

THE FROG BOY AND HIS FAMILY

Mchod pa'i lha mo

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Learning folktales was something I loved to do as a child. Every night, I asked my parents, brothers, sisters, and familiar guests to tell stories. Children who lived in remote herding pastures were proud of knowing many stories at that time, when there was no electricity to watch TV and videos. We children shared our stories with each other when we herded yaks and during our free time, especially after dinner.

We shared stories in turn. When it was my turn, I often told the story of the frog boy and his family because, when I first learned this story from my eldest sister (Chosenyi Drolma; b. 1975), I found the characters to be interesting, mysterious, and frightening.

The Frog's Appearance

An old woman lived alone. One day, her right knee ached, which made her rub it repeatedly. To her surprise, a frog suddenly came out from her knee. Thinking it was a bad sign, she felt very depressed. The frog saw the old woman's sad and worried expression and said, "Mother, don't worry for I will not disappoint you. The king's daughter will be my wife."

The old woman said, "How can a frog possibly get a king's daughter for his wife. Don't say such things! If the king hears this, our life will be in danger!"

The frog said, "Mother, you will see me come home tonight with the king's daughter."

The old woman thought it was impossible as the frog left to propose to one of the king's daughters.

The Frog Gets a Wife

When the frog neared the king's palace, the dogs barked loudly. The king asked his eldest daughter to check. She went out and looked around, didn't see anything unusual, returned to the palace, and reported that everything was as usual. She added, "Maybe our dogs bark a lot because they are too full."

After a while, the dogs resumed barking madly and the king asked his second daughter to check. She also didn't find anything unusual and returned with the same report. The king trusted his daughters and didn't think about it further.

A short time later, however, the dogs resumed barking furiously. This time the king asked his youngest daughter to find out the cause. The third daughter noticed a tree in their courtyard was moving a little. She returned to the king and said, "A tree was moving a bit. Other than that, nothing else is happening."

The king believed her as he had his other two daughters. The frog was small and none of the daughters had seen him.

Just after the third daughter's report, the frog entered the palace and spoke, shocking the king and everyone in the palace. They were sure it was a bad omen.

The king asked his servants to bring the frog nearer. The frog said, "I came here tonight to propose to one of your daughters. I want her to be my wife."

The king laughed loudly, thinking how utterly ridiculous it was, while his first and second daughter made

silly expressions. The frog noticed that the king's third daughter's expression was different and also realized that she was prettier than the other two.

The king said to the frog, "It's impossible! Servants, throw this frog out of the palace!"

The frog said, "Please wait! Wait! If you don't give me your third daughter, I'll stretch out my body and your palace will collapse."

The king laughed and said, "Please go ahead and stretch out your body. We do not fear frogs."

The frog then had no choice and began stretching out his body. The palace started to shake and almost collapsed. The terrified king begged the frog to stop and promised that he would allow the frog to take his youngest daughter for his wife.

The frog stopped, but the king didn't keep his promise. The frog said, "If you don't grant my request, I will laugh loudly and your palace will be destroyed by a strong wind."

The king said, "It's up to you. We're not afraid of a frog."

The frog started laughing. Strong wind came, almost destroying the palace, forcing the king to plead with the frog to stop and renewing his promise.

As before, the frog believed the king and stopped and, as before, the king broke his promise. Then the frog said, "If you don't give me your daughter this time, I will cry and not only your palace, but the whole area will be destroyed by heavy rain."

The king didn't believe this and told the frog to cry. The frog cried. Suddenly there was lightning and heavy rain. When the palace was almost flooded, the king again begged the frog to stop.

The frog said, "You must keep your promise or I will cry loudly again and again." The king had no other option and so gave his daughter to the frog. The frog stopped crying and everything returned to normal. The frog then

cheerfully returned to his home with the king's third daughter and much property.

When the frog arrived, he asked his mother to open the door. She said, "You little frog can enter the tent from anywhere, there is no need to open the door."

The frog said, "Mother, it is OK for me, but your daughter-in-law and her property cannot come inside without you opening the door."

She still didn't believe him and said, "If you are with a woman, tell her to speak."

The frog's wife said, "He's right, I am with him."

The astonished old woman then opened the door and was happy to see her daughter and the property that they had brought. The old woman then began a happy life with her frog son and her daughter-in-law.

The Horserace

One day, a horserace festival was to be held and the frog asked his mother and wife to dress up and attend. He said, "I'm a frog and it unnecessary for me to go. I'll stay at home and tend the livestock."

Then his mother and wife dressed up in their best clothes and set off. Once they were gone, the frog took off his skin, put on white clothes, mounted a white horse, and galloped to the horserace. He was now a very handsome young man.

