

The Goose-Girl

Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm

404 There once lived an old queen whose husband had been dead for many years, and she had a beautiful daughter. When the princess grew up she was promised in marriage to a prince who lived far away. When the time came for her to be married, and she had to depart for the distant kingdom, the old queen packed up for her many costly vessels and utensils of silver and gold, and trinkets also
405 of gold and silver, and cups and jewels, in short, everything that belonged to a royal dowry, for she loved her child with all her heart.

She likewise assigned to her a chambermaid, who was to ride with her, and deliver her into the hands of the bridegroom. Each received a horse for the journey. The princess's horse was called Falada, and could speak. When the hour of departure had come, the old mother went into her bedroom, took a small knife and cut her fingers with it until they bled. Then she held out a small white cloth and let three drops of blood fall into it. She gave them to her daughter, saying, "Take good care of these. They will be of service to you on your way."

Thus they sorrowfully took leave of one another. The princess put the cloth into her bosom, mounted her horse, and set forth for her bridegroom. After they had ridden for a while she felt a burning thirst, and said to her chambermaid, "Dismount, and take my cup which you have brought with you for me, and get me some water from the brook, for I would like a drink."

"If you are thirsty," said the chambermaid, "get off your horse yourself, and lie down near the water and drink. I won't be your servant."

So in her great thirst the princess dismounted, bent down over the water in the brook and drank; and she was not allowed to drink out of the golden cup. Then she said, "Oh, Lord," and the three drops of blood answered, "If your mother knew this, her heart would break in two."

But the king's daughter was humble. She said nothing and mounted her horse again. They rode some miles further. The day was warm, the sun beat down, and she again grew thirsty. When they came to a stream of water, she again called to her chambermaid, "Dismount, and give me some water in my golden cup," for she had long ago forgotten the girl's evil words.

But the chambermaid said still more haughtily, "If you want a drink, get it yourself. I won't be your servant."

Then in her great thirst the king's daughter dismounted, bent over the flowing water, wept, and said, "Oh, Lord," and the drops of blood again replied, "If your mother knew this, her heart would break in two."

As she was thus drinking, leaning over the stream, the cloth with the three drops of blood fell from her bosom and floated away with the water, without her taking notice of it, so great were her concerns. However, the chambermaid saw what happened, and she rejoiced to think that she now had power over the bride, for by losing the drops of blood, the princess had become weak and powerless.

When she wanted to mount her horse again, the one that was called Falada, the chambermaid said, "I belong on Falada. You belong on my nag," and the princess had to accept it.

Then with many harsh words the chambermaid ordered the princess to take off her own royal clothing and put on the chambermaid's shabby clothes. And in the end the princess had to swear under the open heaven that she would not say one word of this to anyone at the royal court. If she had not taken this oath, she would have been killed on the spot. Falada saw everything, and remembered it well.

The chambermaid now climbed onto Falada, and the true bride onto the bad horse, and thus they traveled onwards, until finally they arrived at the royal palace. There was great rejoicing over their arrival, and the prince ran ahead to

405

406

meet them, then lifted the chambermaid from her horse, thinking she was his bride.

She was led upstairs, while the real princess was left standing below. Then the old king looked out of the window and saw her waiting in the courtyard, and noticed how fine and delicate and beautiful she was, so at once he went to the royal apartment, and asked the bride about the girl she had with her who was standing down below in the courtyard, and who she was.

“I picked her up on my way for a companion. Give the girl some work to do, so she won’t stand idly by.”

However, the old king had no work for her, and knew of nothing else to say but, “I have a little boy who tends the geese. She can help him.” The boy was called Kürdchen (Little Conrad), and the true bride had to help him tend geese.

Soon afterwards the false bride said to the young king, “Dearest husband, I beg you to do me a favor.”

406 He answered, “I will do so gladly.”

408 “Then send for the knacker, and have the head of the horse which I rode here cut off, for it angered me on the way.” In truth, she was afraid that the horse might tell how she had behaved toward the king’s daughter.

