



The Lion and the Frog

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Animals, Humor, Magic

Once upon a time, in a sprawling mansion, there lived a sad widow and her loyal daughter. Why was the woman sad? For one thing, she was a widow. For another, she was cursed. Inside, she was a good-natured lady with a heart of gold. On the outside, she appeared a lioness, with azure eyes and hideous green fur created from a witch's envy. This witch had discovered that her mortal husband had been having an affair with the widow, who never knew he was married. Their love grew in inexplicable ways, their passion animalistic. He found a woman that could make his heart leap just by the sight of her. That bothered the witch. Greatly. Since that day six years ago, the witch cursed the woman to appear as a lioness until a man was willing to kiss her as a beast. For this, she turned to her lover in hope he would see through such a horrible fate and love her for who she was. This was never to be, for the moment he saw her large paws and her ferocious teeth, the mortal man returned to his witchy wife, who threatened to curse him should he not. From that day on, his heart refused to ever leap again.

Rather than leap, the lioness' heart broke. Only her daughter lacked fear of her mother's new form. Even as a beast, to her, the lioness was still her mother. Paws and a tail would not change that.

From that day on, the daughter cared for her mother. She knew of nothing else. All she knew were of the quiet moments by the hearth, filing her mother's claws and discussing the day. Or the days reading the books in her mother's library or painting portraits of her family from memory. She cared little for the outside world, and the horrendous villagers that had turned her mother away. She only visited once a month to buy milk and fruits, and would often use a disguise so as no one would recognize her. The only thing she ever kept the same was a blue ribbon in her hair, given to her by her father before he died. He told her that it was a special ribbon,

that it had magic powers. She innocently believed her father and kept in her hair always.

As for food, that was something she could gather from the woods. Unlike her mother, who had no desire to hunt, her daughter was quite favorable to it. This was in large part due to her father, who had taught her such skills before he died. He showed her how to wait, watch, and listen. She learned many animal's calls, their habitats. She could locate a swallow from twenty yards away, or hear a cockroach skittering through the leaves in the distance. Almost by magic.

One morning in early autumn, while searching for her and her mother's next meal, the daughter came across a small frog perched on a rock near a lake. It stared at her, unblinking, as if it and her were the only two things in the forest. She leaned towards the creature, assessing its bizarre blue coloring and yellow eyes. It was unlike any of the frogs she'd ever seen. Gecko-like, with flecks of black in its skin with wispy legs dangling beneath him. Most would have been frightened at the sight of her. Yet this one sat, an immovable statue.

I've never eaten frog before, the daughter thought. There's a first time for everything.

With silence on her side, she aimed her gun at the little frog. Fear blinked in his eyes. Suddenly, the frog lifted his long, shaking legs and shouted, "Don't shoot!"

Startled, she dropped her gun and started to run away. At the moment, frog legs took a backseat to her own legs as they pounded through the forest.

"Wait! Miss! Please come back!" the frog called out after her, hopping madly to keep up with her pace.

The girl's heart beat in her chest. She stumbled over fallen twigs and leaves in her haste to return home.

"Please, Miss!" he called out again. "You can break my curse."

Well that stopped her in her tracks. Her mind took its place, racing faster than it ever had. This could be the answer, she thought. Her mother's savior – in the form of a slimy talking amphibian. She whirled around to face the frog, a smile on her lips.

"A curse, you say?"

"Yes. I need someone that will kiss me. A witch cursed me to find a woman that would be brave enough to withstand by mucus lips and bestow upon me a kiss. It does not have to be love. A kiss is all I ask. And my curse will be broken."

With a serious face, the girl leaned down on one knee. "Sorry, Froggy. I'm not a woman yet. But I know of one. My mother! I am sure she would not have any qualms kissing a frog such as you." The daughter joked, "She has very low standards."

The frog brightened. He clasped his legs together as if in prayer, his salvation found. "Then take me to her immediately!"

Ecstatic, the girl scooped up the frog in her arms and dashed back to the mansion, foregoing a meal for the time being.

