

The Frog Prince Fashion

By David Henry Wilson

Appears here with the kind permission of the author.

ONCE upon a time there was a princess who lost her favourite ball in a spring. Along came a frog saying he'd fetch it on condition that he could eat from her golden plate and sleep for three nights in her bed. The Princess wasn't too keen on the arrangement, but as she did want her ball back, she agreed. After three nights the frog turned into a handsome prince, they got married, and lived happily ever after. And that was how the trouble started. From that day on, girls all over the country started throwing balls into streams and offering board and lodging to the nearest frog. The result was a lot of rich ball-makers, a lot of fat frogs, and a lot of disappointed girls.

The story of the Frog Prince eventually reached France, and it wasn't long before French streams were full of lost balls, and French beds were full of fat frogs. After three nights French frogs remained just as froggy as English frogs, and so French girls remained as princeless as English girls. In most cases the third morning would see a few tears from the girl and a quick exit by the frog. But in a region called Provence, there would be screams of terror and a quick exit by the girl. The cause of the terror was a wicked witch named Grenwee.

Up until the age of the Frog Prince fashion, Grenwee had had a very unsuccessful career. In fact she had always been bottom of every league table published in *Witch* magazine. The reason for her lack of success was the fact that she could only perform one trick, which was to turn herself into a frog—and turning herself into a frog had proved to be utterly useless from every point of view. She had been on the verge of retiring from French witchery and emigrating to a country called Chad (where chadpoles come from), when suddenly frogs became all the rage. Overnight—or at least over three nights—Grenwee went from total failure to glorious success. Not only did she get herself free dinners and free bedding, but every third morning she would change

herself back into a witch and scare the living daylights out of her hostess. Grenwee became the envy of all witches – and all the terror of all would-be princesses.

News of Grenwee’s wickedness at last reached the ears of the King of France. He himself had a daughter, and as he certainly didn’t want her sleeping with frogs let alone with witches, he summoned his Minister for Frogging Affairs, Maitre de Kweezeen, to see what could be done. Maitre de Kweezeen consulted his colleagues, his friends, and his family, but finally found the answer in an old Voodoo-It-Yourself book of black magic.

“There’s only one way to stop Grenwee,” he informed the King. “But it’s rather nasty.”

“It couldn’t be nastier than she is,” said the King. “Tell me what it is, and I’ll do it.”

“You can’t,” said Maitre de Kweezeen.

“Of course I can,” said the King. “Kings can do anything.”

Then the Minister explained that the task had to be performed by a princess or it wouldn’t work, and the King had to agree that as there weren’t many princesses with deep voices, bald heads and beards, perhaps he couldn’t do it after all.

“Princess Gourmande will have to do it,” he said, after hearing the full list of instructions. “She won’t like it, but she’s the only princess we’ve got.”

The Princess said “Ugh!” several times when she heard what she had to do, but although she was very fat and very lazy, she was also brave and kind-hearted.

“If that’s what must be done,” she said, “then that’s what I shall do.” And at once she went off to the palace kitchen, which was where she spent most of her spare time, anyway. After a quick snack of fish soup, steak and onions, chocolate gateau, camembert cheese and a cup of coffee, she gave cook the instructions that Maitre de Kweezeen had handed over to her: cook was to prepare salt, pepper, milk, flour, butter, parsley, olive oil, chives, lemon juice and garlic, and leave them all right next to the oven.

“I don’t think that’ll fill you up, Your Highness,” said the cook.

“I’ve never found anything that did,” said the Princess.

Next, Princess Gourmande took the biggest, sharpest knife she could see in the kitchen, and carried it off to her bedroom, where she hid it under her pillow. And then

she went with her favourite ball down to the spring at the bottom of the palace garden. She threw it up and down a few times, and then deliberately let it fall with a loud splash into the water.

“Oh dear!” she cried. “I’ve lost my favourite ball. Dear me, boo hoo, golly gosh and all that, who’s going to get it for me?”

“I will!” cried a handsome young gardener, who’d been watching from behind a rose-bush, and before Princess Gourmande could stop him, he had dived into the stream and rescued the ball.

“Oh!” said the Princess. “Well, thank you very much.”

