

A King Among Frogs

A fairy story from *Tales from the Wood* by Adrian Farrel

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There was once a small pond in the corner of a meadow. The pond was covered in the large leaves of a lily plant, and in the summer great lily flowers floated on the water.

In the pond there lived a frog. A fine fat frog. A healthy frog that fed on flies. A prince among frogs.

One day a beautiful young girl came into the meadow. She was dancing and singing, and the sunlight shone brightly on her white dress and golden hair. In her hand she held a silver chain, and on the end of the chain was a golden cross. She swung the chain round and round as she danced.

Suddenly the chain snapped and the cross flew up into the air. It sailed over the grasses and wild flowers of the meadow and fell with a loud splash into the waters of the pond.

"Oh no," cried the princess, for that is what she was, "whatever shall I do? That was my mother's cross and my father will expect to see me wearing it in church on Sunday." And she started to cry.

"What is all this noise?" asked the frog, who had been woken from his snooze in the shallow warm water. "Can't an honest frog get a few moments of sleep?"

"Frog, O frog," exclaimed the princess, "you must help me. You must search through the mud at the bottom of the pond and find my gold cross."

"Oh, I must, must I?" said the frog. "I don't think I must do anything. I am a frog and not one of your father's subjects. But I will help you because I choose to. And because the water will taste funny with gold in it. I will search the mud and find the cross. Come back tomorrow and see what I have found."



When the princess returned the next day the frog was sitting on a lily pad looking tired. Along the bank of the pond were arranged a number of items: an old boot, a tin can, three nails, and a horseshoe.

"Did you find my cross?" asked the princess.

"Not yet," said the frog. "It is a big pond for a small frog like me. The mud is thick and it is hard work. I am taking a rest. Come back tomorrow and we will see what I have found."

"Oh, but tomorrow is Saturday," wailed the princess. "I must have the cross for Sunday when two fine princes will be in Church to see me. You must find it for me by tomorrow. You must start to search again at once."

"Oh, I must, must I?" said the frog. "I don't think I must do anything. I am a frog and not one of your suitors. But I will help you because I choose to. Come back tomorrow."

So the princess went home, and the frog plopped back into the water.

On Saturday afternoon the princess ran into the meadow full of trepidation. "Did you find it?" she cried out, even before she could see the frog.

And there sat the frog on a big leaf in the middle of the pond with the cross glinting in the sun beside him.

"O frog," she cried, "you are so wonderful. You must bring it to me at once so my maids can clean it and polish it for me to wear to Church tomorrow."

"Oh, I must, must I?" said the frog. "I don't think I must do anything. I am a frog and not one of your ladies-in-waiting. How will you reward me if I bring you the cross?"

"That's easy," said the princess. "I know exactly how to reward a frog like you. A frog that is so kind and can talk can be rewarded properly in only one way."

So the frog took the cross in his mouth and swam to the shore. The princess was delighted and immediately hung the cross on a new chain around her neck. The cross sparkled and added to her beauty.

"And now for your reward," she said. "I bet you have been waiting for this for years." And she leant forward and gave the frog a huge kiss with her ruby-red lips.

The frog leapt back in alarm. "Is this how you reward me?" he cried. "I have worked non-stop digging in the mud in this pond. I worked all night and I missed my dinner. But you come here with unnatural hair on your head, your rosy complexion when you should be green, your warm and slimeless lips, and your fat short tongue. And you have the disgusting temerity to plant a vile kiss on my head. How dare you?"

And with that, the frog jumped back into the pond.



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