



What Happened to the Frog?

By Peter Härtling
übersetzt von Jan M. Bruder



Two years ago, I was at the seaside in Holland with my child. The weather was good, and we went swimming often.

My son Clemens, who was five years old at the time, had been given a large green-and-yellow inflatable frog for the sea, which he loved and always dragged behind him.

In the water, he sat on the frog and rode the waves with it.



I don't know if you all know about the tide, ebb and flow. Every sea has ebb and flow. At high tide, the water flows onto the land; at low tide, it flows away from the land.

It moves with such force and speed that anyone swimming in the sea during low tide is pulled out to sea very quickly.

That's why you shouldn't swim during low tide.



Clemens knew this too, and he never did.

But he thought the frog could do it. He set the frog on the water, waited for it to float a little, and suddenly I heard him screaming:

"The frog is running away! The frog is running away!"
And I see the frog already far out at sea.



I ran into the sea to catch the frog but felt the undertow pulling my feet, the sand being dragged out by the tide. I stopped and watched the frog as it became smaller and smaller.

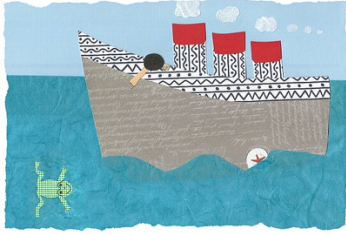


Clemens cried terribly. He asked me:

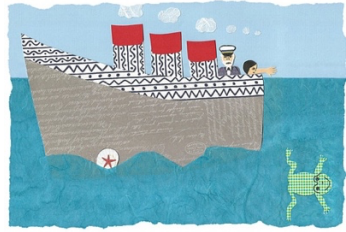
"Where is the frog swimming to now?"

Since England is on the other side of the sea, I told him:
"The frog will probably be in England by tomorrow."

From then on, I thought up stories about what might have happened to the frog, which we soon couldn't see anymore, on the vast sea.



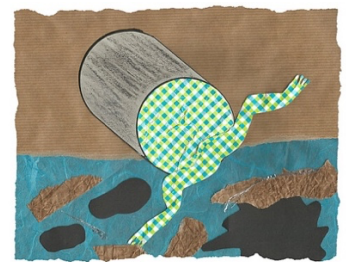
Maybe this story:
The frog swims and swims.
He is tiny in the vast sea.
A huge steamship passes by him, and a boy looks down from the ship, sees the tiny frog, and shouts:
"There's a frog! I want that frog!"



The captain, who hears this, says:
"We can't stop the steamship just for you.
It takes so long until the ship comes to a stop, that we won't even see the frog anymore."
So, the boy waves goodbye to the frog, and it swims on—maybe all the way to England.



Or this story:
The frog swims and swims and actually reaches England. It is high tide again, and the frog is carried towards a pipe from which dirty water flows into the sea. The tide pushes the frog into the pipe.
Inside, it is dark and it stinks.
The pipe gets narrower, but the water is so strong that it keeps pushing the poor rubber frog further in.



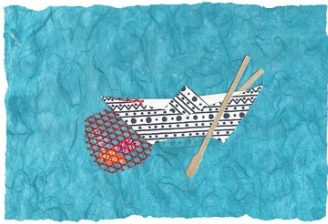
Then it's low tide, the water recedes, and the frog gets stuck in the pipe that smells of decay and filth.
Will he stay there forever? No!
Because slowly the air leaks out of the frog, he shrinks, and as a smaller frog with wrinkly skin, he can swim out of the pipe again. He washes ashore, where a child finds him, takes him home, and inflates him again.



I think up a very exciting frog story:
The frog drifts on the sea for a long time until he gets close to the English coast.
The waves grow higher and higher.
A storm gathers in the sky.
Lightning flashes.
A gentle breeze turns into a great storm so fierce that even the heaviest ships rush into the harbour to wait it out.



But the frog is so light that he doesn't care how high the waves are.
He hops from one wave to another, sometimes zipping into a trough where the water crashes over him. And anyone who knows such rubber frogs might now worry that the stopper will pop out and the air will escape.
Then the frog would sink.
But the frog in my story doesn't sink.



A little earlier, a boy living in an English village on the coast, who sometimes takes his fisherman father's boat out to sea, had once again taken the boat without asking. He had done it many times before.
But this time, the boy didn't pay attention to the weather forecast.
That was his mistake.



He rowed further and further out to sea, and suddenly, towering waves came towards him, tossing the boat around and lifting it high.
The boy, whom I'll simply call Edward, loses the oar from his hand and drifts helplessly at sea.
Again and again, water splashes into the boat, and Edward tries to scoop it out with his hands.
But it is too much for him to manage.
It doesn't take long before the boat is so full of water that it sinks like a stone.



The boy is terribly afraid, shouting and calling for help, but no one hears him.
The waves toss him back and forth, he swallows a lot of water, and he tries to swim.
He's usually a good swimmer, but in this raging sea, he can't swim at all.



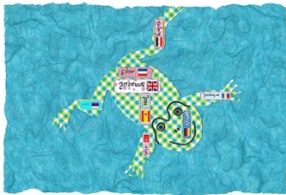
Then he sees the frog.
The frog is carried towards him by a wave.
It is full of air.
The boy holds on to it and rides the waves up and down on the frog, and that's how he reaches the shore.
So now my frog has even saved a boy's life.



And finally, one last story:
The frog swam away.
The weather is beautiful, and he quickly reaches England. There, a girl walking along the beach with her mother finds him.
The girl says:
"That's a funny frog. I want to keep it."
The mother says:
"But maybe the frog wants to keep swimming."



You know what, let's stick a plaster on the frog and write on it with a thick marker that water can't wash off:
"The frog said hello to Susanne in England.
Whoever finds him should send him on!"
And they send the frog back out to sea.



In Holland, a boy named Egon finds him and sticks a plaster with his name on it.
The frog keeps swimming; he reaches France.
In France, a girl named Jacqueline sticks a note on him;
in Spain, a boy named José does the same.
And in the end, the adventurous frog is completely covered with names.
He swims out to sea and never reaches a beach again.



And now, what kind of frog story will you tell?



The End