Qav Kaws Thiab Ntxawm (The Toad and Yer aka The Frog Prince)

 Once upon time there lived a poor, poor man who had nothing to his name but a beautiful wife and 6 wonderful children. The man was an honest and very hard working man but a bit of a recluse who lived at the edge of town where land was plentiful as was privacy. One morning, the man woke up and he had a wart on his knee. As the days passed, the wart continued to grow until one day it was the size of a pea. The man decided to squeeze the wart. He squeezed and squeezed but nothing happened. He continued wincing in pain and squeezing with all his might until…the wart popped and out came a Toad.

 “Nyob zoo,” said the Toad. “I am *Qav Kaws* (Toad), what is your name?”

 “*Qav Kaws*, what are you doing here? How did you come from my wart? And why do you need my name?” questioned the man. The Toad and the man continued their conversation but after a few minutes, the man got tired of talking to the Toad and not understanding why the Toad was there. He walked away from the Toad and went inside his house.

 The man told his wife about what happened and at that very moment, they heard someone knocking at their door. The man and his wife went to open the door and there was no one there. They looked at each other, perplexed thinking maybe it was the wind until they heard a voice telling them to look down; it was Toad. He told the couple he wanted to marry their youngest daughter, Yer. The man shook his head and slammed the door. Again, the Toad knocked and the couple just ignored the knocking. Then Yer came to answer the door and the Toad told Yer she was the most beautiful being he had ever seen and that he wanted to marry her. The father rushed to slam the door shut.

 The next morning, the man was getting ready to cut some taws, or firewood, and as he opened the door, he saw the Toad was still standing there. Once more, the Toad asked for his daughter’s hand in marriage. The man just could not get the Toad to go away so he came up with a plan. He told the Toad to help him with the firewood and if the Toad could do the work with him for two days, he would give Toad his daughter. The man cut down a lot of trees and filled his carriage with firewood and told Toad that he would have to haul the firewood to the house. The man walked home laughing to himself knowing the Toad could not possibly haul all the firewood.

 When the man arrived home, his wife asked him how he got rid of the Toad and proudly, he told his wife the entire story. They both chuckled and called to their children so they could enjoy dinner together. Halfway through dinner, there came a knock at the door. Surprised, the father went to open the door and there stood Toad. Baffled at the sight of Toad, the man and his wife could not utter a single word except the man walked to the door to see if the Toad had really hauled in the firewood. Sure enough, the firewood was stacked neatly beside the house. The man told Toad he did a good job but he would have to do it again tomorrow before receiving Yer’s hand in marriage.

 That night, the man and his wife concocted a plan to get rid of Toad for good and after they hatched their plan, they went to sleep. Waking up from a nice sleep, the man got up and prepared himself for another long day at work. Just like the previous day, Toad was waiting right outside their door. The man told Toad his job would change a little for that particular day.

 After spending hours cutting firewood, the man found the largest tree in the forest and told the Toad his job was to stand and catch the falling tree knowing the tree would smash and kill the Toad. The man spent almost an hour chopping at the large tree before it finally gave way.

 “Get ready Toad, you need to catch and secure this tree. It’s the big one!” yelled the man. The frog was right underneath the tree and sure enough, the tree fell right on top of Toad. The man called out to Toad and did not receive a response and went home happy knowing he had accomplish the plan he and his wife had created. The man walked in the house skipping and clicking his heels in midair telling his wife and his children that Toad would not be bothering them anymore.

 As they were eating dinner, that same familiar knock was heard again. With an incredulous look, the man turned to the door, to his wife, and to his kids. He thought to himself there was no way it could be Toad. It had to be a guest or a relative. Walking slowly and a bit confused, the man opened the door and sure enough, Toad was standing there and he told the man he had carried the big tree along with all the other pieces of firewood back and piled them neatly where they were supposed to go. The man peeked around the corner of his house and there was the firewood, just as Toad had said. In disbelief, the man looked at his wife and Yer. The toad asked the man if he could marry Yer and the man kept his promise. Toad promised to love Yer, take care of her, and give her all that she could ever want. Toad also said that after the Hmong New Year, Toad would give the man all he could ever want as well. The man and his wife were still in complete disbelief and barely heard what Toad had said.

