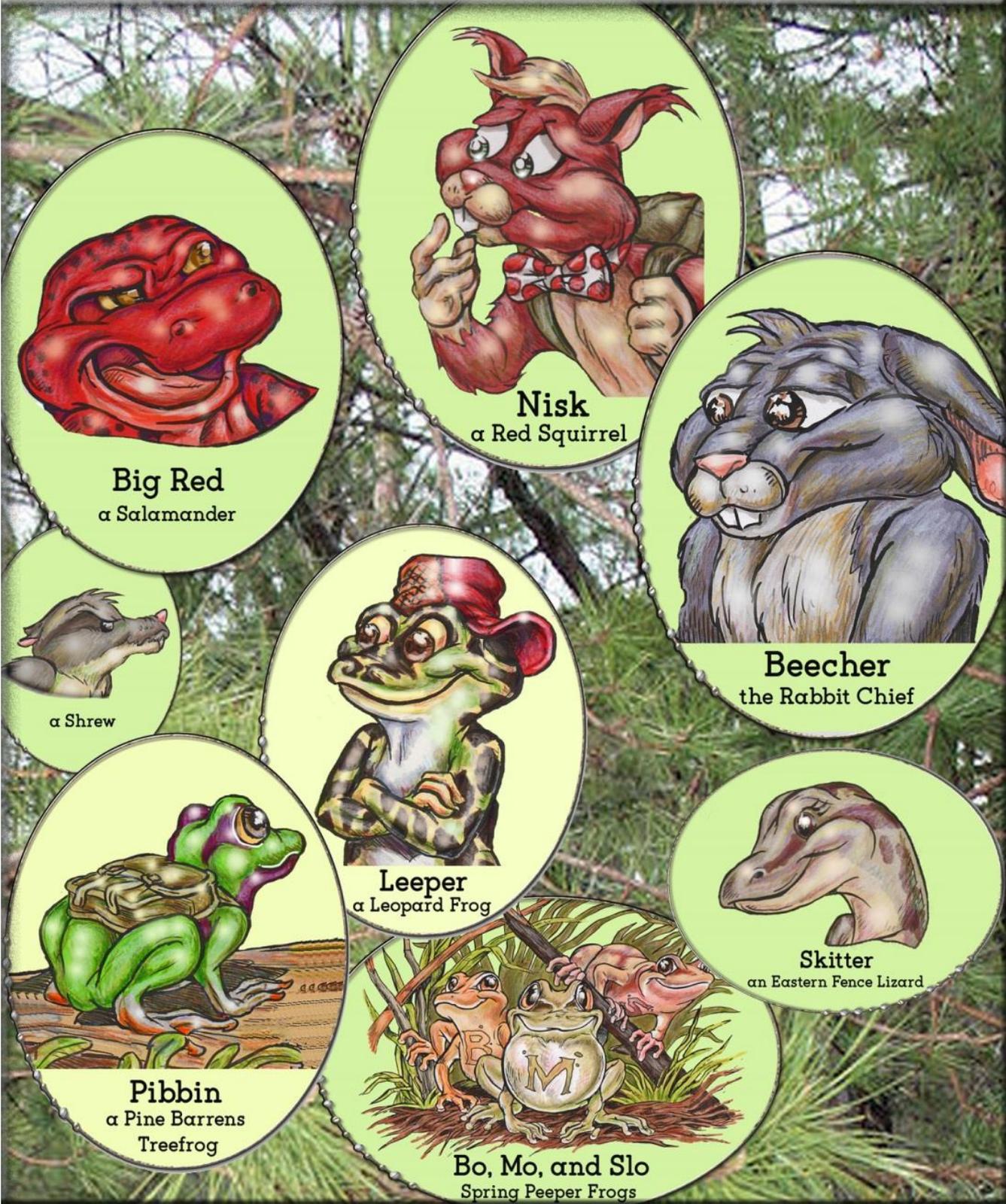


BOOK 4: CATCH A ROBBER





Chapter 1

Help! Help!

Pibbin hopped through Ticklegrass Field, working on his jumps. He leaped high for his best jump ever, but a creeping shadow stopped him short.

