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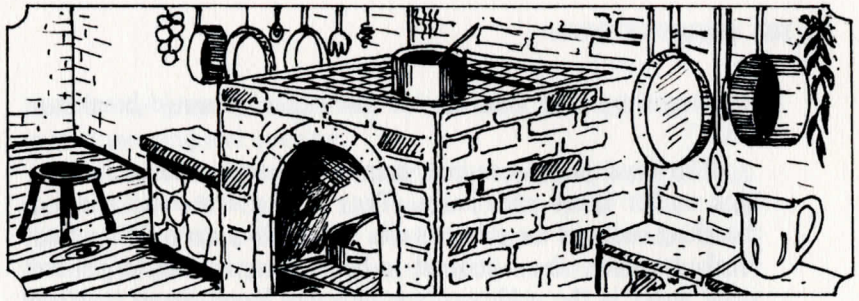

"The Goose Girl"
Puella and Transformation

Ladson Hinton

An old queen, whose husband had been dead for many years, had a very beautiful daughter. When she grew up, she was betrothed to a prince in a distant country. When the marriage date approached, the queen packed clothes and jewels, gold and silver, cups and ornaments, and everything suitable for royalty, all out of love for her daughter.

She sent a waiting-woman to travel with her and to place her hand into that of the bridegroom. Each received a horse, and the princess's horse was named Falada and could speak.

Before the departure, the queen went to her bedroom and cut her finger with a knife, letting three drops of blood fall onto a piece of white linen. She gave this to her daughter, saying, "Dear child, take good care of this; it will stand you in good stead on your journey." There was a sorrowful farewell, and the princess hid the linen next to her breast, mounted her horse, and embarked on her journey.

After a time, she became very thirsty and asked the waiting-woman to fetch some water in her cup from the stream. The waiting-woman responded by telling her to get down herself and drink. She said she did not choose to be the princess's servant.

The girl was so thirsty she just dismounted and drank directly from the stream, because the servant would not fetch her precious cup. As the poor princess drank, she said, "Alas," and the drops of

blood answered, "If your mother knew this, it would break her heart."

The royal bride remained humble and said nothing, but got back on her horse once more. They rode a few miles under a scorching sun, and the princess was soon thirsty again. When they reached a river, she called out to her waiting-woman to get her some water in the golden cup, completely forgetting all that had gone before.

Now the waiting-woman was more haughty than ever and told her, "If you want to drink, get the water for yourself. I won't be your servant."

The princess was so thirsty she again dismounted and knelt by the water, saying, "Ah me!" and the drops of blood answered again, "If your mother knew this, it would break her heart."

While she was drinking, the piece of linen with the three drops of blood fell out of her blouse and floated away, but the princess was so fearful she didn't notice. The waiting-woman did see and was very happy because she knew the princess had now become weak and powerless. When they went to remount, the waiting-woman demanded the horse Falada for herself, giving the girl her own nag in exchange.

The princess not only gave way in the exchange of horses, but was also ordered to give up her royal robes and put on the servant's garments. Then, under threat of death, she had to swear an oath that she would tell no creature at the court what had taken place. Falada observed these happenings. After the exchange, they set off again.

There was great rejoicing when they arrived at the castle. The prince, her betrothed, thought the waiting-woman was his bride and lifted her from her horse and took her up into the castle. However, the old king looked out and saw the delicate, pretty girl standing below in the courtyard and asked the false bride about her companion. The woman told him she had brought her for company and that the girl should be put to work.

After reflection, the king suggested she work with a little boy named Conrad, tending the geese. This was done. Soon after, the false bride asked the king to have Falada's head cut off, saying the horse had annoyed her. Actually, she feared the horse would speak and tell the truth of things.

When the princess heard about that, she offered the man employed in the task a piece of gold for a service: to nail up Falada's

head in the great dark gateway to the town, through which she passed morning and evening.

This was done, and in the morning when she passed through the gateway with Conrad, she spoke to the head, "Alas! dear Falada, there thou hangest." And the head answered, "Alas! Queen's daughter, there thou gangest. If thy mother knew thy fate, her heart would break with grief so great."

She and Conrad went on out of the town, into the fields with the geese. In the meadow, the princess sat down on the grass and let down her hair. It shone like gold, and little Conrad was so delighted, he tried 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."

A strong wind came up, blowing his hat away, and he had to run after it. By the time he returned, she had finished putting up her hair and he couldn't get a single strand. Conrad became very sulky at this and would not speak. Finally, they went home in the evening.