As soon as she arrived, her mother rose her lioness head up from the book her paws were flipping through. She lounged elegantly by the fire on a bear skin rug.

"Back so soon, dear?" she called out.

"Yes, mother" her daughter said, holding the frog behind her back. "And I have a surprise."

The lioness lowered her reading glasses with her paw. "A surprise?" she asked, suspicious.

Ancestral paintings poised above her, their faces toward the door, as though also anticipating the daughter's surprise. After gently placing the lace bookmark to mark her place, the lioness strode towards her daughter standing by the door.

"What is going on?" she asked. She noticed her daughter's hands were behind her back and she was trying rather futilely to hide her giddiness.

The lioness peered around her. "What are you holding behind you back?" she asked.

"Your prince, mother!" The daughter whipped the frog around to face her.

Caught prepping his moist skin for a kiss, the frog stopped mid-pamper when he saw the lioness.

"Ah!" it screamed, hopping frantically up the girl's arm and onto her shoulder. "A lion!"

The lioness recoiled. "What is going on?"

The frog kept trying to bounce out of the daughter's hands. She gripped it as it attempted flee. It shook in her hands.

"Mother. This frog was cursed just like you. He needs a kiss from a woman. You need a kiss from a man. If you kiss one another, I'm sure it will break both of your curses."

The lioness looked at her paw sorrowfully. "But, darling, I have not been a woman in ages. I'm not sure it will work."

"But are you willing to kiss him?" she demanded.

The lioness nodded. "Of course." She pointed at the frog with her paw. "But I don't think he is."

The frog's heart bounded against its chest. It clung to the girl's face for dear life. With a sigh, she carefully removed him and held him in her hands, looking at him sternly.

“You wanted a kiss, did you not?” she asked.

“Yes, but not like this” the frog objected. He turned his head slowly toward the lioness, then quickly snapped back when he saw her massive fangs.

“Well, it’s her or nothing. Your choice. Do you want to stay a frog forever?”

The frog gulped. “No.”

“Then you must kiss her.”

The frog sighed. “All right. I will do it” he told her. He closed his eyes tight. “I just don’t want to see her face when I do.”

“Fine.” The girl held the frog tight and slowly moved him close to her mother’s mouth. Her mother calmly licked her paw, then her fur, trying to make herself more appealing.

She leaned in towards the frog, her mouth extended, his mucus lips jutting forward. Gradually, the two cursed creatures inched towards each other. But just before their lips touched, the frog lifted one eye.

“Ah, I can’t do it!” he screamed.

He wiggled out of the girl’s arms and raced towards the door. Just before he escaped, the daughter locked it tight, sealing him into the lioness’s den. The poor frightened frog, his heart beating fast, stood on his hind legs bunched up against the door.

“You’re not leaving until you’ve kissed my mother. And kissed her good, you hear me?” the daughter said, wagging her finger at the frog.

The frog stared up at the daughter. She was scarier than the lioness when she was angry. He turned to the lioness, witnessed her knife-like fangs protruding from her muzzle. Well, maybe not. With a start, he bounded away into the mansion, trying to find a place to hide.

The daughter started to run after him.

“Let him go” said her mother, with a look of regret. “He’ll kiss me when he’s ready.”

The daughter watched her mother slowly return to the fireplace and reopen her book. Sometimes a frog wasn’t always a prince.

The next few days only served to validate this belief. He resided in his “castle” — the mansion’s largest bathroom — all alone, surviving on dead flies and spiders in its dusty, unkempt corners. He had been so used to the lake, being in a home felt foreign to him now. He would fill the sink with water and imagine it a lake. He would collect bars of soap and sit on them like rocks, just to feel at home. Sure he missed the forest greenery,

but the shower curtain had trees on it which was nice.

One day, the lioness, who had been secretly practicing hunting for food, came home dirty after failing to capture a fleeting hare. As she walked back into the house, rather than alert her daughter that she needed a bath, she decided to try bathing by herself. She hadn't done so in ages, but she was reluctant to explain her hunting faux pas.

