

The true Frog Prince

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There was once a frog. He was a prince and wore a crown. He sat at the lesser head of the table, was fed flies on a golden plate and drank pond water from a crystal glass. When he burped everyone pretended not to notice for he was the first born and it was only a matter of time before he became king.

The frog prince had been born this way. It wasn't his fault—or at least any fault that he remembered. The queen did not love him, neither did the king, nor any of his brothers and sisters. They loathed him. They didn't like his large mouth, his widely spaced and bulbous eyes, his webbed feet, his cold, clammy skin, or the way his long tongue darted out whenever a fly passed within reach. And it didn't matter that he was polite, well spoken and human sized—though his voice was rather rough and croaky—indeed, being well bred and the same size as his siblings when they squatted down only made them loath their brother all the more. Thus it was hardly surprising that the frog prince spent most of his time alone—usually among the reeds by the muddy end of the palace pond.

At last the frog prince came of an age to be married. The king called him before the throne.

“You are eighteen. It is time for you to wed. Where we will find a bride I do not know. If we do find one, all I can say is God help her. You are dismissed.”

Word was sent out: ‘The Frog Prince, Royal Heir to the Great Kingdom, is seeking a Bride. Anyone may apply.’

The silence was as deafening as it was expected. No one answered. Not even the poorest daughter of the local tramp offered herself as bride.

The frog prince said nothing—after all, what could he say?—and continued to eat flies for breakfast, lunch and supper and slurp as quietly as he could the pond water from his crystal glass.

One day a royal carriage drawn by seven black horses appeared at the palace. Out stepped a red-faced king with a princess held firmly by the hand.

"Here is your bride," said the king, pushing her forward. "Good luck."

He stepped back into his carriage and took off before anyone could say either hello or goodbye.

"Well," said the queen, taken by surprise, but before she could utter a further word the princess pushed past her, stormed into the palace and demanded her room.

That evening the princess sat in stony silence beside the frog prince. She shunned him as much as she shunned the dead flies on his golden plate or the murky water in his crystal glass. Behind the scenes it only took an hour for the servants to live in terror of the princess. She was demanding, petty, snarky and mean. She told lies. She was cruel. The lords and ladies soon avoided her at all cost—the servants had no choice but to do her endless bidding.

The only one who sought out her company was the frog prince. He spoke to her kindly and ignored her spite. He attempted to join her when she walked in the garden. He waited for her to appear for meals and didn't touch a fly until she had begun to eat first.

The princess, however, made herself clear: "I detest and despise you," she said. "I loath you unremittingly."

Still, the frog prince continued to treat her considerately, but also did everything in his power to protect the servants from her abuse. One day, however, he found her beating her changing maid with a fire iron. The maid was bleeding from the head and crying pitifully.

"Stop!" shouted the frog prince. "No one deserves to be beaten like that."

"She stole my broach," said the princess.

"I didn't, I swear," cried the maid. "It's there on the mantle where you left it last night."

The broach sat glittering on the mantle.

"You trickster," spat the princess, and slashed at the maid again.

"Enough," said the frog prince, stepping between them. "If you must beat someone let it be me."

"Gladly," hissed the princess, and brought the fire iron down on the frog's broad head with a vicious stroke.

The maid screamed and screamed. People came running. They found the frog prince gone, and in his place stood a human being. The princess, too, was gone. In her place crouched a human sized frog far uglier than the prince had ever been.

At first the frog princess was confused. She croaked loudly and waved her arms in command as she usually did. But the lords and ladies merely laughed and the servants stood about and grinned. Finally the queen took her to the royal dressing room. This room was round. It had twelve closets filled with clothes of every kind. It also had twelve full length mirrors, one beside each closet. The queen led the frog princess to the center of the room, then left, locking the door behind her.

At supper the frog princess sat beside the prince. Her golden plate was heaped with flies. For wine she had pond water in a crystal glass. She touched neither and sat silently, her broad, warty shoulders hunched over. The prince tried to be pleasant but she uttered not a word and left as soon as the king gave the sign. Days passed and still the frog princess refused to eat the flies. Finally she gave in and ate them ravenously. Afterwards she burped and her breath smelled.

The frog princess avoided everyone and spoke as little as possible. She spent her days at the far end of the pond where the reeds grew and the shores were muddy. The prince, however, often waded out and kept her company. After a year he managed, now and then, to coax the frog princess into making a reply or offering a comment herself.

Another year passed. The youth became the man and the king and queen pressed him to marry.

"It's getting late," said the king.

"Definitely," said the queen.

The prince said naught but knew they were right. He found the frog princess by the pond and asked her to marry him. She looked at him in horror and leaped into the water with a splash. But day after day the prince persisted, and was persistently refused, until, at last, he stood up at table and asked for her hand in public.

The frog princess blushed an ugly shade of brown. The palace—royals and commoners alike—stared at the prince in horror. The king and queen were furious. They asked if he'd lost his mind.

The prince made no reply but slammed his hand upon the table before him. In an instant he became a frog again.

From then on the frog prince remained at the frog princess's side. He wooed her as they ate flies from their golden plates and sipped murky water from their crystal glasses. He followed her to the pond or down the stream where the woods were dense and no one ever

came. He waited patiently by her door for her to come out in the morning and was the last to bid her goodnight.

The king and queen shunned them both. They tried to keep them apart, but to no avail, for the servants always and gladly did the frog prince's bidding.

One day the king did not get out of bed. Soon after the queen was buried beside him. Everyone looked to the frog prince. They told him it was time and the frog prince nodded. He knew.

He made his way to the pond. He found the frog princess hiding in the gray mud. Only her bulbous eyes showed, glistening with gold.

"Come, be my bride," said the frog prince gently. "It is time, it is time," and the frog princess came out of the mud.

Then hand in hand the prince and princess struggled to shore and, laughing, made their way to the palace to don their wedding clothes.