“Not at all, Your Highness,” said the gardener. “Glad to be of service.”

He went back to his roses, and Gourmande waited for ten minutes before she tried again.

“Oh, goodness gracious me!” she said. “My favourite ball has fallen into the . . .”

But before she could finish her sentence, the young gardener had dived in again and rescued the ball.

“Thank you again,” said the Princess.

“Any time, Your Highness,” said the gardener, and went back to his roses.

This happened five times. Princess Gourmande enjoyed watching the gardener jump in and out of the water, but she knew this was hardly the way to catch a witch. As for the gardener, he didn’t really enjoy jumping in and out of the water, but he began to wonder if perhaps this was the way to catch a princess. And when Gourmande invited him to go for a little walk in the garden, he had a feeling that before long he might well become more than just a gardener.

“Listen,” said the Princess, when they were some distance away from the stream, “I’m trying to catch a wicked witch, and if you keep diving into the spring, I’ll never catch her. So next time I throw my ball in, would you please stay away.”

The handsome young gardener turned as red as a rose and said he was very sorry. The Princess said it was all right, and at any other time she’d love to watch him jump in and out of the water. The gardener said, “Well, how about tomorrow?” And the Princess said tomorrow would be fine. Then the gardener went off to his flower-beds, and the Princess went off to the spring where once again she threw in her ball and cried, “Oh, good heavens above, my favourite ball! Now what am I going to do?”

“Arrk, arrk!” said a voice from the bank of the spring. “I’ll get it for you, Princess, on one condition.”

“What’s that?” asked Princess Gourmande.

“That I can eat from your plate and sleep in your bed for three nights,” said the froggy voice which was really Grenwee in disguise.

“That’s two conditions,” said Gourmande. “But if you’ll get my ball for me, I’ll let you eat from my plate, and sleep in my bed as well.”

The frog wondered whether there’d actually be room for anyone else in Gourmande’s bed if Gourmande were in it. But even Grenwee had never been in the royal palace before, and if she could scare a princess, she reckoned nothing could stop her from being made Witch of the Year.

With ball in one hand and frog in the other, Princess Gourmande walked back to the palace. She stopped only to exchange a few words with the handsome young gardener, who had just planted a rose called ‘Princess’ in her honour.

“Thank you very much,” said Gourmande. “But you should also plant a flower in honour of my little friend here.”

“Certainly, Your Highness,” said the gardener. “What about this purple flower?”

“Good,” said Princess Gourmande. “What’s it called?”

“Croakus,” said the gardener.

That evening in the palace, the frog ate from the Princess’s plate, and was also allowed to drink plenty of wine from the Princess’s glass. When the meal ended, the frog was fat and sleepy and drunk.

“I’m going to bed,” announced the Princess.

“An’ hic arrk oopsh sho am I!” said the frog. Within a few minutes, Grenwee was fast asleep. It was now time for Gourmande to carry out the most difficult part of her instructions. She felt under her pillow, took out her big sharp knife, and proceeded to cut off the frog’s legs. Holding them in her hand, she ran down to the kitchen, where she dipped the legs in the milk, rolled them in flour and popped them in the frying pan with some butter and olive oil. After twelve minutes she added salt, pepper, lemon juice, parsley and chives, melted some more butter, chopped up the garlic, and poured the butter and garlic over the legs. Then do you know what she did? She closed her eyes, held her nose, and ate them.

“Actually,” Gourmande told her father the next day, “they were rather nice. A little bit like chicken.”

Grenwee never troubled anybody again. Not only was she unable to move, but she was also unable to change back into a witch. (If you think that’s strange, see if you can change from a frog into a witch without using your legs.) She died soon afterwards, and the gardener buried her under the croakus. The King spread the happy news all over the kingdom, and the French people rejoiced to hear that their princess had rid them of the wicked witch.

As for the handsome gardener, he and Gourmande fell in love and so the King, without using any magic at all, turned him into a prince. They were married, and at their wedding feast Gourmande insisted that the main dish should be frogs’ legs. From that day to this, the French have copied the example of their princess, and if you go into any good French restaurant you’ll find that they’re still serving frogs’ legs cooked in butter, olive oil, and garlic.