surfacing again and settling himself on another lily-pad, “one of these days you’ll laugh yourself out of your skin.”

“Serve him right, it will,” said the Hoopoe, fluttering down once more to start her endless digging.

“All in fun. No harm meant,” said the Hare, twitching his whiskers. “But what’s all this about the Big Ones? Did he really see them?”

“The Biggest of the Big Ones,” boasted the Bullfrog, puffing himself up like an inflated balloon. “The last of the Elephants, the Great One herself. My great grandfather saw her,” he went on, sighing deeply and shrinking back to his normal size, “on the last day of her life.”

The Bullfrog liked nothing better than talking of “old times” and settling himself comfortably, began his tale:

“Once our jungle belonged to the Big Ones. It was a vast rich forest with Sal trees that stood even higher than the Big Ones themselves. Tall Haldu trees cast their shade over the smaller curry pat which in turn overshadowed orange lantana bushes. And there were Peepal and reeds growing along the banks of the stream.”

“Stream?” asked the Hoopoe.

“We know it now as Barsati Nullah,” explained the Bullfrog, “but then the nullah was never dry; it was a clear running stream that went all the way down to join the great river in the valley. In those days herds of Elephants roamed
our forest; Tigers and Leopards stalked Nilgai and spotted Cheetal. The howl of Wolves could be heard in the ravines and Wild Boar snuffled among the roots of the heavy undergrowth. Of course," admitted the Bullfrog honestly, "all this was much before my time. Even when I was a tadpole the Big Ones had already gone and the jungle—or what was left of it—was given over to us, the Little Folk. But in Bamboo Grove across Barsati Nullah..."

"Do you mean the Haunted Grove?" asked the Hoopoe, fanning out her crest feathers.

"In Bamboo Grove, across Barsati Nullah," repeated the Bullfrog who disliked interruptions, "the Big Ones were back, at least that’s what that chatterer, Blue Jay said as he flew screaming through the trees. ‘The Big Ones are back, are back, are back,’ he called—And he was right or almost right.” The Bullfrog gave a short laugh. “You know how he is, Blue Jay? Two of the Big Ones had returned to Bamboo Grove. One of them was the old Cow-Elephant who, so my great grandfather told me, had led the largest herd in the forest. The other was her half-grown calf.”

"Where had the rest of the herd gone," asked the Hare.

"That’s what my story is about, but you impatient young people won’t let me get on with it,” snapped the Bullfrog crossly. “The old Cow-Elephant was a great leader, wise and strong. Yet every year one or more of the herd were caught in the pits, dug by Man, the enemy. At last the other Elephants rebelled. ‘Let’s leave this evil place. Lead us to a home of safety. The enemy is taking away all our young ones. Each time they capture two or three. Soon there’ll be no one left. The others have escaped, let’s go too.’

"At first the old Elephant refused to leave. The jungle was her home. ‘No enemy can drive me away,’ she said. But the other Elephants trumpeted and the calves squealed, ‘Take us away, take us to safety!’ And so, reluctantly, the old Cow slowly led the way, up the banks of the nullah, up and away.”
"Where did she take them?" asked the Hoopoe.

The Bullfrog croaked wistfully. "They say there is a place, a wonderful, beautiful Paradise, far away where no enemy can harm the Big Ones, nor us Little Folk. Without our enemy, Man, our homes aren't burnt or cut down, nor are we hunted for our skins or fur. No terrible monsters blast our rock nor level our hillside. The streams are not dammed nor do lakes become pools. There all is as it always was."

The Little Folk were silent for a while. The Hoopoe even forgot to dig for worms. Then the Hare asked, "Can the Little Folk ever get to that Paradise?"

The Bullfrog looked around the pool. "This is our world. We are small. We could never get so far. I am certainly too old. How far would a few hops take me?"

"What was good enough for my parents is good enough for me and my young ones," said the Hoopoe primly. "But why did the old Cow return?"
"I don’t know," the Bullfrog said thoughtfully. "Perhaps she was too old to change. Elephants have long memories; perhaps she missed her home in the jungle and knowing she hadn’t long to live wanted to end her days there. Anyway, back she came, moving like a great grey shadow through the trees. The young calf padded along behind her but he was frisky. He waded into the pool, squirted water
over his back, and squealed with delight. Enjoying the sound of his voice, he trumpeted louder and louder.

“Oh dear!” cried the Hoopoe. “What a mistake! She should have stopped him. They must have heard him in the village below.”

