

THE GOOSE GIRL



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There was once an old queen who had a very beautiful daughter. The time came when the maiden was to go into a distant country to be married. The old queen packed up everything suitable to a royal outfit.

She also sent a waiting woman with her. When the hour of departure came they bade each other a sorrowful farewell and set out for the bridegroom's country.

When they had ridden for a time the princess became very thirsty, and said to the waiting woman, "Go down and fetch me some water in my cup from the stream. I must have something to drink."

"If you are thirsty," said the waiting woman, "dismount yourself, lie down by the water and drink. I don't choose to be your servant."

Being very thirsty, the princess dismounted, and knelt by the flowing water.

Now, when she was about to mount her horse again, the waiting woman said, "By rights your horse belongs to me; this jade will do for you!"

The poor little princess was obliged to give way. Then the waiting woman, in a harsh voice, ordered her to take off her royal robes, and to put on her own mean garments. Finally she forced her to swear that she would not tell a person at the court what had taken place. Had she not taken the oath she would have been killed on the spot.

There was great rejoicing when they arrived at the castle. The prince hurried towards them, and lifted the waiting woman from her horse, thinking she was his bride. She was led upstairs, but the real princess had to stay below.

The old king looked out of the window and saw the delicate, pretty little creature standing in the courtyard; so he asked the bride about her companion.

"I picked her up on the way, and brought her with me for company. Give the girl something to do to keep her from idling."

The old king said, "I have a little lad who looks after the geese; she may help him."

The boy was called little Conrad, and the real bride was sent with him to look after the geese. When they reached the meadow, the princess sat down on the grass and let down her hair, and when Conrad saw it he was so delighted that he wanted to pluck some out; but she said—

*Blow, blow, little breeze,
And Conrad's hat seize.
Let him join in the chase*

*While away it is whirled,
Till my tresses are curled
And I rest in my place.*

Then a strong wind sprang up, which blew away Conrad's hat right over the fields, and he had to run after it. When he came back her hair was all put up again.

When they got home Conrad went to the king and said, "I won't tend the geese with that maiden again."

"Why not?" asked the king.

Then Conrad went on to tell the king all that had happened in the field. The king ordered Conrad to go next day as usual and he followed into the field and hid behind a bush. He saw it happen just as Conrad had told him. Thereupon he went away unnoticed; and in the evening, when the goose girl came home, he asked her why she did all these things.

"That I may not tell you," she answered.

Then he said, "If you won't tell me, then tell the iron stove there." And he went away.

She crept up to the stove and unburdened her heart to it. The king stood outside by the pipes of the stove and heard all she said. Then he came back, and caused royal robes to be put upon her, and her beauty was a marvel. Then he called his son and told him that he had a false bride, but that the true bride was here.

The prince was charmed with her beauty and a great banquet was prepared. The bridegroom sat at the head of the table, with the princess on one side and the waiting woman at the other; but she did not recognize the princess.

When they had eaten, the king put a riddle to the waiting woman. "What does a person deserve that deceives his master?" telling the whole story.

The false bride answered, "He must be put into a barrel and dragged along by two white horses till he is dead."

"That is your doom," said the king. "And the judgment shall be carried out."

When the sentence was fulfilled, the young prince married his true bride, and they lived together in peace and happiness.

THE END