

The Frog Prince © 2019

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And they lived happily ever after—the prince and the young maiden. So did the stepmother for she had kept a promise, too.

Promises, promises... a good woman always keeps her promise.

The girl cut off the prince's head with an axe. Well, not *his* head, but the *frog's* head. You see the prince had irritated a witch and zap! the prince was changed into a frog. The only way back to be a prince again was for the frog to get a woman to do whatever he wanted for one night.

The girl did not know this at the time. She was merely keeping a promise to a frog. She didn't want to chop off its head; she wasn't a violent kind of girl. But when the frog asked a second time, the girl thought it would be nice to get rid of those big google eyes.

This was not the first request from the frog. Before the head chopping, it asked to sleep with her; in her own bed, on her clean sheets, its head upon her pillow, so awfully close to her. Stroking her hair with those slimy green hands, serenading her with its throating song and constantly reminding her of the promise she had made.

She had to carry the frog to her room. Its legs were tired from the journey and its belly was quite full. It wasn't enough for the frog to have something to eat on the floor. It had to perch on her plate while she fed it milk and bread, broken into small pieces. She had answered the door when it knocked—when the frog pleaded with her to grant entrance. She didn't want to, but her stepmother had made her open that door.

"Who would be knocking on the door at this time of night?" asked the stepmother.

The girl hung her head and the stepmother tapped her bony fingers upon the wooden table as the girl confessed.

"So, you met a frog on the road, did you? Made a promise to it, did you? Well, a good woman keeps her promises."

Oh, so many times the maiden had heard those words.

The girl had met the frog earlier that day. She wasn't that kind of girl, really. When she made the promise to it, she had not been thinking of the frog's request. She had been distracted by getting the sieve to hold water. She knew if she did not return with the water for her stepmother,

there would be consequences. Making a promise to a frog was so insignificant –it did not know where she lived, it did not know her name, and she surely could outrun the frog.

You see, it was the frog's idea to use the moss and clay.

“Line the sieve,” said the frog.

The girl might have dangled over the edge of the well for hours dipping the sieve into the icy cold water if the frog had not suggested the clay. Why had her stepmother given her a sieve to fetch the precious water from the Well of the World's End anyway?

The journey had been a long one. It always takes longer to arrive than to return. If it were not for the stranger she met on the road, the girl would still be on the road searching for the Well of the World's End.

The strange old woman's body was bent at the waist; a worn woolen shawl covered her head and the hump on her back. The girl never saw the old woman's face but was relieved to finally find someone who knew the way to the Well of the World's End. She had asked so many folks for directions.

The girl had been caught primping by the stepmother—fussing in the mirror when she should have been doing her chores—dusting and sweeping, cooking and scrubbing. It was the promise to be a watchful guide for the girl that kept the stepmother focused.

“Go, take this sieve and fetch me water from the Well of the World's End,” said the stepmother.

There were no chores when the girl's mother had been alive. There had been servants to do such work. The father—who was always gone—had married this new woman to replace the girl's mother.

“You are not very pretty,” said the girl to the stepmother. “My mother was beautiful, and my father says I look just like her.”

The stepmother's jaw tightened, and another wrinkle formed upon her face. And yet, the stepmother kept her promise.

Once, the stepmother had been young and pretty. That was a time when fairies danced upon the grass at twilight and the wind never blew cold. The porridge was thick and hot, and she married a merchant. She had promised him to be a watchful guide to his daughter and a good woman always keeps her promise.