“Yes,” croaked the Bullfrog, “they heard and they shouted, ‘The Big Ones are back! Let’s catch them!’ The next day they came with sticks and spears, gongs and drums, ropes and chains. They found the Elephants near the nullah. ‘Look, a young one. We can sell him to the zoo.’

‘Take him to the circus!’

‘Give him to the temple priest!’

‘Catch him first, you rascals,’ shouted their leader, who carried a cruel fire-stick. Bang! Bang! went the fire-stick.
The calf was frightened and ran here and there. His mother rushed to save him, scattering the yelling Men left and right, but they drove her off with their spears and the fire-stick. The calf didn't know the jungle. He turned towards the nullah, and fell into an old pit. In a flash they were upon him, and tying him with ropes and chains, hauled him out and dragged him away. Bang! Bang! went the fire-stick as the old Cow-Elephant tried to rescue her calf. The bullets stopped her in her tracks at the edge of the pit and she fell to her death.” The Bullfrog was quiet for a long time, then croaked softly, “She was the last of the Big Ones in our forest.”
All was quiet. It was as though even the woods paid tribute to the memory of the Big One who had lived there.

"Where is the Haunted Grove?" asked the hare breaking the silence. "You know the one Hoopoe spoke of."

"Oh that? That's a long story. I'll tell it to you some other day," and the Bullfrog dived into the pool, leaving a trail of bubbles to float across the water.
The Haunted Grove

The Hare hopped away from the pool, into the thick scrub. The Bullfrog had promised to tell the story of the Haunted Grove. But when? The Hare was impatient; perhaps he could find out on his own.

He made his way through the bushes, crossed the nullah, which was dry during the hot summer days, and boldly entered Bamboo Grove.

The Dragonfly saw the Hare disappear into the scrub and dipping low over the pool said,

"Zim, Zim, Zim,
Go after him,
There lies danger
For the stranger."

"Danger!" piped a musical voice. The Hoopoe looked down from her nest in the hollow of the Silk Cotton tree. "Oh, dear! What will happen to my young ones?"
Taking no notice of her, the Dragonfly skimmed above the still waters of the pool:

"Zim, Zim, Zim,
Let's look for him,
The spirit prowls
The thunder growls
The light grows dim."

A ripple disturbed the quiet pool and with a burst of bubbles the Bullfrog settled himself on a broken log that lay half in the water.

"Now, what's the matter?" he croaked grumpily.

"He spoke of danger," said the Hoopoe peeping out of her safe hollow. "I'm anxious for my young ones."
"What danger? Do talk sensibly!" But the Dragonfly, wings shimmering in the evening light, hummed again,

"...the spirit prowls
The thunder growls
The light grows dim,"

and away he darted, across the pool.

"Spirit? growl?" piped the Hoopoe, her crest feathers fanning and folding in agitation.

"Aw-awk!" croaked the Bullfrog, "I think I know what he means. It is full moon tonight."

"Oh dear! Oh dear, why ever did we speak of the Haunted Grove?" moaned the Hoopoe. "Do you think...?"

"How can I think, if you twitter so much," the Bullfrog said crossly and called out to the Dragonfly.

But there was no sign of him. All was dark and still over the pool.

Then a dancing moon-beam lit the waters and a big, shining silver moon rose high in the sky.

"Full moon tonight," mused the Bullfrog, rocking gently on the log in the water. "I wonder if Dragonfly..."

Before the Bullfrog could finish his sentence a shrill squeal rang through the woods. There was a rustle and a thud, as some frightened creature darted out of the scrub, crashed through the bushes and almost fell into the pool.

The log lurches as the Bullfrog leaped into the water. The Hoopoe melted into the depths of her nest in the hollow.

The Dragonfly began flitting over the waters agitatedly.

"Ha! I knew it," spluttered the Bullfrog, scrambling back on to the log. "It must be that foolish Hare." He peered at the farther bank, where a furry object lay in the reeds. "Is that you? Are you all right?" he called.

The Dragonfly darted across the pool, and hovered like a helicopter.

"K—K—eep q—quiet," stuttered the Hare trying hard to keep his teeth from chattering. He sat up, pulled himself
out of the reeds and gave himself a shake. “I’m p—perfectly fine!” he said in his usual boastful manner.

“Hm! What was your hurry?” asked the Bullfrog.

