Frog Lake

Missy and her brother Frank were exploring the forest near their house when they came upon a small pond. They knelt down to peer into the murky water. It was full of tiny black things that darted back and forth, propelled by thrashing tails. “Tadpoles,” Frank explained. “They’re baby frogs.”

“You mean when all of these grow up they will be frogs?” Missy asked, surprised. “There must be hundreds of them! There isn’t enough room in the forest for all of these frogs!”

“They won’t all grow up,” Frank said. “Maybe one in ten will grow up. If the puddle dries up, a lot of them will die that way. Others will get eaten by birds or fish.”

“That is so sad,” Missy said. “I wish every tadpole got to grow up to be a frog.”

A young and very immature forest fairy heard Missy’s wish. I, too, think it is a shame that all of these tadpoles will not grow up to be frogs, the fairy thought to herself. I will cast a spell over them to make sure that they all get to turn into frogs.

A month went by, and Missy and Frank were out walking again. It was nearing dusk, and the forest was full of the croaking of frogs. “Watch out,” Missy said. “You almost stepped on one.” There were frogs in the path, frogs on the trees, even frogs hopping onto their shoes as they walked. Missy squealed and tried to shake the frog off, and almost stepped on another frog in the process. “I don’t know what happened,” Frank said, “but something has gone terribly wrong. This is not how nature is supposed to work. There are way too many frogs here.”

“I don’t like it,” Missy said. “I want to go home!”

The young forest fairy who had cast the spell heard Missy and felt very sad. She wanted to please children with her magic, not cause chaos. Just as the children reached the edge of the forest and ran back towards the lights of their house, the queen of the forest fairies appeared. She gave the young fairy a stern, disapproving look. “What have you done?” she asked. “I granted a little girl’s wish,” the young fairy said. “But when she saw it, she didn’t like it.”

“The girl’s wish—and your magic—have thrown the whole forest off balance. Birds and fish have died because they did not get enough to eat. There are not enough bugs to go around to feed all the frogs. A situation like this can only get worse. You cannot grant wishes to humans,” the queen fairy said. “The world is too big and complex to be shaped by the wish of one person. Sometimes, by not granting a wish, you can give understanding, and most of the time this is of far more value. Do you understand?” The young fairy nodded. Then the queen fairy waved her wand and a soft, golden light washed over the forest. The young fairy gasped. It was once again afternoon. There were Missy and Frank, crouched over the pond, looking down at the tadpoles. The queen fairy had done the most splendid magic of all, turning back time.

“That is so sad,” Missy said. “I wish every tadpole got to grow up to be a frog.”

“It is not sad,” Frank said. “It is just how nature works. That is why they have so many tadpoles in the first place.”

But this time the young fairy just smiled knowingly and did nothing, and felt she had done far more to help the little girl than she had done before.
The Carpenter’s House

Once there was a very special house indeed. It was made from boards hewn from ancient trees that had once grown in Merlin’s woods in Old England, trees that had soaked up centuries of magic, back when people could still be bothered about such things. A very rich man had brought the boards to America and used them to build his house. The house stood in the center of a large field, and the field was surrounded on all sides by woods. A single road cut through from the main road some ten miles off to the driveway in front of the house. No one ever happened upon the house by accident.

The house the rich man built was modest and simple. But as the man’s life grew more complicated, so did his house. When he got married, the man arrived back from his honeymoon to find that the house had grown a second sitting room and a large closet for his wife. When his first child was born, a nursery seemed to unfold itself out of thin air right before the little family. For every event in his life, the house provided for him, so by the time the rich man died, the house was practically a mansion.

But once the man was gone, the house fell into disrepair. No one lived in it anymore, and eventually it was sold at auction. The man who bought it was a carpenter. He had spent years building houses for other people, and it was his dream to buy an old house of his own and to fix it up with his own two hands. The man loved his craft. He loved the smell of sawing wood, and the feel of freshly sanded boards. In his mind, the tumble-down old house was a mansion once again, and he looked forward to several enjoyable years of making his dream come true.

The first night the man spent in the house, he dreamed that the lovely front room would once again gleam with polished hardwood walls. He imagined resetting a mantle over the old stone fireplace, and sanding down and repainting the lattice work between the glass window panes. He awoke feeling excited and full of energy and ready to get to work. But when he walked into the living room, he saw that the work was already done. There was the room of his dreams, just as he had imagined it, in every detail. Instead of feeling happy, the carpenter was disappointed. He loved the room, but he was sorry he had not gotten the opportunity to do the work himself.

Over the next week, the carpenter decided on another project. He would refurbish the kitchen. He would sand down the old kitchen cabinets, replace the hardware, install a new countertop, and refinish the creaking hardwood floors. He went to the store to order the materials. But when he got back, once again he was dismayed to find that the work was already done. The man felt that someone must be playing a cruel trick on him. For a different kind of man, he supposed this house would be a dream come true. “But it’s not my dream come true,” the carpenter said. “I wanted a house that I could work on. I wanted a house that I could pour my love and energy into over the years, a house that would be mine because I fixed it up with my own two hands.” Feeling very down, the carpenter went to bed.

The next day, the carpenter got the idea to paint the porch and the porch railing. He stepped outside the front door as he considered possible colors. He had just decided on forest green, when he saw the porch miraculously changing colors. The chipped old white wood was covered with crisp, gleaming forest green paint as if a wave of paint were washing across it.

“House! Stop!” the carpenter cried. “This may have made your last master happy, but you are making me miserable! I am going to sell you!”

The magic painting stopped, and then began to rewind. The porch seemed to groan, as if expressing its own unhappiness.

“We must come to an understanding,” the carpenter said. “Around here, I am the carpenter. I do the work. You are the house. You have the work done to you. Are we in agreement?”

Slowly, as though reluctant to do so, the house undid the improvements it had made until, a few moments later, the carpenter was standing once again in the dilapidated house that he had bought at auction.

“Wonderful,” the man said, looking around at the sagging ceilings and crooked doorways with admiration and excitement. “Now you are the house of my dreams.”

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1. What do these two stories have in common?

2. Who has to learn a lesson in the story Frog Lake? What is the lesson?

3. Who has to learn a lesson in the story The Carpenter's House? What is the lesson?

4. What does Frog Lake have to say about whether or not every wish should come true?

5. What does The Carpenter's House have to say about whether or not every wish should come true?

6. Do you think every wish should come true? Why or why not?