

THE FROG WHO BECAME AN EMPEROR

(from China)

The Emperor had not the slightest intention of letting his daughter marry a frog.

"Of course I cannot do such a thing!" he said to himself. She must marry someone else, but whom? He did not know what to do. Anyone but a frog! Finally he ordained that her marriage should be decided by casting the Embroidered Ball.

The news spread immediately throughout the whole country and within a few days the city was in a turmoil. Men from far and wide came to try their luck, and all manner of people flocked to the capital. The day came. The frog was present. He did not push his way into the mob but stood at the very edge of the crowded square.

A gaily festooned pavilion of a great height had been built. The Emperor led the princess and her train of maids to their seats high up on the stand.

The moment arrived. The princess tossed the Embroidered Ball into the air, and down it gently floated. The masses in the square surged and roared like a raging sea. As one and all stretched eager hands to clutch the ball, the frog drew in a mighty breath and, like a whirling tornado, sucked the ball straight to him.

Now, surely, the princess will have to marry the frog! But the Emperor was still unwilling to let this happen.

"An Embroidered Ball cast by a princess," he declared, "can only be seized by a human hand. No beast may do so."

He told the princess to throw down a second ball.

This time a young, stalwart fellow caught the ball.

"This is the man!" cried the happy Emperor. "Here is the person fit to be my imperial son-in-law."

A sumptuous feast was set to celebrate the occasion.

Can you guess who that young, stalwart fellow was? Of course it was the frog, now in the guise of a man.

Not till he was married to the princess did he change back again. By day he was a frog but at night he stripped off his green skin and was transformed into a fine, upstanding youth.

The princess could not keep it a secret and one day revealed it to her father, the Emperor. He was startled but happy.

"At night," he said to his son-in-law, "you discard your outer garment, I hear, and become a handsome young man. Why do you wear that horrid frog-skin in the day?"

"Ah, Sire," replied the frog, "this outer garment is priceless. When I wear it in winter, I am warm and cosy; and in summer, cool and fresh. It is proof against wind and rain. Not even the fiercest flame can set it alight. And as long as I wear it, I can live for thousands of years."

"Let me try it on!" demanded the Emperor.

"Yes, Sire," replied the frog and made haste to discard his skin.

The Emperor smiled gleefully. He took off his dragon-embroidered robe and put on the frog-skin. But then he could not take it off again!

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The frog put on the imperial robe and became the Emperor. His father-in-law remained a frog forever.