So she went through the mansion to the bathroom with a shower to accommodate her size. Unbeknownst to her, the frog had taken up residence there. As she entered, she caught the frog bathing in the sink, splashing water under his armpits.

"Oh, I'm sorry" she said, backing away in embarrassment.

The frog ducked into the water. "It's okay" he said, hoping she'd leave.

She pointed her paw backward. "I'll go find another bathroom." She turned around, slinking back through the hallway.

He peered around the door frame and watched her walk away. He noticed her strong legs, her shapely shoulders, the curve of her tail.

Suddenly, he realized he was staring. He went back to bathing, attempting unsuccessfully to shake the image of her piercing blue eyes.

A few nights later, the lioness returned from a hunt, a hare dangling from her lips. Practice had made perfect and she had dinner to prove it. She placed the furry carcass on the floor, swishing her tail in excitement.

"Darling, I've got a surprise for us."

Her daughter put down her brush. On the canvas, abstract portraits of families beamed back at her. Mothers. Daughters. Fathers.

As she joined her mother in the hall, she noticed the hare lying on the carpet.

"Mother! I didn't know you could hunt!"

"I learned from the best, my dear" she replied, smiling at her daughter. "Now, if you wouldn't mind taking this into the kitchen."

"Of course" the daughter responded eagerly.

She took the rabbit and went into the kitchen to prepare a rabbit stew for two.

As soon as she was gone, the lioness gagged. Its dead, furry body tasted revolting. She didn't know how her daughter killed these creatures so easily. At least she was finally able to provide for her daughter. That's what

mattered.

Feeling energized from her accomplishment, she decided to reward herself with a bath. She walked by the frog's bathroom without looking his way. She was headed towards another bathroom, with a tub large enough to fit her.

"Hello" he called out to her. She stopped.

"Hello?" she asked, peering cautiously into the bathroom.

The frog's heart skipped a beat at the sight of her looking at him "Need a shower?" he asked, noticing how dirty she was. How very dirty.

The lioness looked down, self-conscious of her appearance. "Yes."

He hopped onto the edge of the sink and extended a hand toward the shower. "It's all yours."

"Thank you" she nodded in gratitude, surprised by the kind gesture. As she walked past him, the frog watched her transfixed. She was incredibly handsome, for a lion.

She then entered the shower, pulling the curtain closed with her paw. The velvet drapes concealed her from view.

Realizing he had nowhere else to be, the frog, however regrettably, decided to spy on the lioness in the shower. Silently, he hopped across the carpet and onto the back of the toilet. He carefully peered behind the curtain, watching her shake her head in the fountain. He leaned forward, peeping at her. Suddenly, she turned her head and caught him peeking. He tumbled into the shower.

The lioness growled, her body bristling. "What are you doing, you perverse little amphibian?"

He put up one of his legs, and looked away. "I'm sorry. My bad."

He started to hop out, but before he did, he added, "However, it's not as if you being naked is abnormal." He nodded at her furry physique, perennially on display.

The lioness chuckled. "I guess you're right. I'm just so unused to people wanting to see me like this, I reverted back to when I was. . ." She sighed. "When I was human."

The frog watched her look away. A lump of pity formed in his throat. He knew how terrible that must feel.

"Forgive me for my indecency. I will leave you to your bathing." He hopped out of the shower and shook off the water onto the carpet. As he was leaving, he fantasized about her fangs, how they glistened in the water. He shivered, imagining them sinking into his skin. The horny little toad.

As soon as she knew the frog was gone, the lioness smiled to herself. A warm feeling arose in her chest. A man

had gazed at her, for the first time in so long.

After that, the frog ventured out of the bathroom more often. He would join the lioness and her daughter by the hearth. The daughter would read him stories and he would fall asleep to the sound of the lioness purring. Returning from the hunt, the daughter would often catch the frog and the lioness sleeping by the fire, curled up close. She herself also started to bond with the frog. She brought in some rocks and twigs from outside to make him feel at home by the sink. She even cooked him a strawberry pie filled with flies, or as she liked to call it, fruit fly pie.

