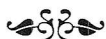


The Frog Prince



In the days when wishes came true, there lived a king who had three daughters. They were all beautiful, but the youngest was so lovely that the sun himself, who had seen everything, was filled with wonder every time he shone on her face.

The king lived in a castle next to a great, dark forest. In the forest under an old oak tree, there was a deep, cool well. Whenever it was hot, the youngest princess sat beside this well. There she amused herself by playing with a pretty gold ball, passing the hours by throwing it into the air and catching it.

One day, the gold ball fell out of reach and into the well. The princess leaned over the edge and looked down. The well was very deep—so deep she could hardly see the bottom. Surely her ball was lost forever! The princess began to cry.

Then she heard a voice calling her. "What's the matter, lovely princess? Why are you crying so pitifully?" it asked.

The princess looked up to see who was speaking. She was surprised

to see a frog sitting on the side of the well. "Oh," she said, "I am crying because I lost my gold ball in the well."

"Don't cry," the frog replied. "I can fetch your ball. But what will you give me if I get it back for you?"

"Whatever you wish, dear frog," said the princess, for the ball was her favorite plaything. "I will give you my fine clothes, my jewels, even the gold crown I wear on my head!"

The frog shook his head. "I have no use for your clothes or jewels or even your gold crown," he said. "But if you will love me and be my friend and let me sit beside you at your gold table and eat from your little gold plate and drink from your little gold cup and sleep in your little bed—well, if you promise all that, then I will get back your gold ball."

"Yes, yes," the princess said quickly, "whatever you like." The frog was surely talking nonsense, she thought. How could a frog who sat in the water all day, croaking and catching flies, possibly live among people? With this in mind, she gave her promise.

The frog dived into the deep well. Soon he came paddling up to the surface with the gold ball in his mouth. He hopped out of the well and dropped the ball on the grass before the princess. Delighted to have her beautiful toy again, she picked it up and ran as fast as she could.

"Wait for me," called the frog. "You promised to be my friend and take me home with you. Wait! You're going too fast! I can't keep up." But the princess would not stop. She would not even turn around. Instead, she ran all the way home and quickly forgot the frog.

The next day as the princess was sitting at dinner with her father and all the court and eating from her little gold plate and drinking from her little gold cup, she heard something crawling up the marble steps. *Plip, plot, plip, plop*, it went.

Then there was a knocking at the door.

"Oh, king's youngest daughter, remember your promise and let me in!"

The princess ran to the door to find out who was calling. But when she saw who it was, she slammed the door and returned to the table.

"My daughter," the king said, "what is wrong? Why are you frightened? Is there a giant at the door who's come to carry you away?"

"Oh, no!" the youngest princess replied, "just a horrible, ugly frog!"

"And what does this horrible, ugly frog want from you?" asked the king.

"Oh, Father, yesterday as I was playing beside the well in the forest, my gold ball fell into the water. I cried so much that the frog came to see what was wrong. He said he'd get the ball back for me, if I promised to let him be my friend. But I never thought he would actually leave the well. And now, he's come."

There was a knocking at the door again, and a voice called:

"Oh, king's youngest daughter, let me in.

Don't you remember what you promised—

Yesterday by the cool well water?"

The king turned to the princess. "Whatever you promised, you must honor," he said.

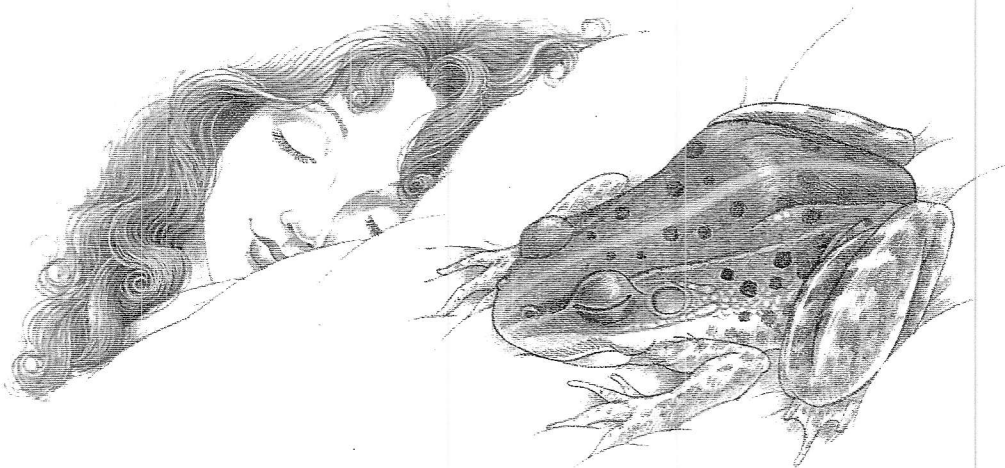
So the princess let the frog in. Hopping slowly and leaving a trail of wet footprints behind him, he followed the princess to her chair. Then he looked up at her and said, "Lift me up beside you."

The princess made a face, but the king ordered her to obey. Then the frog asked the princess to lift him onto the table. Then he said, "Oh, princess, please push your gold plate closer so that I can eat from it, too!" The princess did as the frog asked, but everyone could see she didn't want to. The frog seemed to enjoy the meal, but the princess could eat no more than a bite.

When the meal was over, the frog turned to the princess and said, "Now that I've eaten my fill, I'm feeling quite tired. Please carry me to your bedroom, and let me sleep beside you in your little bed."

The princess burst into tears. "I won't have that awful, cold, wet frog in my nice, clean bed," she sobbed. But the king sternly told her, "If someone helps you when you are in need, you must repay your debt." So the princess reluctantly picked up the frog, carried him to her room, and set him in the corner.

But the frog crawled over to the bed as the princess lay down. "I'm tired," he croaked, "and I'd like to sleep just like you. Pick me up and set me on the pillow beside you."



The princess did as he asked, though she was not at all happy about it. The frog slept on her pillow all night long. When the sun rose, he leaped off the pillow and hopped out of the room, down the stairs, and out the door.

"Thank goodness!" the princess thought to herself. "I won't be bothered with that dreadful frog anymore."

But the next night, as she was sitting down at the table, there came again a knocking at the door. Once more, the frog appeared and asked to eat from her little gold plate and drink from her little gold cup. That night the frog slept on the pillow beside her. The night after that the same thing happened, and no matter how much she cried, the poor princess could not convince her father to put a stop to the frog's visits.

However, on the third morning when she awoke, the princess saw to her amazement that instead of the ugly frog, a handsome young prince stood gazing down at her with a warm smile.

The prince then told the princess that he had been put under a spell by a wicked witch. She had changed him into a frog, and he was doomed to stay in that form until a princess took him from the well and let him sleep in her bed for three nights. "You have freed me from my enchantment," the prince said tenderly. "Now I wish to marry you and take you to my father's kingdom, where I will love you and take care of you for as long as we both shall live."

The princess gave her consent, and together they went to the king and told him what had happened. Their marriage was celebrated that very day, and they both lived together in great happiness for many years.

