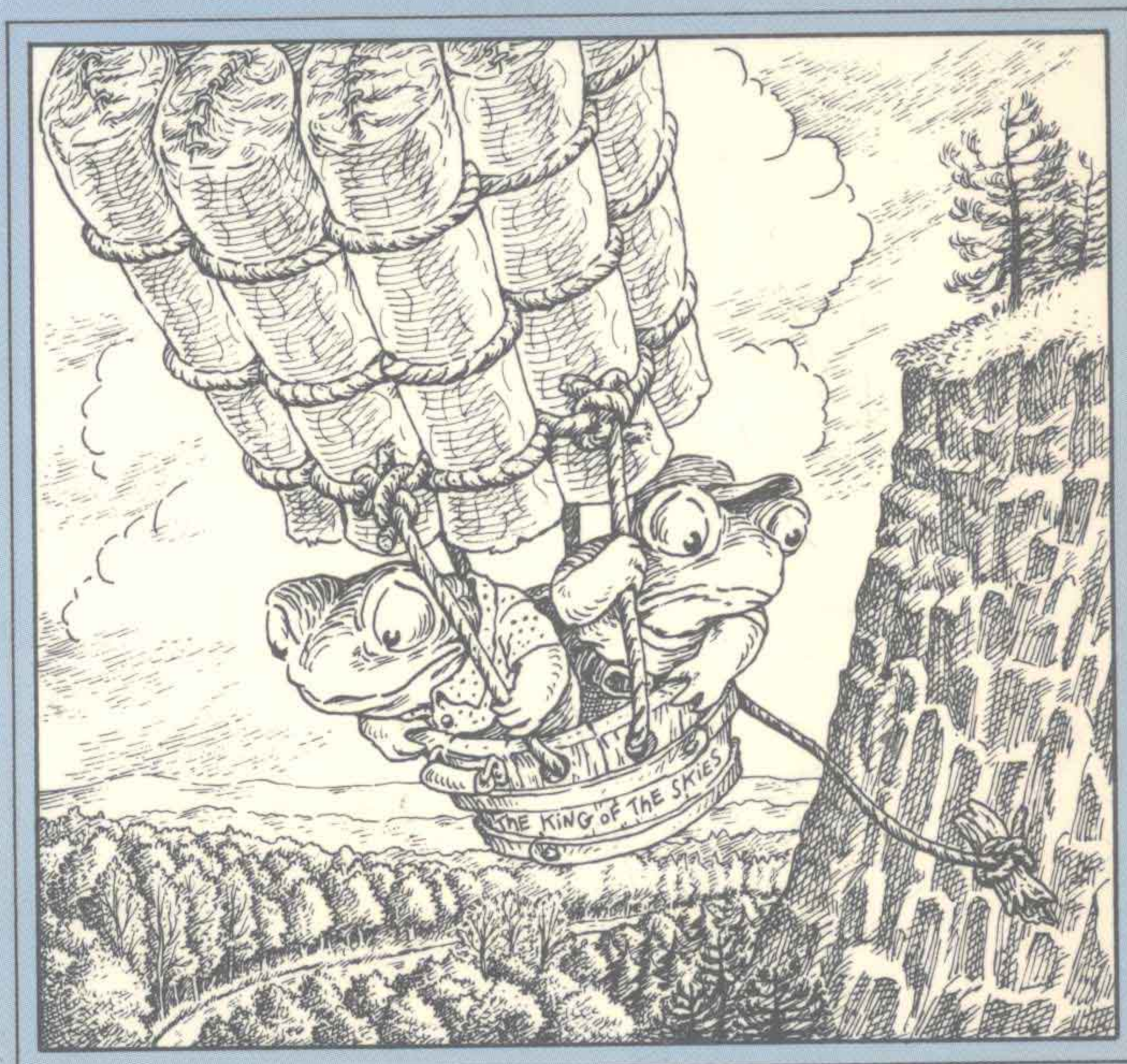


WARTON AND THE KING OF THE SKIES

BY RUSSELL E. ERICKSON



PICTURES BY LAWRENCE DI FIORI

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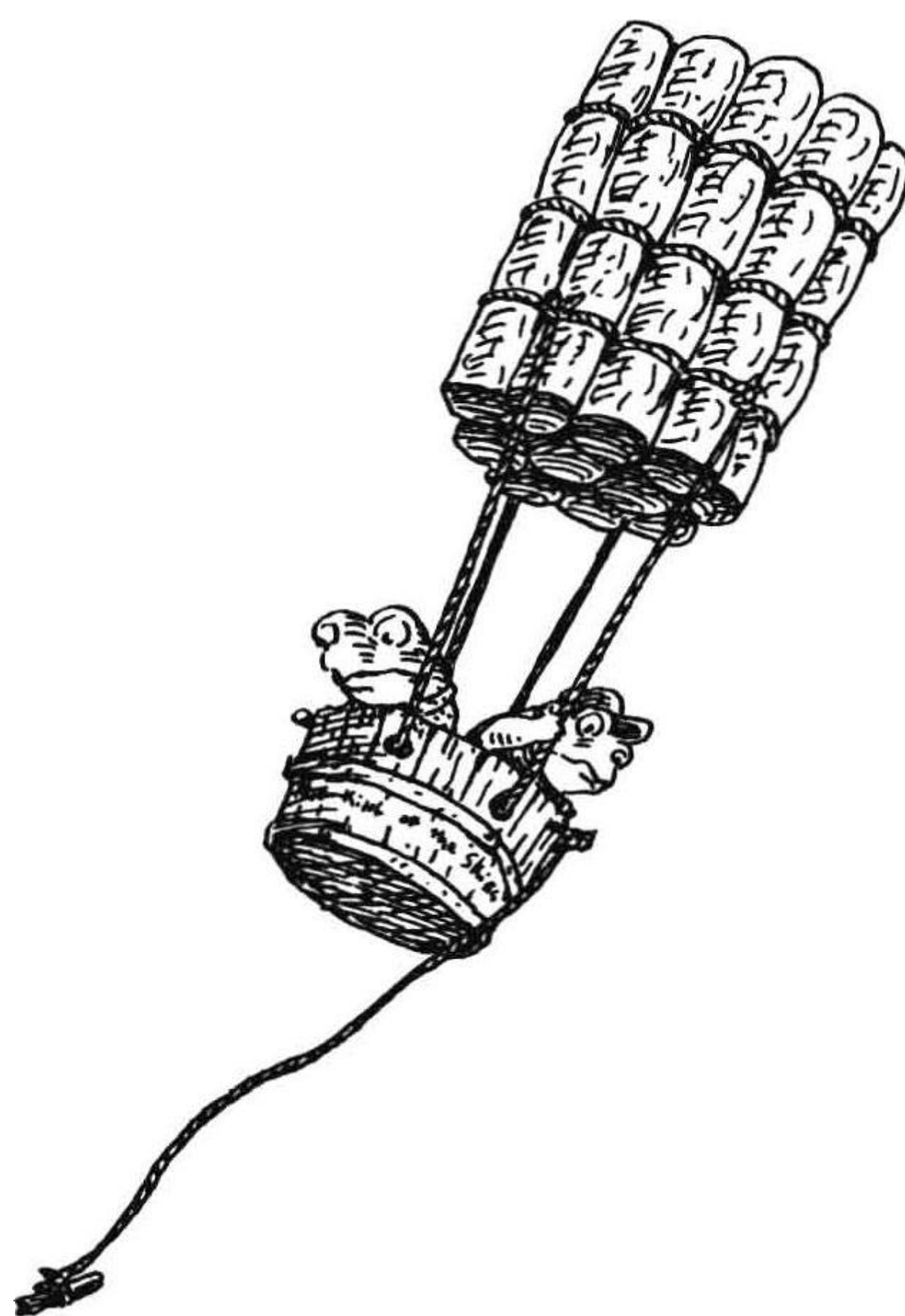
Suppose you have a problem to solve. How would you rather figure it out—alone or as a member of a team? Sometimes it is easy to solve a problem by yourself. There are times, however, when only a group of people working together can succeed.

As you read about two brothers working together, think about what each would have done without the other. In many ways, they help each other. But sometimes, when they are trying to help, they just cause trouble!

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WARTON AND THE KING OF THE SKIES





Except for the chirp of a small bird now and then, there was but one other sound that broke the stillness of the deep forest. It came from the bottom of a giant twin hemlock where Warton the toad, wearing faded brown shorts and a green sun visor, was busily beating the dust out of a braided rug.

The rug was draped over a line strung from the hemlock to a stump that hid the entrance to the home Warton shared with his brother, Morton. Although Warton always enjoyed doing his cleaning chores—just as Morton always enjoyed doing his cooking chores—he was very glad to be nearly done, for it was the hottest day of the summer.

