

THE FROG KING, OR IRON HARRY

In the old days, when wishing still worked, there lived a king, and his daughters were all beautiful; but the youngest was so beautiful that the sun itself, although it had seen so many things, wondered whenever it shone into her face. Near the king's palace was a big dark forest, and in the forest under an old linden tree was a well; so when it was a very hot day the princess used to go out into the forest and sit down at the edge of the cool well – and when she was bored she would take a golden ball and throw it into the air and catch it again; and this was her favourite toy.

Now it happened one day that when the princess held out her little hand to catch her golden ball, it did not fall into it but bounced past it onto the ground and rolled right into the water. The princess stared after it but the ball vanished, and the well was deep, so deep that no one could see the bottom. At this she began to cry and cried louder and louder and was quite inconsolable. And as she wailed she heard a voice call out to her: 'Now, princess, what are you howling about? It's enough to make a stone take pity on you.' She looked round to see where the voice was coming from and saw a frog sticking its fat ugly head out of the water. 'Oh, it's you, old puddlefoot,' she said. 'I'm crying for my golden ball, it's fallen down into the well.' 'Be quiet and don't cry,' answered the frog, 'I think I can do something about it; but what will you give me if I fetch up your toy for you again?' 'Whatever you want, dear frog,' she said, 'my dresses, my pearls and jewels, even the golden crown I wear.' The frog answered: 'I don't want your dresses, your pearls and jewels and your golden crown – but if you will love me and let me be your companion and playmate, sitting by you at your table, eating from your golden plate, drinking from your cup, sleeping in your bed; if you will promise me that, then I will go down and fetch up your golden ball for you again.' 'Oh yes,'

she said, 'I'll promise you anything you like if only you'll bring me back the ball.' But she thought: What nonsense this silly frog is talking! It sits in the water and croaks with the other frogs, how can it ever have a human companion?

As soon as the frog had her promise he stuck his head in the water and dived down, and before long he came swimming up again with the ball in his mouth and threw it onto the grass. The princess was overjoyed when she saw her beautiful toy again, and she picked it up and ran away with it. 'Whoa, whoa!' cried the frog. 'Take me with you, I can't run so fast as you!' But he might shout his quaw, quaw as loud as he could, much good it did him. She paid no attention, hurried back home and had soon forgotten the poor frog, who had to go back down into his well.

Next day, when she had seated herself at table with the king and all the courtiers and was eating from her little golden plate, something came plish-plash plish-plash crawling up the marble stairs, and when it had got to the top it knocked at the door and called out: 'Princess, youngest daughter, let me in!' She ran to see who was there, but when she opened the door there sat the frog. She slammed it shut and sat down again at the table feeling very frightened. The king saw clearly enough that her heart was beating fast, and said: 'Why are you scared, child, is there a giant or something at the door who has come to fetch

you?' 'Oh no,' she answered, 'it's not a giant but a horrid frog.' 'What does the frog want of you?' 'Oh, father dear, yesterday when I was sitting playing beside the well in the wood, my golden ball fell into the water. And because I cried so, the frog fetched it up again, and because it absolutely insisted I promised it to let it be my companion; but I never thought it would be able to leave the water where it lives. Now it's out there and wants me to let it in.' And already there was a second knock and the voice said:

'Princess, youngest daughter,
Let me in!
Have you forgotten
Your promise of yesterday
By the well's cool water?
Princess, youngest daughter,
Let me in!'

Then the king said: 'When you have made a promise, you must keep it; so go and let him in.' She went and opened the door, and the frog hopped in and followed her close at her heels and up to her chair. There he squatted and called out: 'Pick me up and put me beside you.' She hesitated, till finally the king ordered her to do it. Once the frog was on the chair he wanted to be on the table, and when he was on it he said: 'Now push your golden plate nearer, so we can eat together.' And although she did it, you could see that she didn't like to. The frog ate heartily, but she could hardly swallow a morsel. Finally he said: 'I've eaten my fill and I'm tired; now carry me to your bedroom and make your little silk bed, and then we shall lie down and sleep.' The princess began to cry; she was afraid of the cold frog which she didn't even dare touch, and now it was to sleep in her lovely clean bed. But the king grew angry and said: 'When someone has helped you out of trouble, you must not despise him afterwards.' So she took the frog between her finger and thumb, carried him upstairs and put him in a corner. But when she was in bed he came crawling up and said: 'I'm tired, I want to sleep as well as you - lift me up, or I'll tell your father.' At this she really got furious, picked him up and hurled him against the wall as hard as she could, saying: 'Now you'll sleep, you horrid frog.'

But when he dropped to the floor he was no longer a frog, but a prince with beautiful soft eyes; and he, at her father's wish, became her dear companion and husband. He told her that a wicked witch had put a spell on him, and that no one had been able to save him from the well until she came, and tomorrow they would travel together to his kingdom. Then they went to sleep, and when the sun woke them next morning a carriage came driving up: it had eight white horses in harness, with white ostrich plumes and golden chains, and behind them stood the young king's servant, who was known as Faithful Harry. Faithful Harry had been so sad when his master had been turned into a frog that he had had three iron bands put round his heart to stop it bursting with grief and sorrow. But the carriage had come to fetch the young king home; Faithful Harry lifted both of them into it, stood up again in his place and was full of joy that his master had been saved. And when they had driven a little way, the prince heard a crack behind him as of something breaking. He turned round and called out:

'Harry, the carriage
Is falling apart.'
'No, sir, from my heart
An iron band fell;
For my heart grieved sore
When you were a puddock
And sat in a well.'

A second time and a third time there was a crack as they drove along, and each time the prince thought the carriage was breaking, yet it was only the bands bursting round Faithful Harry's heart because his master was saved and happy.