One night, the frog decided he'd join them for dinner. He proudly sported an old black and white barrette he found in the bathroom. He wore it like a bow tie tied with string beneath his chin, to make him look distinguished. This was it. This was the night he would kiss the lioness. End all their sorrows. Return each of them to their true selves. Yet, he had been putting off this day for one reason, and one reason alone. Because for the first time in his life, he was happy — just as he was.

He could hop to places without worrying about predators chasing him. He could swim in waters that weren't muddy, or slimy, or filled with other frogs, who couldn't talk and provided much less riveting company. But most importantly, he could eat flies and not have to do it alone.

Certainly, he could live like this. Quite well, in fact. But the lioness couldn't. He would hear her cry to herself when her daughter went to bed, and know how unhappy she was. He had to try, even if her love was not returned.

Little did he know that it was. The lioness loved seeing him with her daughter, the way they bonded. Loved holding him in her paws, his body close to hers. Close, but never close enough. He still had not kissed her after all this time. Not only that, they had been keeping him as prisoner for the last month. She couldn't allow that to continue.

As her daughter was stirring a pot of soup, the lioness bounded into the kitchen. "Darling, we have to talk."

"What is it, ma?" she asked without turning around. She lifted the spoon to her lips. Too hot!

"We have to let him go" the lioness said.

The daughter stopped mid-stir. She turned around. "What are you talking about? He's finally warming up to us."

The lioness paced. "Maybe so, but he still hasn't wanted to kiss me. He's not happy here, darling. We can't keep him locked up like this forever."

“But he wants to be human too” she protested. “If he leaves, that will never happen.” And we’ll never be a real family, she thought in secret.

“Even if he does, I can’t give him that. I am not a woman.” She swished her tail and looked at it. “I am a lioness.” Her daughter kneeled before her. “No, mother. You are a woman.” She slid her hand against her green fur, on the place where her heart was. “In here. You are always a woman. And I love you no matter what.”

The lioness looked into her daughter’s eyes. A tear rolled down her cheek. “Then I don’t need to be human after all.”

She scurried across the kitchen tile, almost colliding with the frog on his way to meet her.

“Hello there” he greeted her warmly.

She recognized the barrette underneath his chin. She smiled, recalling her daughter as a baby, giggling with the little barrette stuck in her light blonde hair. Days when she could hold her daughter in her arms.

“That is my daughter’s” she said to the frog.

The frog looked down. He nudged it with his pad. “I know. I repurposed it.”

In that moment, the lioness saw not a frog, but a man, held against his will in order to break a silly curse.

“You have to go!” she whispered, seeing her daughter coming up behind her.

“What?”

The lioness nudged the frog across the floor. Mucus formed a line beneath his body.

“Go! You have to leave” she demanded.

Her daughter watched her in disbelief. “Mother, what are you doing?”

“Darling, open the door. We can’t keep him here.” The matter was final.

The daughter stood her ground, crossing her arms. “I won’t.”

“You’re being ridiculous. Open the door.”

“No.”

Seeing as her daughter refused, the lioness jumped up to grab the handle with her teeth, swung the door open, and flung the frog outside. She pushed the door closed with her shoulder. Sobbing, she leaned against the door and slunk to the ground.

“Mother!” her daughter called. She raced over to her, her apron flying, and put her arms around her mother.

She hugged her close, like her mother used to do to her when she was sad.

“I’m so sorry darling. I just couldn’t do it anymore. He doesn’t deserve this.”

Her daughter wiped away the tears streaming down her muzzle. "It's all right. It doesn't matter. You could be a lioness the rest of your life and I'd love you just the same."

Her mother smiled. She had all the love she needed, right here, with her daughter.

Suddenly, they heard something bang against at the door outside. They jumped away in shock.