“Oh that,” the Hare laughed uneasily, looking over his shoulder towards the dark grove. “N—nothing. I thought I saw... that is... I felt—well, you know something pulled my tail,” he ended lamely. “It did... you know. Look!” And turning his back he pointed at his tail. The fur had been pulled out of the centre, leaving a small, bald patch.
“Zim, Zim, Zim,
The Ghost on his trail
Has bobbed his tail!”

“Go away, you horrid insect,” shouted the angry Hare,
waving his paws at the Dragonfly.

“What’s happening?” the Hoopoe peered out of her hollow. “Will we be allowed to sleep tonight? Goodness me! What are you doing here?”

“The Ghost on his trail
Has bobbed his tail...”
The naughty Dragonfly darted beyond the reach of the Hare’s paws.

“Take no notice of him,” advised the Bullfrog. “But why did you go into Bamboo Grove? I told you it was haunted.”

“I couldn’t wait,” replied the Hare twitching his hairless tail. “I thought I’d find out for myself and then...”

“Ah well,” said the Bullfrog. “I’d better tell you the story.”
"What! A mid-night tale?" piped the Hoopoe half out of the hollow. She was not going to miss a story if she could help it. "Since I am wide awake and my young ones are asleep, I might as well hear it," she said, settling herself on a low bough.

The Bullfrog yawned, snapped at a night-fly, and finally began to speak:
“For some years after the Great One died there were no Big Ones in Pasuvan, and the forest was the home of the Little Folk. Then one day with a terrific crashing and chattering a band of Langoors raced through, leaping wildly from tree to tree. They landed just above our pool, on the very tree you live in,” said the Bullfrog pointing at the Silk Cotton.
“They had had a terrible fright, and were warning the forest folk of danger—a huge, old Tiger had entered our home. At first I didn’t believe them and told them not to spread such tall tales. But they swore it was true. And, they were right, as I got to know myself that evening. As I was sitting here, on this very log, a silent form came out of the woods. I slipped under the log and keeping in its shadow, peeped out of the water and what do you think I saw?” He paused dramatically. “A HUGE STRIPED TIGER!”
The Dragonfly darted back into the circle of listeners, his gauzy wings gleaming in the moonlight.

"Do be still," scolded the Bullfrog, very annoyed, "and don't spoil my story. Yes, it was Tiger himself. He had come to the pool for a drink. As he walked away, I noticed he limped. Then I knew why he had come down from the upper forest and the very thought made my blood freeze."

The Bullfrog shuddered.

"Zim, Zim, Zim,
Just look at him
Freckles and bumps
All over his skin,"

teased the Dragonfly.

"Oh! GO AWAY," shouted the Hare, trying not to notice that the Bullfrog's freckles had indeed blown up into little lumps all over his back at the memory. "Why had he come down?" he asked the Bullfrog.

"I knew Tiger could no longer hunt for his usual prey. He couldn't run fast enough to catch fleet-footed Cheetal or swift-running Sambhar. He had come to our forest to hunt—MAN!"

"But—but," stammered the Hare, "I thought that even Tiger feared Man."

"So he does," said the wise Bullfrog. "Man is our greatest enemy but he is only dangerous when he carries fire-sticks."

"Or when his nasty little ones climb trees to steal our eggs," piped the Hoopoe fluffing her feathers and casting a watchful eye on the hollow.

"Or when he lays cruel traps for us in the woods," added the Hare.

"Yes, yes, I know Man is a cunning beast," said the Bullfrog. "But he can't run as fast as Deer, nor is he as strong as the Big Ones. Anyway, the next evening as I was sitting on a lily-pad in the cool dusk, some village children passed the pool. They had collected piles of sticks. Laughing and talking they walked through the trees. I saw a
shadow lurking in the bushes and tried to warn them. I croaked as loud as I could. One small child heard me, but only turned around to throw a stone at me so I dived into the pool. Then I heard a muffled cry but by the time I came up again all I saw was Tiger’s tail disappearing into the shadows. He had pounced on a girl and was limping away with her into Bamboo Grove. The other children ran about screaming and shouting in panic.
"That night a party of villagers came into the forest. They shouted and banged tins and some carried those terrible fire-sticks. But Tiger couldn’t be found. Every day they hunted him.

"One moonlit night they sat up for him in a tree beyond Bamboo Grove. We heard their fire-sticks go Bang! Bang! Bang! followed by a terrible roar of pain—Tiger had been hit, but he bounded away. They never found his hiding place."
"But—but are you sure he is dead?" asked the Hare, remembering his adventure in the grove.