The next day, the exact same events transpired with Falada's head, with the princess's hair, and with the wind blowing away Conrad's hat. He went to the king and told him he was so vexed by the maiden that he didn't want to tend the geese with her anymore. The king asked why, and Conrad described in detail all that had happened.

The old king ordered Conrad to continue as usual, and he hid himself behind the dark gateway so he could hear the princess speaking to Falada's head. Then he hid behind a bush in the field, and heard and saw all that happened there. He went back to the castle.

Upon the goose girl's return in the evening, the king called her aside and questioned her. However, she said she could not tell him or any creature, having sworn under threat of death. He pressed her strongly, but she would not give in to his entreaties. Finally, he told her that if she wouldn't tell him, perhaps she could tell the stove. He went outside and stood by the pipes from the stove, so

he could hear. Alone, the girl tearfully told her whole story to the stove.

The king came back and told her to come away from the stove then and had her dressed in royal robes. She looked extremely beautiful. The old king told his son about the situation, that he had a false bride who was a waiting-woman, but that the true bride was indeed this so-called goose girl.

The young prince was totally charmed. They held a great banquet to which all the court was invited. The bridegroom sat at the head of the table, with the princess on one side and the waiting-woman on the other. The woman was so dazzled, she didn't recognize the princess in her brilliant apparel.

When everyone had eaten and drunk and were merry, the old king put a riddle to the waiting-woman. He asked her, "What does a person deserve who deceives his master?" and told the whole story. He ended by asking, "What doom does he deserve?"

The false bride answered, "No better than this. He must be put stark naked into a barrel stuck with nails, and be dragged along by two white horses from street to street till he is dead."

"That is your own 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 ruled their kingdom together in peace and happiness.

"The Goose Girl," a beautiful, moving story, is a classic tale of feminine development. In the beginning, there is symbiotic dependence – or interdependence – of mother and daughter. Then, there is a movement toward separation and individuation with all the complex symbolic struggles, pain, and suffering which that involves. It is a more emotional tale than many, and one goes from tears to joy as the goose girl struggles along her way. The tale can be taken as an individuation struggle, as a girl emerges into full womanhood; or it can be seen in the light of anima development for the male. In any case, it is a deeply feminine story and brings out many aspects of the evolution of the feminine.

Initially, the scenario is entirely feminine with only the mother queen and her princess daughter. There is one brief reference to a long-dead husband (see Klein, "The Goose Girl: Images of Transformation," p. 159). As a matter of fact, the queen herself is minimally present as a personage and is mainly visible in the

appurtenances she gives her daughter for the journey to the betrothed. It is stated that she loves her daughter very much, and the exaggerated panoply of goods hints of something excessive in that love. Normally, too, a queen mother would personally accompany an only daughter to her wedding, to guide and sustain her through the transition from maiden to married woman. One imagines she is so upset at losing her daughter to marriage that she stays home to nurse her narcissistic loss. The "baggage" she sends most likely represents the psyche of the mother, or to look at it another way, represents the mother complex of the daughter.

The overall mood or tone of the original scene is that of a rather primitive unconscious situation. There is an aura of the primal, undifferentiated Great Mother, the original vessel. The daughter appears to be an empty, although charming and beautiful, "puella." Nonetheless, this weak being undertakes her quest into the unknown, searching for her true identity as a woman. Considering her fragility, it is remarkable that she begins at all, and this bespeaks some urge to differentiate from within the dark feminine core of the mother/daughter world itself. Perhaps it is the longing for the Other, here in the form of a betrothed. The betrothed – the animus – exerts a numinous attraction which stems from the Self.

This longing for completion can be seen clinically in the seemingly endless flirtations with men and life that dominate a woman stuck in the puella phase. The puella attitude can lead to individuation or to chronic, fruitless turmoil. In males, a puella anima may manifest as a naive fascination with relationships, things, jobs, exotic travel – which can have a quixotic, destructive quality or can lead them, too, into the world, away from the mother.

The outer world seems not at all hospitable to the princess from the beginning. The girl, protected all her life in the moist containing darkness of the queen mother, is suddenly exposed to the harsh patriarchal sun of "the world." She constantly craves water, being herself empty, with only the second-hand substance of the mother to sustain her. She can no longer drink passively from the golden mother cup – the breast – but must lie on the earth and drink directly from the stream of life.

The three drops of blood speak of suffering, of breaking mother's heart. This emphasizes the psychological and spiritual pain that must be endured in all transformation/initiation. Both mother and daughter suffer. It is the loss/death side of every

profound change. These drops of blood are symbolically crucial; as Bettelheim (1977, p. 139) states, another version of the story is actually entitled, "The Cloth with the Three Drops of Blood."

