

The Frog Maiden

From *The Second Virago Book of Fairy Tales* by Angela Carter

Once there was a husband and wife who longed for a child. It was many years before their dream was realised. One day they were overjoyed to find that the wife was with child. But alas, she gave birth not to a human child but to a frog—a girl frog. But the little girl frog behaved just like a human child and her parents as well as their friends and neighbours became accustomed to her appearance and grew to love her very much. She was known affectionately as Little Miss Frog.

A few years after Little Miss Frog was born her mother died. Her father later married a widow with two daughters. The daughters were jealous of Little Miss Frog's popularity and took great pleasure in mistreating her. Life at home was not so pleasant for Little Miss Frog anymore but she did not allow it to change her appealing disposition.

One day the youngest of the king's four sons, who was not yet married, announced that he would choose a bride. He would perform a special ceremony on a certain date and after that ceremony he would choose his princess.

On the morning of the appointed day the two stepsisters spent a great deal of time in front of the mirror trying to do what nature had chosen not to do. They dressed themselves in new gowns bought especially for the occasion and when they thought they had achieved the impossible they set off for the palace with high hopes.

Little Miss Frog ran after them pleading to go with them. Her stepsisters looked at her and sneered.

"Excuse me, but the invitation specifically said young ladies NOT young frogs," said the elder sister. They both laughed.

Little Miss Frog walked along with them anyway but they made her stay outside the palace gates. However Little Miss Frog spoke so sweetly to the guards that they let her in and she stood with all the other hopeful young ladies waiting for the prince.

The prince appeared and began the special hair washing ceremony. As was the custom all the ladies also let down their hair and joined in the ceremony. At the end of the ceremony the prince declared that there were so many beautiful ladies that he simply couldn't decide which one to choose. He decided to let fate make the choice for him. He would throw a posy of jasmine in the air and the lady on whose head it fell would be his bride.

It was to the annoyance and disappointment of all the ladies and the prince that the posy fell on the head of Little Miss Frog. The two stepsisters were livid! The prince did not let his disappointment show. He kept his word and married Little Miss Frog. She became known as Princess Frog.

Shortly after they were married the king called his sons to a special meeting. He announced that he wished to choose one of them to be his successor so that he could retire to the forest.

"I love each of you equally and cannot make a choice," he told his sons. "What I will do is set you a task to perform and he who performs it successfully will be the new king. Your task is to bring me a golden deer at sunrise on the seventh day from today."

The three elder princes went off into the forest to search for deer. The young prince stayed at home because Princess Frog told him his task was remarkably easy and she would provide him with a golden deer on the appointed day.

“Go about your business as usual,” she said. “A golden deer? That is too easy. I will give you a golden deer.”

The young prince was a little sceptical but she seemed so sure that he finally believed her. When he awoke on the appointed day Princess Frog stood by his bed holding on a lead, a deer made of pure gold.

At the palace the three elder brothers had taken ordinary deer so of course the youngest prince was declared to be the heir to the throne. His brothers objected and pleaded for another chance. The king eventually agreed to their pleas, although reluctantly.

“Very well,” he said at last. “On the seventh day from today at sunrise bring me rice that never becomes stale and meat that is ever fresh. He who performs this task successfully will be the new king.”

The three elder princes went in search of the special food but the youngest prince stayed at home. Princess Frog again told him she would give him the special food on the appointed day.

“Go about your business as usual, dear husband,” she said sweetly. “I will give you the rice that never becomes stale and the meat that is ever fresh. This task is too easy.”

And so on the appointed day when the prince awoke Princess Frog handed him the special rice and meat. He took it to the palace. When the meat and rice of each prince had been tested it was declared that the food brought by the youngest prince was the only food that filled the requirements of the task.

He was again declared the new king. Again the three elder princes objected strongly and insisted on being given another chance.

The king said, “I will give you one last chance. There will be no more chances. This is the final task. On the seventh day at sunrise bring me the most beautiful woman on earth. He who performs this task will be the new king.”

The elder princes were delighted because they knew their wives were three of the most beautiful women on earth. They laughed at the thought of their younger brother trying to locate a woman more beautiful.

The young prince was sad. He went home to Princess Frog and told her he had to go on a journey in search of the most beautiful woman on the earth. But Princess Frog answered him as she had done on the other two occasions.

“Go about your business as usual dear husband,” she said. “On the appointed day you will have the most beautiful woman to take to the palace. You can take me.”

The prince looked at her in surprise. He opened his mouth to speak but quickly closed it again. He did not want to hurt her feelings so he said agreed. On the seventh day at dawn Princess Frog woke her husband.

“Please get up and wait outside,” she said. “I must make myself beautiful. Call me when it is nearly time to go.”

The prince dressed and left the room. When it was time he knocked on the door.

“Princess, it is time to go,” he called.

“Just a few minutes more,” she said. “I am powdering my face.”

The prince began to hope that perhaps since she had already performed two miracles, perhaps she could perform this third miracle. Perhaps she could make herself into the most beautiful woman on earth.

A few moments later he called again with a note of hopeful expectancy in his voice.

“Are you ready? We must go.”

“I am ready,” she called. “Please open the door for me.”

The prince dared to hope. He opened the door and looked eagerly at his princess. But Princess Frog was still a frog and nowhere close to being beautiful. His heart sank but he said nothing, not wishing to hurt her feelings.

He took her hand and they arrived at the palace together. When the prince entered the audience chamber the king was surprised. His brothers, already there with their beautiful wives, sniggered.

“Where is your beautiful maiden?” the king asked. “You have performed all of these tasks so well. Surely this third task was not too difficult for you?”

“I will speak for my husband,” said Princess Frog. “I am his beautiful maiden.”

She then removed her frog skin and stood before them, an exquisitely beautiful maiden dressed in silk and satin.

Everyone gasped in admiration. The king immediately declared her the most beautiful maiden in the world. The young prince was declared the new king.

The prince asked his princess not to wear the frog skin again, now that she was Queen.

She smiled, picked up the frog skin and threw it into the fire.