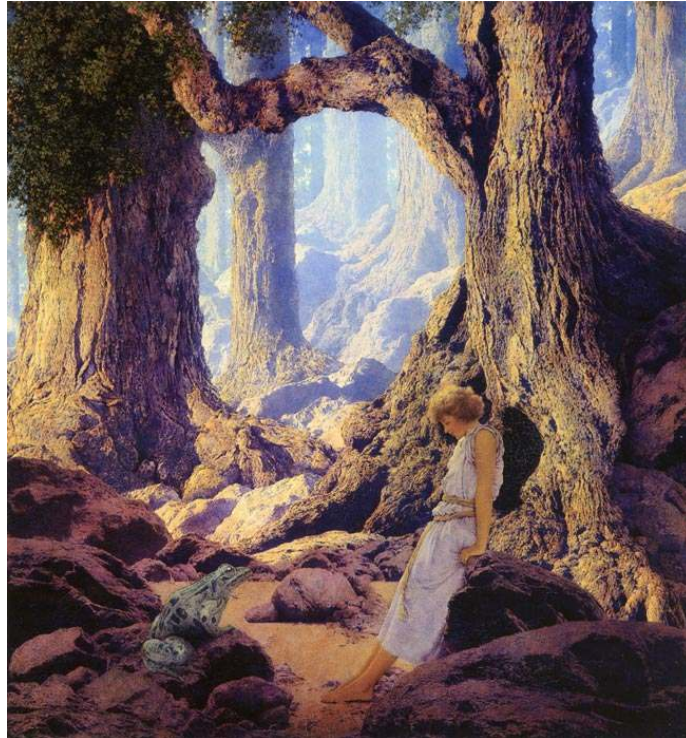


***TO KISS OR NOT TO KISS THE FROG! By Lynne Marshall***

***This article originally appeared at the Pink Heart Society blog.***



It is said that first impressions last, yet I'm surprised by how often friends and relatives admit that the first time they met their spouse, or current boyfriend, they thought he was a jerk. How did they get past their negative opinion? Could it be the influence of a certain fairy tale we've known since we were little girls?

The Frog Prince is best known from the Brother's Grimm. Though in their version, the reluctant princess befriends the repugnant frog, she throws him against a wall and only then does he turn into a prince. More modern and romanticized versions of the age-old fairy tale require a kiss.

Why must we kiss that frog?

And more importantly, why do there seem to be such an abundance of them? Optimists that we girls are, we give the guy a chance to prove he isn't nearly as jerky as he seemed at first, and we are often disappointed. However, there are enough tales floating around out there about the Jerk-to-Gem phenomenon as I like to call it, to keep us kissing those overly-confident jocks, cocky-not-charming career guys, self-proclaimed funny men, and mucho-macho dudes.



Think of how long it took Harry and Sally to figure out they were the perfect match. And poor Joan in *Romancing the Stone*, think of what she had to put up with from Jack before he proved himself to be a real prince. Or Hans Solo from *Star Wars*, or any character Hugh Grant has ever played in any movie. Or Dean Robillard and Blue Bailey in Susan Elizabeth Phillips' *Natural Born Charmer*. Though in that wonderfully entertaining book, Blue and Dean were both frogs in the beginning!

When I met my husband, he was a rough-around-the-edges cop, and I didn't hear a single bell or whistle. I wasn't the least bit impressed with his swagger and street talk and let him know it right off. He had issues with me, too, but rather than throw each other against a wall, we went out on another date, and ... we kissed. You're probably expecting me to say a miracle occurred, but I'm going to be honest and say the only thing amazing was that we didn't break up in the first four months.

Now twenty-seven years later I recently pondered what qualities I'd discovered once I'd kissed the frog, as it were. And though I'd never call my husband a total jerk when we met, he wasn't what I thought I was looking for, but he did turn out to be a gem in many ways. So what are the qualities that mattered to me? He was accountable, trustworthy, responsible and dependable, ethical, honest, brave, and protective, even though at times he gets a bit overly protective. And yes he was sexy! And the best part about kissing my frog was he wasn't afraid to commit, which automatically made him a prince!

After this blog was posted, a very lively conversation ensued, and I am adding some insightful thoughts from Laura Vivanco –

The modern metaphor about kissing frogs and hoping one of them will turn into a prince puts a rather different spin on things from what I understood to be the moral of the story in the fairytale.

There are [lots of versions of this story](#)

<http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/frog.html> but it always seemed to me that if the princess had made a promise to the frog in return for him finding her golden ball and bringing it back, then she should keep her promise and kiss him.

What she does instead is try to break her promise, discriminating against the frog on the basis of his appearance, and if she throws him against a wall, that's cruel and abusive behaviour. The only good reason for him to

stick around is that he needs her to kiss him in order to be turned back into a prince. But after that, why would he want to hang around with a shallow, cruel princess?

Maybe it depends on the frog's backstory. Maybe he was once a cruel and shallow prince, which was why he got turned into a frog, so he can't really object to the princess being the same?

### **Laura Vivanco also said...**

*in which case they \*should\* stay together, working on the principle that they can make each other unhappy instead of two other people!*

Somehow, whichever way we try to imagine it, the original versions really aren't very romantic. No wonder the golden ball, the promise, and the princess throwing the frog against a wall aren't there in the more modern version about having to kiss a lot of frogs before finding a prince.

What about a Little Red Riding Hood story? I've thought for a while that the wolf might have potential as a hero. Not literally as a wolf, though, unless it was going to be published in the Silhouette Nocturne line!

*To be honest, we all judge people by their looks, and on many levels we are shallow - AT FIRST - but if we make a promise we should keep it, by golly!*

I have a feeling that my opinion about this story is rather influenced by the fact that I think frogs are very handsome creatures. Which no doubt just proves how shallow I am. I'd have found the princess a bit more sympathetic if the enchanted prince had been **a great big hairy spider** of the kind that frightened Little Miss Muffet. But as you say, a promise is a promise, and heroines should try to keep them.

*I've missed seeing your posts at the PHS loop, Laura. and as I recall you have a wonderful blog.*

{blushes}Thanks, Lynne.{/blushes} The PHS loop does seem to have been a bit quiet recently.

**The blog** should have quite a bit of interesting stuff on it this year, because there are plans for 4 conferences/parts of conferences focused on romance scholarship. I'm in the UK, and the conferences aren't, so I won't be able to go to them, but some of my co-bloggers will be at the Popular Culture Association conference in April, a conference on the romance genre to be held at Princeton University later

the same month, a panel on romance scholarship at the RWA conference in July, and a conference in Brisbane in August. They've promised to write blog posts reporting back on them all, so I think we've got an interesting year ahead of us.

*the wolf would need to be redeemed, and the story might seem a bit similar to beauty and the beast?*

I think the beast's problem is that he thinks he's unattractive (physically and/or in terms of his personality), and he isolates himself because of that, but he still yearns to be loved. The heroine, who grows to see the beauty inside him, has to transform him through her love.

The wolf has always seemed to me to be more of a rake or "bad boy", tempting the heroine off the straight and narrow path. Actually, [Perrault, one of the authors of an early written version](http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0333.html#perrault) <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0333.html#perrault> of Little Red Riding Hood makes that reading of the tale quite explicit:

*"Moral: Children, especially attractive, well bred young ladies, should never talk to strangers, for if they should do so, they may well provide dinner for a wolf. I say "wolf," but there are various kinds of wolves. There are also those who are charming, quiet, polite, unassuming, complacent, and sweet, who pursue young women at home and in the streets. And unfortunately, it is these gentle wolves who are the most dangerous ones of all."*

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