According to Neumann (1970, pp. 31–32), the three great mysteries of feminine transformation are menstruation, pregnancy, and lactation. These, he states, are the "blood mysteries": the periodic bleeding of women's moon cycle, transforming blood into a living being in pregnancy, and the mysterious creation of milk from blood that enables the new life to survive and grow. Each mystery contributes its own kind of broader awareness and wisdom. Menstruation is connected with the cycles and rhythms intrinsic in all creation. Pregnancy relates to human creativity in general – the ability to bring forth unique new life from deep within. Lactation manifests the capacity to lovingly nurture new life into differentiated form, to enable it to grow – whether it be an infant, a relationship, a work of art, or human consciousness. Women have an early initiation into these core mysteries through the natural pathway of their bodies (see Klein, p. 161).

Defloration – first intercourse – could be included as a bloody mystery. Bettelheim does so, excluding lactation. However, it would seem that those mysteries *intrinsic* to the feminine are more crucial in this stage of development. Discovering the capacity to nurture, to enhance life within and without, is more fundamental than first penetration by a male. It is these mysteries that have bonded women over the ages – including virginal women. It is necessary that the goose girl, like all women, discover the potency of being "one-in-herself," grounded in the *feminine*, before intercourse or openness to the masculine can occur in any meaningful way. Defloration is connected with loss of innocence, rather than discovery of potency.

It is interesting to note that Perceval spies three drops of blood in the snow at a crucial point in the grail legend. The drops appear from a flock of wild fowl wounded by a falcon. They signal a turning point in Perceval's development. Forgetting all about the Round Table and its knights, he falls into a trance at the sight of the blood, remembering all the wrongs he has blindly committed toward women. Soon thereafter, he must confront the "loathsome damsel" who reminds him of his bad faith to the soul. The drops are like moods which paralyze a man in all their ugliness, appearing out of nowhere, insisting that he stay still and deepen. The evolution of the goose girl can be seen as anima development in a man's individuation. The mother must be left behind for a

true relationship to the feminine side of a man to develop: he must grow beyond being a "good boy" – or a heroic knight. And he must suffer and learn like the goose girl in the process.

After the drops of blood are gone, the waiting-woman has more power than ever. She takes all the appurtenances of comfort and rank from the princess, including her magical horse, and swears her to secrecy. Interestingly, Falada does not speak but *notes* everything. Whatever awareness exists in the princess is as yet passive and inarticulate – she has no access to her deeper feminine potency.

The waiting-woman, on the other hand, is a powerful, expressive figure. She seems to carry many symbolic functions. She is most apparently the dark side of a doting mother's endless waiting upon her prized only daughter. This narcissistic preoccupation paralyzes and enfeebles the child who ends up with her own narcissistic syndrome of inner void and illusions of entitlement. The princess expects that life will always "wait upon" her. She is the victim of the queen's power shadow (see Klein, p. 160).

Another dimension of the waiting-woman is initiatory and transformational. Her aggressiveness challenges the princess and shakes her out of her lethargy. In this way, the power shadow of the queen, introjected by her daughter, ultimately forces the girl to connect with her own latent vitality. The waiting-woman *does* darkly serve the purpose of maturation and transformation, as a complex passed unconsciously from mother to daughter. She is the controlling shadow of the mother which weakens and humiliates her offspring; on the other hand, she is the challenge that causes the princess to awaken to her own strength. Only through being forced to the earth by this dark woman can the girl begin to discover her own inner ground.

In the male, the waiting-woman illustrates the syndrome of endlessly expecting to be served by women, and by life in general. This often stems from the power shadow of a narcissistic mother. A man cannot be fully a man when enmeshed in this way. Eventually, as with Perceval, retributions by the inner or outer woman ground him harshly, and, hopefully, awaken him, as happened to the goose girl.

The prince fits the picture of a young man unconscious of the dark side of the feminine. He greets the waiting-woman in a totally undiscerning way, unable to tell appearance from reality (see Klein, p. 162). There is a dramatic lack of differentiation on the anima level. Could this be due to the grip of an overidealized

dead mother? Has he been too much in the king's shadow? It is not clear from the story. He does seem like a sort of male version of the goose girl, although his evolution is not elaborated. One gets the sense that he is unready for relationship . . . another problem for the goose girl in the future!

The king, however, shows signs of awareness from the start. He is somehow suspicious of the situation. It is noteworthy that it is he who first asks the goose girl *who she is*. The king shows wisdom, curiosity, and activity. He shows creativity by assigning her to tend the geese with Conrad, as if sensing she is not ready to cope with a full-fledged man. In this respect, the creative masculine enhances the further evolution of the feminine by a thoughtful discernment that does not act clumsily or arbitrarily but with subtle discretion. It is the sort of masculine attitude that is wise enough to respect and encourage organic feminine development.