"So they say," replied the Bullfrog, "He must be dead, because no one ever saw him again. But on full moon nights it's best not to go into the Haunted Grove."

"They could never have shot him," said the Hare, "if he hadn't been lame. I wonder how it happened?"

"Perhaps Man had shot at him in his hillside home," explained the Bullfrog, "but only hurt his leg. Being lame he could not hunt his usual prey. It was because of Man himself that Tiger took to killing Man's young ones."

"Hm," sniffed the Hoopoe. "How foolish Man is! I would never do anything to harm my young ones." And she flew up into the hollow to her sleeping children.

The Hare said in a whisper, "Do you think it was Tiger who nipped my tail?"
“Awk! No!” croaked the Bullfrog. “If you ask me, that looks more like the work of a field-rat. So good-night and sleep well.” And the Bullfrog dived into the pool.

The Dragonfly flew off and for once the Hare had nothing to say.
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“Serve him right, it will,” said the Hoopoe, fluttering down once more to start her endless digging.

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“Do you mean the Haunted Grove?” asked the Hoopoe, fanning out her crest feathers.

“In Bamboo Grove, across Barsati Nullah,” repeated the Bullfrog who disliked interruptions, “the Big Ones were back, at least that’s what that chatterer, Blue Jay said as he flew screaming through the trees. ‘The Big Ones are back, are back, are back,’ he called—And he was right or almost right.” The Bullfrog gave a short laugh. “You know how he is, Blue Jay? Two of the Big Ones had returned to Bamboo Grove. One of them was the old Cow-Elephant who, so my great grandfather told me, had led the largest herd in the forest. The other was her half-grown calf.”

“Where had the rest of the herd gone,” asked the Hare.

“That’s what my story is about, but you impatient young people won’t let me get on with it,” snapped the Bullfrog crossly. “The old Cow-Elephant was a great leader, wise and strong. Yet every year one or more of the herd were caught in the pits, dug by Man, the enemy. At last the other Elephants rebelled. ‘Let’s leave this evil place. Lead us to a home of safety. The enemy is taking away all our young ones. Each time they capture two or three. Soon there’ll be no one left. The others have escaped, let’s go too.’

“At first the old Elephant refused to leave. The jungle was her home. ‘No enemy can drive me away,’ she said. But the other Elephants trumpeted and the calves squealed, ‘Take us away, take us to safety!’ And so, reluctantly, the old Cow slowly led the way, up the banks of the nullah, up and away.”
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The Little Folk were silent for a while. The Hoopoe even forgot to dig for worms. Then the Hare asked, "Can the Little Folk ever get to that Paradise?"

The Bullfrog looked around the pool. "This is our world. We are small. We could never get so far. I am certainly too old. How far would a few hops take me?"

"What was good enough for my parents is good enough for me and my young ones," said the Hoopoe primly. "But why did the old Cow return?"
“I don’t know,” the Bullfrog said thoughtfully. “Perhaps she was too old to change. Elephants have long memories; perhaps she missed her home in the jungle and knowing she hadn’t long to live wanted to end her days there. Anyway, back she came; moving like a great grey shadow through the trees. The young calf padded along behind her but he was frisky. He waded into the pool, squirted water
over his back, and squealed with delight. Enjoying the sound of his voice, he trumpeted louder and louder.

“Oh dear!” cried the Hoopoe. “What a mistake! She should have stopped him. They must have heard him in the village below.”

“Yes,” croaked the Bullfrog, “they heard and they shouted, ‘The Big Ones are back! Let’s catch them!’ The next day they came with sticks and spears, gongs and drums, ropes and chains. They found the Elephants near the nullah. ‘Look, a young one. We can sell him to the zoo.’

‘Take him to the circus!’

‘Give him to the temple priest!’

‘Catch him first, you rascals,’ shouted their leader, who carried a cruel fire-stick. Bang! Bang! went the fire-stick.
The calf was frightened and ran here and there. His mother rushed to save him, scattering the yelling Men left and right, but they drove her off with their spears and the fire-stick. The calf didn’t know the jungle. He turned towards the nullah, and fell into an old pit. In a flash they were upon him, and tying him with ropes and chains, hauled him out and dragged him away. Bang! Bang! went the fire-stick as the old Cow-Elephant tried to rescue her calf. The bullets stopped her in her tracks at the edge of the pit and she fell to her death.” The Bullfrog was quiet for a long time, then croaked softly, “She was the last of the Big Ones in our forest.”
All was quiet. It was as though even the woods paid tribute to the memory of the Big One who had lived there.