Thus it happened that faithful Falada had to die. The real princess heard about this, and she secretly promised to pay the knacker a piece of gold if he would perform a small service for her. In the town there was a large dark gateway, through which she had to pass with the geese each morning and evening. Would he be so good as to nail Falada’s head beneath the gateway, so that she might see him again and again?

The knacker’s helper promised to do that, and cut off the head, and nailed it securely beneath the dark gateway.

Early in the morning, when she and Conrad drove out their flock beneath this gateway, she said in passing, “Alas, Falada, hanging there!”

Then the head answered:

Alas, young queen, passing by,
If this your mother knew,
Her heart would break in two.

Then they went still further out of the town, driving their geese into the country. And when they came to the meadow, she sat down and unbound her hair which was of pure gold. Conrad saw it, was delighted how it glistened, and wanted to pluck out a few hairs. Then she said:

Blow, wind, blow,
Take Conrad’s hat,
And make him chase it,
Until I have braided my hair,
And tied it up again.

408

409

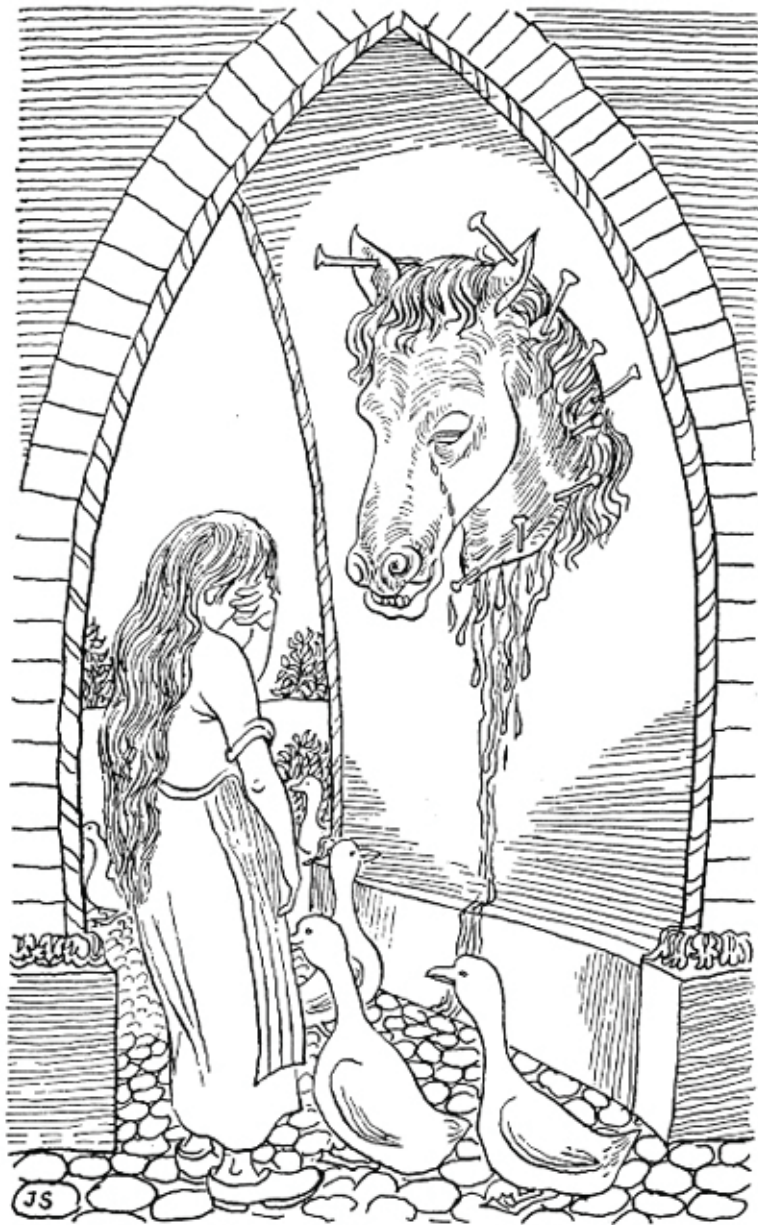
Then such a strong wind came up that it blew Conrad’s hat across the fields, and he had to run after it. When he came back, she was already finished combing and putting up her hair, so he could not get even one strand. So Conrad became angry, and would not speak to her, and thus they tended the geese until evening, and then they went home.