The princess, after contact with the king, is able to actively initiate action for the first time: she pays to have Falada's head nailed up in the gateway. By paying, she is not passively served. It is also noteworthy that it is only after this act of decapitation that the horse speaks. Until then, it, too, had been entirely passive.

Detaching the head from the body has two main aspects. The first and most obvious is sacrifice and differentiation of consciousness. The "lower" part, representing the darker unconscious side of things, has been painfully separated. When things are separated, they can be seen for what they are (see Klein, p. 163). There is the possibility of greater psychological freedom. No longer must life be contained in the body-vessel of the primordial mother. There is an upward movement to head and gate, signifying increasing consciousness. Falada can now have a voice, no longer just passively observing. Suffering is now articulated, and further development is possible.

Another aspect of this horse's head is its resemblance to a hobby horse, an artificial horse's head and neck in miniature, placed on a pole a few feet long. It is then "ridden" in a jaunty fashion. Such horses are common in children's play in the Western world and have a widespread ritual significance in parts of Asia and Central America. Generally, they have an earthy, sensual, rather phallic quality. They are often associated with carnivals and weddings as a kind of teasing masculine force with erotic overtones. The male "riders" bounce and toss the head and neck in a noisy, cocky fashion. Sometimes there is a mock pursuit of the

women onlookers. Altogether they contribute a mood of Dionysian revelry.

St. Augustine once forbade "the filthy practice of dressing up like a horse or stag." The hobby horse must be connected with a chthonic masculine force that was the opposite of Augustine's body-hating, overly lofty spirituality.

It is this active, earthy creativity that is being raised to consciousness in this story. Without conscious connection to such elemental life, the princess would remain a puella, endlessly flirting with dark earthy vitality in a vicarious way, manifesting in destructive relationships, always falling victim in the end. She would be unprepared for a true marriage, remaining the tool of king or prince.

Falada's head is placed in the passage between town and field, between the patriarchal and matriarchal realms, as a sort of mediator. There is a strong ritualistic sense in the passage and repetitions. The horse's words are similar to the three drops of blood, i.e., breaking the mother's heart, but here there is a consciously sought dialogue, a purposiveness in the goose girl's actions.

When she finally enters the fields of Mother Nature and her geese, she becomes empowered. Conrad, a little phallic lad, tries to steal her hair. In the realm of magic, if one possesses the part—here, the hair—one possesses the whole.

Little Conrad is a threat to her consciousness, represented by her head and hair, as well as carrying overtones of the erotic. In such situations, clinically, the puella has a dangerous potential for a wild destructive dance with a demon lover. One often sees a chronic drama of such infatuations. Multiple wild and disappointing loves, possession by wild emotions, or union with the death-lover in suicide are all too common.

But the goose girl is prepared by all she has experienced. It is Conrad who loses his head, as she summons the wind to blow his hat away. Here she demonstrates that she can utilize the elemental rhythms of nature by weaving a spell. This signifies conscious connection with the powers of the transforming feminine. She weaves her spell, and then weaves her hair, showing her newly won prowess and her self-possession. She is becoming fully empowered as a woman, nearly ready for a true marriage. No longer does she passively succumb to her own dark dependency, or to the controlling waiting-women of the world. The challenge of the waiting-woman has helped her to discover her true nature and

ground. Coping with Conrad, a sort of preliminary animus figure, furthers and deepens this development.

The geese themselves are not discussed in the tale, but one is constantly aware of their background presence. After all, the tale is called "The *Goose* Girl!" All farm people know of the aggressive and territorial nature of geese: they are better watchdogs than watchdogs. Their long phallic necks ("goosing") and mythological association with Aphrodite show eros qualities. Like all swamp birds, they are strongly connected symbolically with the mother rivers and their prolific environs. In some mythologies, the goose is a world-creator, layer of the Divine Egg. In Egypt, geese were connected with spiritual transformation and immortality. The wild goose in its migratory flight is a familiar symbol of the intrinsic direction and purpose within nature, of individuation and the transcendent Self.

All these qualities are contained in the goose, and at this point in the tale, this deep archetypal ground of feminine being has replaced the original, narcissistically dominating mother complex. The fields are open and friendly, and experimentation and growth can freely take place. The goose girl can experience her own powers and leave the realm of girlhood.