"What was that?" the daughter asked.

"I don't know" her mother responded. She leaned up with her teeth and yanked open the door. Sitting on the grass outside was the frog, laying on his side half-dead. Far away from him, holding a burnt wand and wearing an angry snarl, was the witch that had cursed her long ago.

"You!" the lioness growled. Her fur bristled. She jumped in front of the frog and her daughter to guard them from the witch's wrath.

The witch tapped her wand on her hand. "Oh you! I remember you! I can't believe he found his way back to you."

The lioness stalked towards her, her teeth bared, "What are you talking about?"

The witch flicked her wand at the frog. "Him. I came back to finish my revenge on him for ever cheating on me."

The lioness stood flabbergasted. She suddenly became aware of her paws, her ears, her whiskers. "You're not saying. . ."

"Of course, I am saying! That frog cheated on me with you!"

The lioness turned towards the frog. He was heaving in the grass, his pad across his chest. This is the man she had loved once, lying near dead just inches from her. She watched as her daughter kneeled to pet his head. Tears fell onto her apron.

"It can't be him" the lioness snapped. She remembered the way he had looked at her, how he had rejected for being a lioness.

"Well, it is. She looked at her wand. "My magic has a way of knowing my true feelings. I turned him blue, as blue as I felt inside."

The lioness skulked across the grass. The dry leaves cracked beneath her paws. "Then he would recognize me." The witch shook her head. "No, he wouldn't. The minute he rejected you as a lioness, I completely wiped his memory of your existence. That way, we could be happy together. Unfortunately, his memory returned. He started asking me about you, what had happened, where you were. He could remember you, but not your

transformation. I grew so upset, I turned him into frog. That's what he gets."

The lioness' heart started to beat fast. He remembered her. He was looking for her!

"But he would never love a lioness like you!" the witch cackled, her body shaking with laughter.

The lioness snarled. "I'm not a lioness. I am a woman!" She charged across the ground and jumped on the witch, pinning her to the ground. The witch screamed. The lioness wrestled the wand out from her hand, gripping it with her teeth. But the witch held on. She tried to flick her wrist to cast a spell, but the lion wouldn't let it go. They both tugged on the wand, with the lioness' paws holding fast to her arms and legs.

Slowly, the witch's grasp started to loosen. The lioness used the opportunity to slip the wand out of her grasp. Crunching it between her teeth, she snapped it in two. It fell to pieces on the ground.

"No" the witch screamed, reaching fruitlessly for her wand.

The lioness smiled. So did the witch.

"Now you'll never be human" she cackled.

"What?" She'd broken her wand; wouldn't that break the curse?

"I may not be able to cast anymore spells, but the ones I have cast are permanent" she said.

The lioness backed away. "No, it can't be." She stared at her paws. She would be like this forever, trapped in this hideous green hide.

"That's what happens when you break my wand. Oh well" she said, turning to leave, her havoc wreaked.

The lioness slunk back on her hind legs in defeat. She curled her tail around her feet, attempting to keep herself together. She felt just like the wand beside her. Broken. Powerless.

Without her knowing, her daughter dashed over to the wand. She took the blue ribbon in her hair and tied it around the middle of the wand.

"Darling, no!" the lioness called, running to stop her.

As tears streamed down her face, she flicked the wand. A sizzle of blue light flew out of the wand. It whizzed through the sky, hitting the old witch in the back.

"Ah!" she screamed. Zapped by the light, her body started to twitch. She saw her hands shake. In an instant, her sleek white hand turned to a long blue frog leg. Soon, it happened to the other. Her whole body changed to form a blue frog, not unlike the one she had cursed.

"What did you do to me?" she yelled. Scattered about her were her black garments and jewelry. Her new frog body felt sticky and gross.

The daughter dropped the wand in disbelief.

“How could you? Only another witch could repair the wand.”

The girl shook her head. “I’m not a witch. It’s the ribbon that was magic. That’s what my dad said anyways. I never believed him.”