The next morning when they were driving the geese out through the dark gateway, the maiden said, “Alas, Falada, hanging there!”

Falada answered:

Alas, young queen, passing by,
If this your mother knew,
Her heart would break in two.

She sat down again in the field and began combing out her hair. When Conrad ran up and tried to take hold of some, she quickly said:



Blow, wind, blow,
Take Conrad's hat,
And make him chase it,
Until I have braided my hair,
And tied it up again.

Then the wind blew, taking the hat off his head and far away. Conrad had to run after it, and when he came back, she had already put up her hair, and he could not get a single strand. Then they tended the geese until evening.

That evening, after they had returned home, Conrad went to the old king and said, "I won't tend geese with that girl any longer."

"Why not?" asked the old king.

"Oh, because she angers me all day long."

Then the old king ordered him to tell what it was that she did to him. Conrad said, "In the morning when we pass beneath the dark gateway with the flock, there is a horse's head on the wall, and she says to it, 'Alas, Falada, hanging there!' And the head replies:

Alas, young queen, passing by,
If this your mother knew,
Her heart would break in two."

Then Conrad went on to tell what happened at the goose pasture, and how he had to chase his hat.

The old king ordered him to drive his flock out again the next day. As soon as morning came, he himself sat down behind the dark gateway, and heard how the girl spoke with Falada's head. Then he followed her out into the country and hid himself in a thicket in the meadow. There he soon saw with his own eyes the goose-girl and the goose-boy bringing their flock, and how after a while she sat down and took down her hair, which glistened brightly.

Soon she said:

Blow, wind, blow,
Take Conrad's hat,
And make him chase it,
Until I have braided my hair,
And tied it up again.

Then came a blast of wind and carried off Conrad's hat, so that he had to run far away, while the maiden quietly went on combing and braiding her hair, all of which the king observed. Then, quite unseen, he went away, and when the goose-girl came home in the evening, he called her aside, and asked why she did all these things.

"I am not allowed to tell you, nor can I reveal my sorrows to any human being, for I have sworn under the open heaven not to do so, and if I had not so sworn, I would have been killed."

He urged her and left her no peace, but he could get nothing from her. Finally he said, "If you will not tell me anything, then tell your sorrows to the iron stove there," and he went away.

So she crept into the iron stove, and began to cry sorrowfully, pouring out her whole heart. She said, "Here I sit, abandoned by the whole world, although I am the daughter of a king. A false chambermaid forced me to take off my royal clothes, and she has taken my place with my bridegroom. Now I have to do common work as a goose-girl. If my mother this, her heart would break in two."

410

411 The old king was standing outside listening by the stovepipe, and he heard what she said. Then he came back inside, and asked her to come out of the stove. Then they dressed her in royal clothes, and it was marvelous how beautiful she was.

The old king summoned his son and revealed to him that he had a false bride who was only a chambermaid, but that the true one was standing there, the one who had been a goose-girl. The young king rejoiced with all his heart when he saw her beauty and virtue. A great feast was made ready to which all the people and all good friends were invited.

At the head of the table sat the bridegroom with the king's daughter on one side of him, and the chambermaid on the other. However, the chambermaid was deceived, for she did not recognize the princess in her dazzling attire. After they had eaten and drunk, and were in a good mood, the old king asked the chambermaid as a riddle, what punishment a person deserved who had deceived her master in such and such a manner, then told the whole story, asking finally, "What sentence does such a person deserve?"

The false bride said, "She deserves no better fate than to be stripped stark naked, and put in a barrel that is studded inside with sharp nails. Two white horses should be hitched to it, and they should drag her along through one street after another, until she is dead."

"You are the one," said the old king, "and you have pronounced your own sentence. Thus shall it be done to you."

After the sentence had been carried out, the young king married his true bride, and both of them ruled over their kingdom in peace and happiness.

story:

Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. "The Goose-Girl." *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. 7th ed. D. L. Ashliman, trans. Berlin: n.p., 1857. Print.

illustration:

Scharl, Josef. *The Complete Grimm's Fairy Tales*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1944. Print.