

Myths and legends

Extract from *The Goose Girl* by Gillian Cross

Once there was a princess whose father was dead. She was promised in marriage to a king's son in a distant country but she stayed in her mother's house until she was old enough to be a wife.

While she was growing up, her mother, the queen, collected a great store of treasure to go with her. There were rubies and diamonds and sapphires; necklaces of river pearls and goblets of golden filigree; rolls of Chinese silk and carpets from the desert.

But the greatest treasure of all was a horse called Falada. He was a handsome and noble horse and, when the time was right, he could speak.

At last, the princess was old enough to leave and travel to her husband's country. Before she went, her mother called her in.

"I've given you many treasures to take with you," the old queen said. "But before you leave I'm going to give you one more thing, to protect you on your travels."

She called to her maid in waiting.

"Bring me a white linen cloth."

The maid brought the cloth and the queen took a needle and pricked her own finger until it bled. Holding her hand over the linen cloth, she let the blood drip, so that the white cloth was stained with three red drops.

"Keep this safe," she said to her daughter, "and nothing evil will be able to touch you."

The princess took the cloth and hid it inside the front of her dress. Then she put on a rich travelling cloak and covered her face with a silk veil.

"Put on *your* cloak too," the queen said to her maid.

"You're going with my daughter, to be her companion and carry her gold cup."

The maid put on her rough woollen cloak and her shabby white veil and followed the princess down to the courtyard. There was a train of packhorses waiting there, loaded with treasure. And beside them was Falada, saddled up for the princess to ride.

"Fetch another horse for my maid," the queen called to the stable boys. "She's going to travel with the princess."

The stable boys thought it was a pity to send away another good horse, so they fetched a bony, broken-winded gelding from the stables and gave him to the maid.

Task

1. Is this story:

- an adventure story
- science fiction
- traditional tale

2. How do you know?

3. How do you know that the queen is worried about what might happen to the princess on her journey?

4. How do you think the princess felt about setting off on her journey?

5. How do you think the maid felt about setting off on the journey?

6. What do the stable boys think of the maid?

7. Why do you think Falada was the greatest treasure?

8. Do you think they will have an easy journey? Explain your answer.