The frog witch stepped backwards in awe. “Your father?” She shook her head, her pads trembling. “No, no, it can’t be.”

She studied the wand, her eyes darting over the ribbon. Nothing gleamed, nothing sparkled, nothing shone. It was only a normal blue ribbon.

She lifted her head. “You are a witch” she said bluntly. “Because your father was a warlock.”

The daughter clutched her chest, stunned by the news. The lioness thought about her husband. The love they shared was magical.

In fear of the daughter’s magic, the witch hopped away, cursing her new-found desire to consume flies.

With the witch gone, the lioness went towards her daughter. “Are you all right?” she asked frantically, looking all over her for wounds.

“I’m fine, mother” she said, shaking a bit. “I had no idea I could do that.” She looked at the wand in her hand and dropped it like it had turned into a serpent.

“Did you know he was a warlock?” she asked her mother.

“No clue.” As she looked at her daughter, she could see her husband reflected in her eyes. He would always be with them. That was the magic.

Lost in their moment, they almost didn’t hear the wheezing of the frog’s last breath. They both dashed over to him.

The lioness scooped the frog into her paws. “My darling” she cooed.

As she did, the daughter flicked the wand at both of them. To her surprise, the lioness started to feel a white aura around her. Her body shook. Her paws transformed into sleek human. Her fur became hair. Her tail shrunk away.

Suddenly, standing there was no longer a lioness, but a beautiful woman. The woman her mother always was.

“Mom” the daughter cried. She raced towards her mother, dropping the wand in her excitement.

“Darling” he mother cried, gathering her daughter in arms rather than paws. It felt so good to hug her again, despite the awkwardness of being completely naked.

“Darling, could you go get me something to cover myself?” her mother asked, hugging her body close.

“Of course, mom.” She raced into the mansion to get her a towel.

As she waited for her daughter, the woman stole a glance at the frog, now a man. The man she had loved, lying naked on the ground, not breathing. The frog had croaked.

She fell to her knees. “Oh my love.” She sobbed over his dead body.

As she sobbed, she felt a towel draped over her shoulders. It felt cool against her skin.

“Is he okay, mom?”

She shook her head sorrowfully.

Her daughter glanced at the wand on the ground. “This can’t be the end.”

She walked over to the wand and held it in her grasp. Kissing the end, she flicked the wand at the man. Blue light whizzed through the air. It connected with him and sent a shock wave through his body.

Her mother put her hand over his heart to see if it worked. Nothing.

“Why didn’t it work?” he daughter asked, befuddled.

“There is no spell that can break death. Not even love.” She smiled sadly. “I’d know. Or else he’d still be alive.”

The woman stroked his hair. A bit of mucus lingered there. She flicked it from her hand.

“All I can do is say goodbye, to the man and the frog I fell in love with.”

She kissed him, a farewell so pure it gave her chills.

All of a sudden, she felt his heart beat a bit faster. With her own heart beating fast, the woman studied the body before her. His chest started to pump up and down at a normal pace. Breath burst from his lips. His eyes opened.

He saw the woman he had fallen in love with, warts and all.

“My love” she cried. She reached forward and wrapped her arms around his neck. “How?”

The man smiled. “You love could not break death, but death was my spell. When I told the witch I was in love, she flicked her wand and cursed me anew, said only loving a beast could bring me back.” He stopped. “She didn’t count on me loving you.”

The woman’s heart beat fast. He loved her as a lioness, even when she thought she could not be loved.

The man turned her face to him, marveling at her piercing blue eyes. He slid his fingers down her arm, touching the soft blonde hair protruding from her skin. “I miss your fur” he said, smiling.

The woman chuckled. That part of her was gone, yet she was grateful for it. Without it, she would never known

true love. She turned towards her daughter. In all its forms.

Seeing the two together, her daughter came barreling towards them, dropping her wand in her haste. She threw her arms around them both. A family, at last.

And the lion, the frog, and the little witch lived happily ever after.

The End

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