Never had the sun burned brighter. It was only mid-morning, yet open fields were already sending shimmering waves of heat towards the blue sky. In the forest the leaves of the big oaks and maples hung limp and the tips of the evergreens drooped.

On the forest floor the dark earth was warm, and the air hung still.

Warton gave the rug one last whack, then, satisfied that he had not missed a single speck of dust, he rolled it up, threw it on his back, and entered a hole in the stump. He followed a tunnel downward till it stopped at a small door. Pushing it open, he stepped in just beside the kitchen sink.

Morton, with a damp towel wrapped around his head, was filling a pitcher with cold water that trickled down from the wet, mossy rocks above their home. "I've made some fresh huckleberryade," he said. "If you have time, I'll pour you some."

"I've plenty of time," said Warton, as he put the rug in the parlor. "I've just finished my cleaning for today."

"And none too soon, I'd say," said Morton. "I've never known it to be as uncomfortable as this, even underground."

"When it's this hot," said Warton, "there's only one thing to do." He went to the cellarway and came back with a large wooden washtub, which he

half filled with cold water. Then, taking a tall glass of the huckleberrade, he sat down in the tub. "Ahhh," he sighed, "this is perfect. Why don't you get the other tub, Morton? It's very refreshing."



"Not me," said Morton. "I'll drink my huckleberrade here in the rocker."

Warton, feeling quite content, leaned back and shut his eyes. When he opened them he saw that Morton had a wistful smile on his face.

"I'll bet you're thinking of the wintertime, and the snow and ice," said Warton.

“No,” said Morton. “I’ve been thinking about something I’ve often thought about before. It must be the most wonderful and relaxing way there is to cool off.”

Warnton’s eyes widened with interest.

“Do you remember the time we climbed the boulder behind cousin Alfred’s,” continued Morton, “and how we could see the red cliffs far off on the other side of the forest?”

Warnton nodded.

“Then you must remember how we could see the hawks that lived there,” said Morton. “How they seemed to float so easily, high over the tree-tops, and how they circled round and round, drifting on the gentle winds without moving their wings in the slightest.”

Warnton looked at his brother. “You think of that often?”

“I know it’s silly, but I’ve never forgotten it,” said Morton. “It must be so peaceful, so pleasant, drifting high over everything.” Then, with a sigh, he got out of his rocking chair and went to the pantry.

“Hmmm,” said Warton as he took a sip of huckleberryade. “Hmmm,” he said again, after he got out of the tub and dried off. For the rest of the morning he was much quieter than usual. Every once in a while he murmured, “Hmmm.”

At lunchtime Warton was deep in thought.

“Is something wrong with your B.L.M.?” asked Morton.

“Oh, no,” said Warton, “it’s the best beetle, lettuce, and mushroom sandwich you’ve ever made.” Then he grew silent again. As soon as he finished eating, he told Morton he was going outside.

“In this heat?” said Morton with surprise. But Warton had already disappeared into the tunnel.

As soon as Warton stepped outside he began poking about in the underbrush. When he came upon several large puffballs he picked one up, emptied out all its powder, and threw it into the air. It quickly settled to the ground and bounced under some ferns.

“Too heavy,” muttered Warton.