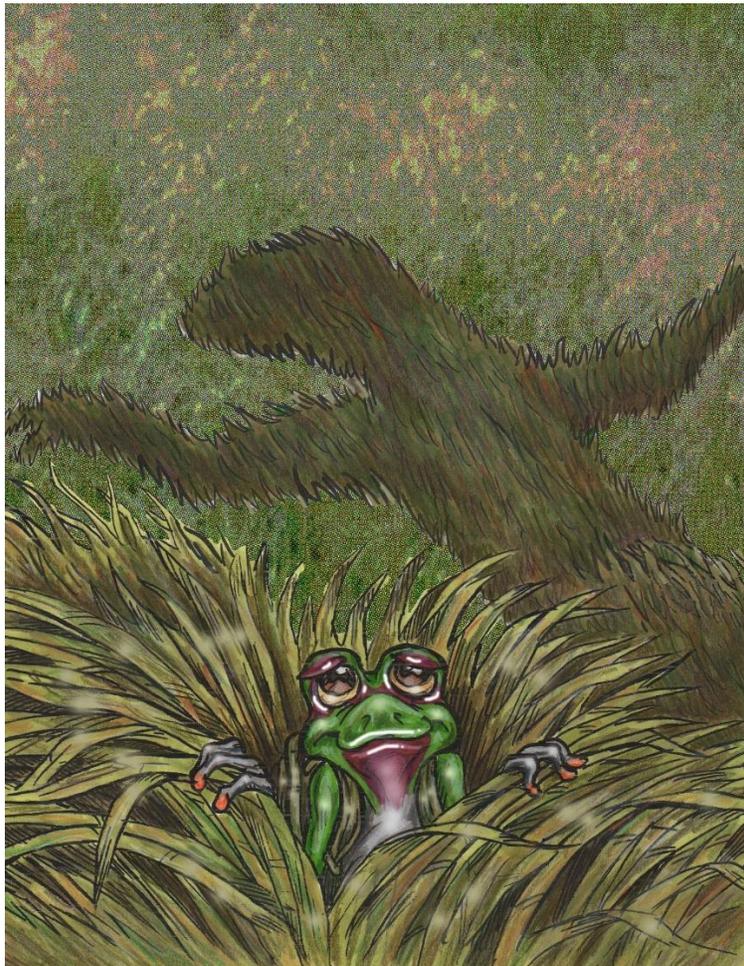
He dived into a clump of grass and let the shadow of a lizard glide by. He poked his head out for a better look.

Was that Skitter?

It couldn't be. He'd left her at Gaffer's tree house, cleaning up after Story Night.

He looked again.

Even in the dark, he could see that this lizard didn't have a tail. How strange!



A white moth fluttered so close that he forgot about the lizard and snapped it up. He yawned. Now he would take that nap he'd been wanting. He crawled under a large brown leaf and fell asleep.

Thump! Thump! Thump!

Pibbin jerked awake. Rabbit feet nearby? On the path?

He looked out in time to see two gray rabbits bounding past. Then a brown one. And then two more.

They stopped to talk, and their voices sounded angry.

“—That lizard must have taken it.”

“—But Skitter seems so nice.”

“—We saw her!”

Beecher, Chief of Rabbits, was the one with the loudest voice. “I promised Grannie that we'd get it back.”

Get what back? Pibbin asked himself. Had they said *Skitter*?

What about Skitter?

The rabbits started off again, but they kept stopping to talk, and Pibbin slipped out to follow them.

It looked as if they were heading toward Gaffer's tree house.

Good. The wise old treefrog would know what to do.

But—oh no! Pibbin slowed, remembering that Gaffer wasn't there. He'd left on a trip to Bullfrog Bog, right after Story Night was over. Even worse, he'd taken Leeper with him.

Pibbin listened to the noisy rabbits. Maybe Skitter would calm them down. She often took care of things when Gaffer was away.

The rabbits, five of them, speeded up as they neared Gaffer's tree house, and Pibbin hopped faster than ever.

The rabbits began to shout. “There she is! Right there on the deck!”

Pibbin climbed up Gaffer's tree, and they were so busy shouting that no one saw him.

Skitter, wearing her favorite yellow apron, was sweeping Gaffer's deck.

The rabbits leaped onto the deck and crowded around her.

“What’s the matter?” she asked.

“You took it,” they shouted.

She backed up, looking small beside the sturdy rabbits.

“What are you talking about?” she cried. She waved her broom at them. “Go away!”

Chief Beecher snatched at the broom. “Someone saw you,” he said in his loud voice.

The rabbits began shouting again.

“—That’s right! She’s the thief!”

“—Don’t let her escape!”

“—Careful, she’s a Bog-Keeper.”

