

# *The Toad under the Castle*

*from The Lost Lagoon*

*A “pedagogical” fairy tale as antidote to vanity and snottiness.*

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Once upon a time, a large and very ugly toad lived beneath a stone near a castle. Every evening the toad plopped into the moat, and croaked: ‘Ribbit-ribbit! Ribbit-ribbit!’

Within the castle lived a young and beautiful princess. She was as lovely as the sun and stars, and her hair shone like gold.

One day the princess went for a walk in the woods, and as she wandered she stubbed her toe on a rock.

‘Ow! Ow! Ow!’ she cried, ‘My poor toe!’ and went limping back to the castle.

In her room she sat down on a chair and wrapped her toe in a bandage. But as she was doing so the toad came plip-plop, plip-plop up the stairs and stopped in front of her.

‘Ribbit,’ croaked the toad. ‘I can make your toe better.’

‘How can you do that?’ asked the princess.

‘Ribbit-ribbit,’ answered the toad. ‘I can kiss it.’

‘Eeeeeyou!’ squealed the princess. ‘How gross!’ And turning her head in disgust she told the ugly toad to go away.

That night, after she went to bed, her toe grew bigger and bigger. It swelled up until it was as big as a grapefruit.

In the morning her toe was very sore. So sore that all the princess could do was limp to her chair and sit down.

Before long the toad came plip-plop, plip-plop up the stairs. He hopped to the princess, and said: ‘Ribbit! Ribbit! I can make your toe better.’

‘How can you do that?’ she asked, hoping the toad would give a different answer. But the toad replied in a croaky voice: ‘I can kiss it—ribbit—I can kiss it.’

The princess turned her nose up into the air, and said: ‘Eeeeeyou! How gross and disgusting! I definitely don’t want that! Not from such an ugly toad as you!’

That night her toe got worse. It swelled until it could swell no more. Her toe should have burst, but the end of her nose began to swell instead. It swelled until it was as large as a ripe tomato—and just as red!

In the morning she got out of bed and looked in the mirror.

‘Eeeeeyoo!’ she cried when she saw how ugly she was. ‘How gross and disgusting!’

She hobbled painfully to her chair, sat down, and waited. Soon the toad came plip-plop, plip-plop up the stairs and stopped in front of her.

‘Ribbit! Ribbit!’ croaked the toad. ‘I can make your toe better.’

'How will you do that?' cried the princess in agony.

'Ribbit,' croaked the toad. 'I can kiss it. I can kiss it.'

This time the princess was glad to say 'yes' to the ugly toad, and he hopped over and kissed her toe. Instantly her toe was better. But, in the same moment, the toad vanished and a handsome prince stood in front of her. It was not long before wedding bells were ringing from every church in the land, and they lived happily ever after."

When Tiptoes finished her story the toad didn't say a word. Tiptoes waited patiently.

"Do you think that toads really have princes hidden inside them?" asked the toad at last.

"This one did," said Tiptoes. "Perhaps you do too!"

The toad looked at her doubtfully.

"It will take a long time for my prince to come out into the world," he said at last.

"Perhaps," said Tiptoes, "but he's in there somewhere."

"Maybe," agreed the toad. He was less grumpy now. "But tell me, Tiptoes, what became of the ugly red swelling on the end of the princess's nose?"

"Well," said Tiptoes, "the swelling did go down, but not quite. For the rest of her life the beautiful princess had a pimple on the end of her nose, to remind her of how snotty she had been, once upon a time."