

The Battle of the Frogs and Mice

written by Leanne Guenther based on Barlow's translation of Homer's story

I begin by calling on the Muses to fill my heart with song, for I will sing of a mighty war: of the clash of shields and the deeds of brave warriors, and how the mice fought the frogs.

One hot day, a young mouse named Crumb-snatcher, who had just escaped from a hungry weasel, stopped at the edge of a pond to drink. Up from the water popped a frog with big puffy cheeks. It was Puff-cheek, king of all the frogs.

"Who are you, stranger?" said the king. "Tell me truly, and I'll take you home as my guest." So Crumb-snatcher told him about his life. He lived in people's houses and feasted on bread, honey cakes, ham, cheese and sesame seeds. He feared nothing in battle, he said, except hawks, weasels and mousetraps.

The frog king laughed. "We frogs have wonders of our own, on land and in the water. Climb on my back, and I'll show you my palace."

So the mouse climbed on and held tight around the frog's neck. At first he loved it, gliding past the green reeds. But then the water began to splash over him, and he cried out in fear, steering with his tail like an oar. Suddenly a water snake rose up out of the pond. King Puff-cheek dove straight to the bottom to hide, forgetting all about his passenger, and poor Crumb-snatcher sank beneath the water.

"You won't get away with this!" he squeaked, as the waves closed over him. Another mouse, watching from the bank, saw everything and ran to tell the others.

The mice were furious. At sunrise they gathered and declared war, and they armed themselves like true heroes, using whatever they could find:

- **The mice** made shin guards from split bean pods, shields from the round middles of oil lamps, and helmets from chickpea husks. For spears, they carried long bronze sewing needles.
- **The frogs** made shin guards from mallow leaves, armor from beet leaves, and shields from big cabbage leaves. Their spears were sharp, pointed rushes, and they wore snail shells for helmets.

A mouse herald named Go-in-the-pot hopped down to the pond to deliver the challenge. The frogs grumbled that this was all their king's fault.

Then the frog King Puff-cheek told a big fib. He said he'd never even seen the young mouse Crumb-snatcher, and the silly thing must have drowned trying to swim like a frog.

His frog citizens believed him and lined up along the shore, ready to fight.

Up on Mount Olympus, Zeus saw the two armies, as huge as the armies of the giants, and called the gods together. "Who will you help?" he asked, and he teased Athena that she must want to help the mice, since they were always scampering around her temple.

Athena wasn't having it. "I'll never help the mice," she said. "They've chewed up my garlands and drunk the oil from my lamps. Worst of all, they nibbled holes in the beautiful robe I wove myself, and now I owe the weaver money to fix it!"

"But I won't help the frogs either," she went on. "After my last battle, I came home exhausted, and they kept me awake all night with their croaking. I didn't sleep a wink until the rooster crowed."

So the gods agreed to stay out of it and watch the battle from the sky.

Two gnats blew their trumpets, and Zeus thundered from the sky, and the war began. Frogs and mice with names like Loud-croaker, Lick-platter, Mud-lover and Cheese-nibbler charged at one another, and the battle raged back and forth along the shore.

Then a bold young mouse named Slice-snatcher swore he would wipe out the whole frog nation. Zeus felt sorry for the frogs, so he hurled a thunderbolt, and all of Olympus shook. But the mice didn't even slow down.

So Zeus sent help of a very different kind: an army of crabs. They came marching sideways out of the water, with backs like anvils, crooked claws, eight legs each, and eyes that poked up out of their chests. They pinched the mice by their tails and paws until the whole mouse army turned and ran.

And as the sun went down, the great war of the frogs and mice came to an end, after lasting exactly one day.