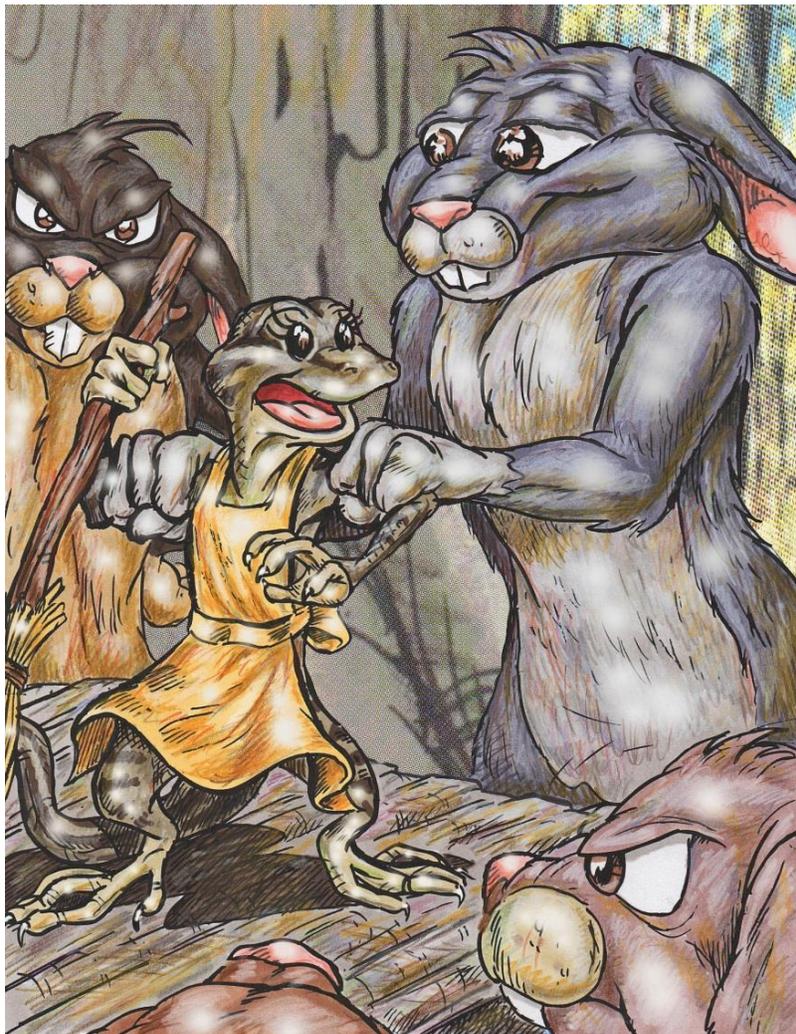
“—Where’s Gaffer?”

Beecher took charge. “Gaffer is away right now. We can’t let her escape.”

He put his paws on her little arms and pulled her off the deck.

“Don’t make a fuss,” he said, “and we won’t hurt you. Come on!”

Skitter screamed. “Help! Help!”



Pibbin yelled too, even though the rabbits were all shouting again and no one would hear.

Skitter wiggled and twisted, but she was just a thin lizard, and the rabbits held each of her legs. She'd never get away.

Pibbin jumped down off the tree to follow them. He could tell where they went by the sound of Skitter's cries. They were probably going to their home—the rabbit warren on the far side of Ticklegrass Field.

He hopped as fast as he could, but by the time he reached the edge of Ticklegrass Field, the rabbits and Skitter had disappeared.

He had to do something. Tell someone!

What about Miss Green? She was one of the Bog-Keepers, so she was a leader in Friendship Bog.

Would she be awake? Would she believe his story? Would she know what to do?

He hopped through the pinewoods toward Miss Green's hole and found her curled up in the ferns.

The slender green snake lifted her head to smile at him. "You're moving pretty fast, young Pibbin. What's going on?"

"It's Skitter!" he said. "The rabbits took her away! They kidnapped her!"

He told Miss Green how he'd seen the strange lizard and what the rabbits had done.

She frowned. "The Bog-Keepers should have a meeting right away. Uncle Dip is the leader, so we'd better find him."

Peeper-frog voices chimed like tiny bells in the grass.

Rabbits kidnap Skitter! Rabbits kidnap Skitter! Bog-Keepers Alert!

Miss Green nodded. "Someone else saw it happen. The peepers keep track of everything."

She twisted herself into a tangle. "Poor Skitter! We certainly will have a meeting."

"Why was Beecher so angry?" Pibbin said.

"I don't know what was stolen," she said, "but rabbits can be a fierce bunch. They're quick to defend any of the tribe. When they get upset, it's hard to stop them."

Pibbin thought about Uncle Dip, the old squirrel who wasn't afraid of anyone. "Uncle Dip is tough, isn't he? He'll make them let Skitter go, won't he?"

“I think he will. And the Bog-Keepers are good at solving problems,” Miss Green said.

Pibbin started to answer, but peeper-news rang out once again.

Bog-Keepers meeting-meeting-meeting!

Starting soon-soon-soon! At dawn!

“I thought so,” Miss Green said.



“Everything’s going to be fine now, right?” Pibbin said. “As soon as the rabbits find out that it wasn’t Skitter?”

“We can hope,” Miss Green said slowly. “Uncle Dip might be able to handle them.”