“Where is the Haunted Grove?” asked the hare breaking the silence. “You know the one Hoopoe spoke of.”

“Oh that? That’s a long story. I’ll tell it to you some other day,” and the Bullfrog dived into the pool, leaving a trail of bubbles to float across the water.
The Haunted Grove

The Hare hopped away from the pool, into the thick scrub. The Bullfrog had promised to tell the story of the Haunted Grove. But when? The Hare was impatient; perhaps he could find out on his own.

He made his way through the bushes, crossed the nullah, which was dry during the hot summer days, and boldly entered Bamboo Grove.

The Dragonfly saw the Hare disappear into the scrub and dipping low over the pool said,

“Zim, Zim, Zim,
Go after him,
There lies danger
For the stranger.”

“Danger!” piped a musical voice. The Hoopoe looked down from her nest in the hollow of the Silk Cotton tree.

“Oh, dear! What will happen to my young ones?”
Taking no notice of her, the Dragonfly skimmed above the still waters of the pool:

“Zim, Zim, Zim,
   Let’s look for him,
The spirit prowls
   The thunder growls
The light grows dim.”

A ripple disturbed the quiet pool and with a burst of bubbles the Bullfrog settled himself on a broken log that lay half in the water.

“Now, what’s the matter?” he croaked grumpily.

“He spoke of danger,” said the Hoopoe peeping out of her safe hollow. “I’m anxious for my young ones.”
"What danger? Do talk sensibly!" But the Dragonfly, wings shimmering in the evening light, hummed again,
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and away he darted, across the pool.
  "Spirit? growl?" piped the Hoopoe, her crest feathers fanning and folding in agitation.
  "Aw-awk!" croaked the Bullfrog, "I think I know what he means. It is full moon tonight."
  "Oh dear! Oh dear, why ever did we speak of the Haunted Grove?" moaned the Hoopoe. "Do you think...?"
  "How can I think, if you twitter so much," the Bullfrog said crossly and called out to the Dragonfly.
  But there was no sign of him. All was dark and still over the pool.
  Then a dancing moon-beam lit the waters and a big, shining silver moon rose high in the sky.
  "Full moon tonight," mused the Bullfrog, rocking gently on the log in the water. "I wonder if Dragonfly..."
  Before the Bullfrog could finish his sentence a shrill squeal rang through the woods. There was a rustle and a thud, as some frightened creature darted out of the scrub, crashed through the bushes and almost fell into the pool.
  The log lurched as the Bullfrog leaped into the water. The Hoopoe melted into the depths of her nest in the hollow.
  The Dragonfly began flitting over the waters agitatedly.
  "Ha! I knew it," spluttered the Bullfrog, scrambling back on to the log. "It must be that foolish Hare." He peered at the farther bank, where a furry object lay in the reeds. "Is that you? Are you all right?" he called.
  The Dragonfly darted across the pool, and hovered like a helicopter.
  "K—K—EEP q—quiet," stuttered the Hare trying hard to keep his teeth from chattering. He sat up, pulled himself
out of the reeds and gave himself a shake. "I'm p—perfectly fine!" he said in his usual boastful manner.

"Hm! What was your hurry?" asked the Bullfrog.

"Oh that," the Hare laughed uneasily, looking over his shoulder towards the dark grove. "N—nothing. I thought I saw... that is... I felt—well, you know something pulled my tail," he ended lamely. "It did... you know. Look!" And turning his back he pointed at his tail. The fur had been pulled out of the centre, leaving a small, bald patch.
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"What's happening?" the Hoopoe peered out of her hollow. "Will we be allowed to sleep tonight? Goodness me! What are you doing here?"

"The Ghost on his trail
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The naughty Dragonfly darted beyond the reach of the Hare’s paws.

“Take no notice of him,” advised the Bullfrog. “But why did you go into Bamboo Grove? I told you it was haunted.”

“I couldn’t wait,” replied the Hare twitching his hairless tail. “I thought I’d find out for myself and then...”