 Yer was hesitant and unsure of what life held for her and Toad but did as she was told. Toad was very nice and within a few days, they grew quite fond of one another. A month had passed and the Hmong New Year was going to begin in a few weeks. Toad informed Yer that he would have to go away to do something for God in the heavens for a while but that he would be back after the Hmong New Year. He gave Yer a piece of his skin and asked her to keep it safe. He told her that if anyone burned it, he would die and they would never get to live happily ever after. Yer wondered why he told her this; why did he tell her how to get rid of him? Was it a test? Would he really die or be gone forever? Yer quickly disregarded these fleeting thoughts and packed food and clothes for Toad to prepare him for his trip. She wished him well and he was on his way.

 The New Year festivities were always a time of fun for the village and Yer felt a little lonely and depressed being home alone. After a few hours, Yer decided it was okay for her to go and enjoy the festivities with everyone. While at the New Year, she saw her parents and they talked. Yer told her parents how well Toad treated her and while she did not love him yet, she thought he was very nice but wished he was a man instead. Her parents, especially the man, told her if he was gone, she should run away but Yer said he would find her. Her parents asked about his riches and she told them that as far as she knew, Toad did not have a lot of money and that infuriated her parents even more. Yer, in a moment of weakness, told her parents about Toad’s skin and her parents told her to just burn it and get on with life. Yer said she couldn’t as Toad had been too good to her. They continued to walk through the New Year until her ears heard the most amazing sound they had ever heard.

 Yer followed her ears until she arrived at a crowd and in the middle of that crowd was a man playing the *qheej*, or Hmong reed flute. Not only was the playing the most beautiful song she had ever heard, he was absolutely charming and handsome too. She was mesmerized and spent the entire day listening to the man play. As night began to fall, Yer asked the man for his name and the man said “My name is Ger and I am but a visitor from far far away. I really love you and if you love me, you will leave with me on the last day of the New Year.”

 Yer went home conflicted, not sure what to do. She found a handsome, charming, and talented MAN who loved her but she knew she was a married woman and could never be with him. She tossed and turned all night thinking about Toad and the man, Ger.

 The next day, Yer went back to the same place and found a crowd around the same man, Ger, playing his reed flute. Once more, Yer spent the entire day listening to the melodies coming from that flute. As night fell, Ger told Yer the same thing before leaving. Yer knew she had a choice to make and she only had one more day to make it.

 As soon as Yer went home, she started a fire and went to find Toad’s patch of skin he had left behind. She thought about it for a long time before finally blowing out the fire and going to sleep. The next morning, she went back to see if Ger was still at the New Year playing the reed flute and, sure enough, he was there. As she listened to his flute and watched the graceful way he played the flute, she ran back home. She knew she could not live with Toad forever; she was human after all and needed a human husband, not a toad. She quickly started a fire and threw Toad’s skin into the fire. Now she felt like a free woman, no longer married or attached to anyone or anything. She rushed to where Ger was but he had already left. Yer felt devastated and cried by herself for a little while before making her way back home.

 When she arrived at her home, she saw Ger standing inside the house and she ran up to hug him…but he did not hug her back. With tears in her eyes, Yer asked Ger why he did not hug her. Upon looking at his eyes, Yer realized that Ger also had tears in his eyes. Ger sat there and explained everything to Yer.

 Ger was God’s son sent to help give Yer and her family a better life. He was a prince, sent to help their family and all he was doing was testing Yer’s loyalty. While he was telling her all of this, she sat crying in his lap torn to pieces. He told her that Ger was his real form but he took the form of a toad to test Yer’s love and loyalty. Ger was disappointed that Yer’s love and loyalty lasted only until she found a good looking man who could play the reed flute and even more disappointed she had chosen to kill him off. He looked at her and at that moment, their small home transformed into a castle. He kissed her on the cheek telling her he had to go back to the heavens to be with his father and that he would again start on a new journey to help another family. Ger walked out the door and the castle turned back into a home and Yer sat crying alone on the floor.

 That night, she left to go back to be with her family and as she told her parents the story, they all sat and wept together thinking of all that could have been if only she had the patience and loyalty to wait for Toad.