Michael Monroe

The Goose Girl

“Mother, please, I beg you, do I really have to leave you and father and my brothers and sisters and my dog and my home?” The Princess Sansa began to sob and howl. She threw her arms around the legs of the queen. “I didn’t even meet this prince once! He could be ugly or fat or mean! Let me stay with you! And on the road I could meet robbers or pirates or wolves or monsters!” The princess broke down.

Her mother spoke, “There, there, darling. Have no fears. I’m sending with you the talking Horse Falada and a magic talking cloth with three drops of my blood. Keep this cloth and it’ll protect you. And you won’t ride alone but with the faithful servant Sersi. Do your duty and make me and your father the king proud of you! Forget not who you are and from what stock you come!”

On the way the horse sang love ballads until Sansa couldn’t take it anymore and begged him to stop. The princess became thirsty and asked her servant for some water. “Get it yourself! I’m not doing that kind of work” was her answer. And as Sansa bent over the river, the cloth fell into the water and was carried away. The cloth screamed and then the horse let loose an anguished cry. The servant girl knew that Sansa was now defenseless, and she forced the princess and the horse to swear an oath. Otherwise she would throw Sansa in the river and drown her. She exchanged clothing and mounts with the princess. Sansa was silent but Falada grumbled until Sersi beat her.
After their arrival the false princess Sersi bid that the horse be slaughtered. “It’s wild and mean and tried to bite me,” she said. “Find some work for my traveling companion suited to her utter stupidity.” And in this way the princess became a goose girl. She tended geese together with the boy Konrad.

One day, as she passed through a gate, Sansa heard a familiar voice. “O princess, there stride you! If perchance your mother knew of your fate, her heart verily would spring from her breast!” Sansa turned and saw. It was Falada’s head, hanging over the gate.

Konrad heard too, and he was terrified. He reported what had happened. He was certain that Sersi was a witch and had no desire to turn into a toad or end up in a stew.

When the king heard the reports, he had the goose girl summoned to his presence. The princess however refused to speak. “Not even if you put my on the rack or burn me with irons, my lord, can I reveal to any man what has occurred. I am bound by oath.”

“Bring me the horse’s head!” roared the king. He ordered the girl to tell all to the horse and hid himself behind his throne. When the king learned the truth, he was wroth. He had the false princess brought to him.

“Do you know this horse head?” he asked.

“Yes, my lord. It belongs to that disobedient horse. Why do you ask? Why am I here?”

“Falada, you noble steed, what punishment befits this traitress, this liar, this monster in the likeness of a woman?”
“My lord, put her deep under the earth. Let her not see the light of day until she starves. Let her sit cold and wet and naked in the darkness in her filth, all alone.”