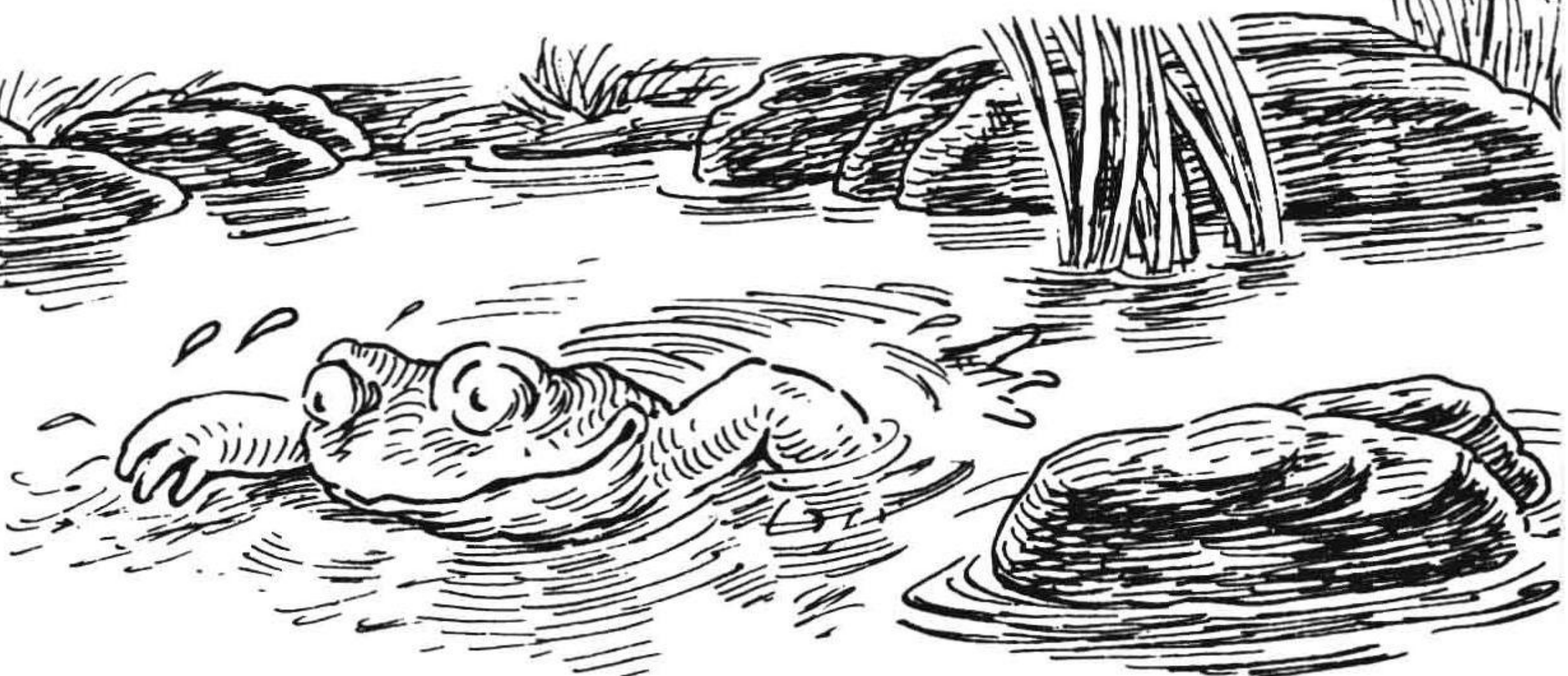
Next, he hurried down the open hillside to the



pond. At the water's edge he spied an empty goose egg. "This could be just what I need," he said, tossing it as high as he could. It landed with a plop at his feet, and Warton shook his head.

He started searching again, and was in amongst some cattails when he discovered a deserted duck's nest. From the old feathers lying all about he carefully chose a few of the downiest, and tied them together with a piece of vine. He held his breath and tossed them up. They returned quickly to the ground, and he looked very disappointed.

Dejectedly, Warton started back up the sizzling hillside. By the time he reached the top, he felt so wilted he decided to cool off in the little stream that ran nearby. He gave a leap and landed far out in the middle. For a long time he swam round and round, slowly kicking his legs in the clear green water. Then he climbed onto one of the rocks in the stream. Once again, he fell into deep thought.



He was staring absentmindedly at the stones along the water's edge when his eyes opened wide.

"There's the answer!" he cried, hopping to one of the stones. Carefully he picked up his discovery and headed for home.

"Now," he said to himself as he hurried along, "I think the best place to build this will be on top of the hill that overlooks the clover meadow. There's always a breeze there. And I'll begin tonight, right after supper."

Morton was just setting the table when Warton returned. As soon as Warton washed up, the two brothers sat down. Morton had made a hot-summer-night supper, cool and light, but very nourishing. It was one of Warton's favorites. First there was a bowl of chilled snail soup. Then came a huge tossed salad of cucumber beetles, cabbage worms, and corn borers. And for dessert, they each had a frosty scoop of iced dewberries.

"Delicious," said Warton, giving his stomach a pat. He went into the cellarway and brought out the big wooden washtub. "And now I'm going outside. I have work to do."

“And you need the washtub?” asked Morton.

“Right,” said Warton. “Also some rope, some heavy yarn, a strong needle, my tool belt, and my carpenter’s hat.”

Morton watched silently as Warton put the things into the tub and started up the tunnel. He had learned long ago that once Warton got an idea in his head, there was no stopping him. “I think I’ll go next door for a game of checkers with Grampa Arbuckle,” he muttered.

Once outside, Warton grabbed one of the handles of the tub and dragged it along the narrow path till he came to the top of the hill that over-