“Ah well,” said the Bullfrog. “I’d better tell you the story.”
“What! A mid-night tale?” piped the Hoopoe half out of the hollow. She was not going to miss a story if she could help it. “Since I am wide awake and my young ones are asleep, I might as well hear it,” she said, settling herself on a low bough.

The Bullfrog yawned, snapped at a night-fly, and finally began to speak:
“For some years after the Great One died there were no Big Ones in Pasuvan, and the forest was the home of the Little Folk. Then one day with a terrific crashing and chattering a band of Langoors raced through, leaping wildly from tree to tree. They landed just above our pool, on the very tree you live in,” said the Bullfrog pointing at the Silk Cotton.
“They had had a terrible fright, and were warning the forest folk of danger—a huge, old Tiger had entered our home. At first I didn’t believe them and told them not to spread such tall tales. But they swore it was true. And, they were right, as I got to know myself that evening. As I was sitting here, on this very log, a silent form came out of the woods. I slipped under the log and keeping in its shadow, peeped out of the water and what do you think I saw?” He paused dramatically. “A HUGE STRIPED TIGER!”
The Dragonfly darted back into the circle of listeners, his
gauzy wings gleaming in the moonlight.

"Do be still," scolded the Bullfrog, very annoyed, "and
don't spoil my story. Yes, it was Tiger himself. He had come
to the pool for a drink. As he walked away, I noticed he
limped. Then I knew why he had come down from the
upper forest and the very thought made my blood freeze."
The Bullfrog shuddered.

"Zim, Zim, Zim,
Just look at him
Freckles and bumps
All over his skin."
tesed the Dragonfly.

"Oh! GO AWAY," shouted the Hare, trying not to notice
that the Bullfrog's freckles had indeed blown up into little
lumps all over his back at the memory. "Why had he come
down?" he asked the Bullfrog.

"I knew Tiger could no longer hunt for his usual prey.
He couldn't run fast enough to catch fleet-footed Cheetal or
swift-running Sambhar. He had come to our forest to hunt—
MAN!"

"But—but," stammered the Hare, "I thought that even
Tiger feared Man."

"So he does," said the wise Bullfrog. "Man is our greatest
enemy but he is only dangerous when he carries fire-sticks."

"Or when his nasty little ones climb trees to steal our
eggs," piped the Hoopoe fluffing her feathers and casting a
watchful eye on the hollow.

"Or when he lays cruel traps for us in the woods," added
the Hare.

"Yes, yes, I know Man is a cunning beast," said the
Bullfrog. "But he can't run as fast as Deer, nor is he as
strong as the Big Ones. Anyway, the next evening as I was
sitting on a lily-pad in the cool dusk, some village children
passed the pool. They had collected piles of sticks.
Laughing and talking they walked through the trees. I saw a
shadow lurking in the bushes and tried to warn them. I croaked as loud as I could. One small child heard me, but only turned around to throw a stone at me so I dived into the pool. Then I heard a muffled cry but by the time I came up again all I saw was Tiger's tail disappearing into the shadows. He had pounced on a girl and was limping away with her into Bamboo Grove. The other children ran about screaming and shouting in panic.
"That night a party of villagers came into the forest. They shouted and banged tins and some carried those terrible fire-sticks. But Tiger couldn't be found. Every day they hunted him.

“One moonlit night they sat up for him in a tree beyond Bamboo Grove. We heard their fire-sticks go Bang! Bang! Bang! followed by a terrible roar of pain—Tiger had been hit, but he bounded away. They never found his hiding place.”
“But—but are you sure he is dead?” asked the Hare, remembering his adventure in the grove.

“So they say,” replied the Bullfrog. “He must be dead, because no one ever saw him again. But on full moon nights it’s best not to go into the Haunted Grove.”

“They could never have shot him,” said the Hare, “if he hadn’t been lame. I wonder how it happened?”

“Perhaps Man had shot at him in his hillside home,” explained the Bullfrog, “but only hurt his leg. Being lame he could not hunt his usual prey. It was because of Man himself that Tiger took to killing Man’s young ones.”

“Hm,” sniffed the Hoopoe. “How foolish Man is! I would never do anything to harm my young ones.” And she flew up into the hollow to her sleeping children.

The Hare said in a whisper, “Do you think it was Tiger who nipped my tail?”
“Awk! No!” croaked the Bullfrog. “If you ask me, that looks more like the work of a field-rat. So good-night and sleep well.” And the Bullfrog dived into the pool.

The Dragonfly flew off and for once the Hare had nothing to say.