When his mother and wife reached the horserace area, they noticed a very handsome man whom they didn't recognize. He rode a white horse, wore expensive white clothes, and was the winner of the horserace. The audience endlessly speculated who he was, but none knew. To everyone's surprise, he smiled at his mother and wife several times but, to them, he was a stranger.

The first day of the horserace ended and everybody returned home. When the frog's mother and his wife got

home, the frog asked, "How was the horserace? Did you two enjoy yourselves?"

They said that they had a great time and his wife told him about the stranger—the handsome man, and the champion of the horserace.

The frog asked them to describe the man.

His wife described the stranger in detail and began to wonder if the stranger might be her husband, the frog.

The next morning, the frog told his mother and wife to attend the second day of the horserace festival while he stayed at home and tended the livestock. That day, his wife and mother left together.

On the way, his wife said she had forgotten something and told her mother-in-law to go on with their neighbors. "I'll catch up with you soon," she said. She wanted to know if the strange man was her husband. She went to the back of the tent, looked inside through a corner, and saw the frog remove his skin and become the handsome man that they had seen at the horserace festival. She was very pleased to see her husband was so handsome and waited until he left the tent. Just after his departure, she entered the tent and burned the frog skin. She wanted her husband to show his real appearance and didn't think about what might happen if she burned the frog skin. Then she went to the horserace. She saw her husband, who again won the horserace. He smiled at his mother and wife as he had done the day before.

When they finished the horserace, the frog rushed home and found his skin had been burned. He was terribly worried when his wife and mother returned and said, "If I show my real appearance, the nine-headed devil will force me to be his servant. Now, without the frog-skin, I cannot hide and the nine-headed devil will come soon and take me away. Wife, please care for my mother."

The Frog is Stolen by the Nine-Headed Devil

His wife was very sad, regretted burning the frog skin, and had no idea how to save her husband's life. Suddenly, a strong wind came and took the frog boy away. His wife was full of regret and set out searching for him with some food.

She went a very long way and met many people, but none had seen her husband. She continued her journey and one day met an old man. She told him what had happened and why she was wandering about.

The old man was shocked, told her the mission was very dangerous, and suggested she return home.

The frog's wife insisted on continuing her journey till she met her husband.

The old man said, "It is impossible for you to meet your husband. Many have been taken by the nine-headed devil and none have returned. If you go there, the nine-headed devil will kill you or keep you for his slave for the rest of your life.

The frog's wife insisted that she would continue to search for her husband, so the old man then finally showed her the way to the nine-headed devil's palace.

She thanked him and walked on toward the palace. A few days later she reached the palace and saw her husband wearing metal clothing and fetching water. She was very excited to see him and ran to him in tears.

Her husband said in surprise, "You are very lucky today because the nine-headed devil went hunting for human blood. He will return tonight and we must find a way to kill him."

They then both went to the palace, where the wife hid in an underground room that was nine floors high. He told her, "When the nine-headed devil closes his eyes in bed, he can hear even a mouse walking. You must not move at that time. But when his eyes are wide open, it means he is deep asleep and he can't hear anything. This is the time you must come thrust this spike into his heart. He will die when the spike breaks into two pieces."

The nine-headed devil returned to the palace. He was in an unhappy mood, sniffed, and said, "There is the odor of human blood."

The frog boy said, "Of course, because I have human flesh."

The nine-headed devil didn't ask further questions and went to bed.

Killing the Nine-Headed Devil

At midnight, the nine-headed devil opened his eyes very wide and went to asleep. The frog boy got up and took his wife from the deep underground room. She then stabbed the spike that her husband had given her into the heart of the nine-headed devil, breaking it in two. The nine-headed devil gave out such a shuddering last gasp that the palace shook.

The couple was very happy for they no longer needed to worry about the nine-headed devil and the frog boy also no longer needed to live in the frog's skin. Many rooms in the huge palace had prisoners. The frog boy and his wife opened each room and saved many people. They also found many human corpses and dead animals. In the last room, they discovered an old, thin woman with white hair. She told them she had been put in the room when she was very young and was delighted to learn the nine-headed devil was dead. She gratefully thanked them.

A Joyful Reunion

The frog boy and his wife happily returned home. The mother was very pleased to see her son and daughter-in-law return. The frog boy and his family had a wonderful and happy life together.

NON-ENGLISH TERMS

Chosenyi Drolma ཚོས་ཉིད་སྐྱེལ་མ།

Dme ru ma དམེ་རུ་མ། 麦尔玛

Gnam mtsho ma གན་མ་མཚོ་མ། 郎措玛

Mchod pa'i lha mo མཚོད་པའི་ལྷ་མོ།

Rnga ba ར་བ། 阿坝

Rnga ba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture ར་བ་བོད་

རིགས་ཆའང་རིགས་རང་སྐྱོང་ཁུལ།