The old king again manifests conscious discrimination and justice, the positive masculine that works in harmony with the feminine mysteries. Conrad, perhaps also a part of the shadow element of the patriarchy, reports his problems to the king. His curiosity is aroused, but he does not act precipitously and carefully takes in all the events of passageway and field.

When the goose girl returns home, he questions her, but she sticks to her oath of secrecy. This is a sign of her growing inner substance and integrity. She does not break down helplessly in the king's arms at first opportunity, but by her poise shows she has become a more mature woman with a respect for transcendent powers and a sense of the responsibilities of an adult. No longer must she be served, at the impulsive need of the moment. What had been narcissistic void has been filled from within by the feminine Self. This reflects another important developmental milestone.

It is fascinating how the king resolves the problem. He abandons a linear, "masculine" interrogation and relinquishes the foreground to the iron stove-vessel. Practically speaking, this gets around her oath, since she had sworn to tell no *creature*. More importantly, the stove represents the primordial creative vessel

of the feminine transformation mysteries – contained heat and energy in the service of new creation. It shifts the perspective from law and order to life, to the principle of organic evolution. For life to evolve, the truth must come out – but only in a way in which both masculine and feminine are respected (see Klein, p. 164).

The goose girl is then fully accepted as the true princess. Her long inner preparation has prepared her for outer recognition. She can be clothed as the person she is and assume her rightful place in the outer world, now that she is inwardly ready. In the final meeting, it is the waiting-woman who is the unconscious one. She prescribes her own fate, which is harsh.

This final denouement illustrates the true nature and origins of the waiting-woman. She is placed in a barrel-vessel studded with nails, which represents her kinship with the negative mother who has controlling claws and devouring teeth. Falada has been part of the princess's salvation, and horses are part of the waiting-woman's destruction. They represent the passionate dynamism of life which can create or destroy. There is archetypal justice as the waiting-woman is returned to her source in a homeopathic resolution of the story.

One can, as mentioned above, take this tale as an individuation parable for men or women. The basic motif – emergence from the embrace of material overprotectiveness – is highly relevant for both sexes. The princess, so empty at first, develops a deep sense of her own essence. She finds a fertile voice: the power of nature and the ability to utilize those energies. The earthy territoriality and sense of purpose of the goose become hers. All this is recognized and affirmed by the king, the creative masculine.

Originally, the princess was unprepared to maintain her individuality in the face of the masculine element. She was unready for any relationship, much less marriage. At the end, she is sure of herself as a woman deeply connected to the feminine ground of life. It is the rather naive prince who seems likely to have trouble maintaining his autonomy in the future! In this sense, the tale seems almost a harbinger of the future, as women seem to be rediscovering the feminine Self, while men seem confused and estranged from their natures.

To see this story in terms of masculine individuation, the original picture would be a man with a capricious moodiness, constantly immersed in his own vapid hypersensitivity. Domi-

nated by the mother complex, such a man is incapable of sustained creative effort or deep relationship with a woman. His relationship to the anima is unconscious, locked in the grip of the dark mother. He can only be "good," not truly vital or creative. In thrall to the mother complex, he has no true masculine stance until, paradoxically, he can relate to the feminine soul. Being in essence so close to the earth and the Dionysian mysteries, the positive anima can save a man from remaining forever an over-spiritualized "nice boy" or a brittle warrior.

The waiting-woman reflects a man's dark moodiness, the "loathsome damsel" of his depression and irritability when his soul is subordinated to the mother's power drive. It is interesting to note parenthetically the princess's thirst, echoing dipsomania, which hits at the alcoholic tendencies often intertwined with anima problems – and often seen in the puella. The problems, the moods, can be a stimulus toward individuation for the male. He can take it as a challenge to break his dependency on the mother and develop a truly individual relationship to the feminine, and to women.

Such development in the man requires the judgment and discrimination of the king. He must be able to know the true bride from the false, real emotional meaning from transient moods and whims. It requires also the conscious acceptance of suffering as a necessary part of evolution, as epitomized in the death and resurrection of Falada. A reborn, fertile, Dionysian sense of horseplay is essential to the masculine psyche, else the man remains forever an effete nonentity at the core, his soul paralyzed in the grip of the negative mother.

The evolved goose girl as anima endows a man with an earthy masculinity that is close to nature and organic order, closer to the animal powers than the mechanical. The archetypal feminine can endow the male psyche with many gifts such as creativity and the capacity to nourish and transform. Ultimately it can lead to that greatest gift which is wisdom (Sophia).

Whatever the perspective – male or female, masculine or feminine – this moving tale of the goose girl has a distinct relevance for our own times, whether for the healing of the grail king or for the return of the goddess.

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