

The Frog Princess

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There was a princess who had a frog's head. She wore pretty dresses, fine leather shoes, long elegant gloves and a golden necklace sparkling with diamonds hung around her thick, warty neck. She never wore earrings, for frogs don't have ears. Nor did she wear lipstick, for red lipstick on green flesh is a gruesome sight. Her voice, however, was gentle, even beautiful.

One day a prince arrived and swept her off her feet. He was tall, handsome and dark. He was courtly and a gentleman. The prince fell in love with the princess as much as the frog princess fell in love with him and he asked for her hand in marriage.

"But ... but ... but ..." stammered his friends.

"My mind's made up," said the prince.

"But ... but she has a frog's head," said his friends.

"Does she? I never noticed," said the prince. "She seems fine to me."

And, indeed, the prince wouldn't have noticed the frog princess's head for he was blind.

The wedding day dawned and the prince's father and mother arrived in their royal carriage.

"Dear Father King and Mother Queen," said the prince, "may I introduce you to my bride," and he brought the frog princess forward.

The Mother Queen stood and stared. Finally she fainted and the ladies-in-waiting rushed her back into the carriage.

The Father King was likewise speechless. At last he composed himself, and said: "My dear boy, your bride has a frog's head."

"So I've been told," said the prince. "Not that I can see it. Blind as a bat, I am. Besides, she's awfully nice and it's all arranged."

"No, no, dear boy," said the Father King. "It won't do," and he grabbed the prince by the scruff of the neck, shoved him into the carriage and took off at tremendous speed.

The frog princess stood mute, tears streaming from her bulbous, golden eyes. At last they had to drag her into the castle.

"I said you'd never marry," said her mom.

"Ditto," said her dad. "Give it up for a bad job and stay in your room, that's a girl."

And the frog princess did stay in her room—she didn't have a choice; they'd locked her in. For weeks she longed and hoped for the prince to return. He didn't come. Finally, she jumped out the window into the moat.

The guards ran about shouting. They fetched swimmers to find her body, but never did. The frog princess, like all good frogs, could hold her breath underwater for a long time. She stayed in the muddy bottom of the moat until nighttime, then crept away. She found a lake deep in the forest and there she made her home. Her clothes fell apart and slowly, day by day, all her skin turned green and her arms and legs grew bent and stunted. At last she became a frog completely and lived among the tall, whispering reeds that lined the lake shore.

That's where the prince found her—or she found him—many years later. She saw two men passing through the reeds in a skiff. Behind sat a servant dressed in royal blue. He paddled softly as the blind one in front sang:

*Many the days are passing
Many the years do follow
My love she is gentle, her voice it is pure
I seek her in pond and meadow.*

The frog princess recognized the prince at once. She cried out to him, but the only sound that came from her broad mouth was a deep throated croaking—*ribbet ... ribbet ... ribbet*—and the prince, hearing only a frog in the whispering reeds, passed on and never knew her.

From that day on the frog princess was changed. She left the water and mud and sought the high ground. She walked and no longer hopped. She sang, too, every day, and refused to croak. For seven long years the princess strove to change. Her green skin gave way to white, she unbent her legs, she straightened her back. During this time she lived in the forest

where no one came. There, remembering herself to be naked, she used animal pelts to cover her body. Later, loving the animals ever more deeply, she made her clothes from leaves and grass. Only then did she leave the forest and wander through the world. She sought the prince's castle, though she knew not what it looked like. Many castles she visited, singing before the gates of each one. None opened their doors to her.

Finally she came to a hut. It was simple, with two windows, a chimney and a door. Out the door a song was winging:

*My love is the fair one
My love she is true
Like the bright sunshine
She warms my heart through.*

And the frog princess replied:

*My love here I am now
I come from the wild
I made you a deep vow
On me the sun smiled.*

The prince came from the hut. He stretched out his hands and found hers. And even though he was blind his fingers traced her face and saw that she was human completely.

Together they sang:

*Our love it is gentle
Our love it is true
On us lays a mantle
For me and for you.*