

The Snow Goose

Getting Started

- * When one cares for another, one is repaid with trust. Have you ever helped anyone out of courtesy and in return were you repaid in kindness?

One November afternoon, three years after Rhayader had come to the Great Marsh, a child approached the lighthouse studio. In her arms, she carried a burden. She was no more than twelve, slender, dirty, nervous and timid as a bird, but beneath the **grime** as eerily beautiful as a marsh fairy. She was fair, with deep-set, violet coloured eyes.



She was very frightened of the ugly man she had come to see. But greater than her fear was her need; for she came to know that this **ogre** who lived in the lighthouse had magic that could heal injured things.

She had never seen Rhayader before and was close to fleeing in panic at the dark figure that appeared at the studio door—the black head and beard, the hump, and the crooked claw.

She stood there staring, calm like a disturbed marsh bird for instant flight. But his voice was deep and kind when he spoke to her, 'What is it, child?'

She stood her ground, and then moved timidly forward. The thing she carried in her arms was a large

white bird, and it was quite still. There were stains of blood on its whiteness and on her **kirtle** where she had held it to her.

The girl placed it in his arms. 'I found it. It is hurt. Is it still alive?'

'Yes. Yes, I think so. Come in, child, come in.'

Rhayader went inside, bearing the bird, which he placed upon a table, where it moved feebly. Curiosity overcame fear. The girl followed and found herself in a room warmed by a coal fire, shining with many coloured pictures that covered the walls.

The bird fluttered. With his good hand, Rhayader spread one of its immense white **pinions**. The end was beautifully tipped with black. Rhayader looked and marvelled, and said: 'Child; where did you find it?'

'In t' marsh, sir, where fowlers had been. What-what is it, sir?'

'It's a snow goose from Canada. But how in all heaven came it here?'

The name seemed to mean nothing to the little girl. Her deep violet eyes, shining out of the dirt on her thin face, were fixed with concern on the injured bird.

She said: 'Can 'ee heal it, sir?'

'Yes, yes,' said Rhayader. 'We will try. Come, you shall help me.'

There were scissors and bandages and **splints** on a shelf, and he was marvellously **deft**, even with the crooked claw that managed to hold things.

He said, 'Ah, she has been shot, poor thing. Her leg is broken, and the wing tip, but not badly. We can bandage it, and in the spring the feathers will grow and she will be able to fly again. We'll bandage it close to her body, so that she cannot move it until it has set, and then we'll make a splint for the poor leg.'



Her fears forgotten, the child watched, fascinated, as he worked, and all the more so because while he fixed a fine splint to the shattered leg he told her the most wonderful story.

The bird was a young one, no more than a year old. She was born in a northern land far, far across the seas. Flying to the south to escape the snow and ice and bitter cold, a great storm had seized her and **whirled** and struck her about. It was a truly terrible storm, stronger than her great wings, stronger than anything. For days and nights, it held her in its grip and there was nothing she could do but fly before it. When finally it had blown itself out, she was over a different land and surrounded by strange birds that she had never seen before. At last, exhausted by her **ordeal**, she had sunk to rest in a friendly green marsh, only to be met by the blast from the hunter's gun.

'A bitter reception for a visiting princess,' concluded Rhayader. 'We will call her the 'Lost Princess'. And in a few days she will be feeling much better. See!' He reached into his pocket and produced a handful of grain. The snow goose opened its round yellow eyes and nibbled at it.

The child laughed with delight, then suddenly caught her breath with alarm as the full import of where she was pressed in upon her, and without a word she turned and fled out of the door.

'Wait, wait!' cried Rhayader, and went to the entrance. The girl was already fleeing down the **sea wall**, but she paused at his voice and looked back.

'What is your name, child?'

'Frith.'

'Eh?' said Rhayader. 'Fritha, I suppose. Where do you live?'

'Wi' t' fisherfolk at Wickaeldroth.'

'Will you come back tomorrow, or the next day, to see how the Princess is getting along?'

Her thin voice came back to him: 'Ay!' Then she was gone.

The snow goose recovered rapidly and by midwinter was already limping about the enclosure with the wild pink-footed geese and had learned to come to be fed at Rhayader's call. And the child Frith was a frequent visitor. She had overcome her fear of Rhayader. Her imagination was captured by the presence of this strange white princess from a land far over the sea, a land that was all pink, as she knew from the map that Rhayader showed her, and on which they traced the stormy path of the lost bird from its home in Canada to the Great Marsh of Essex.

Then one June morning a group of late pink-feet, fat and well fed from the winter at the lighthouse, climbed into the sky in ever-widening circles. With them, her white body and black-tipped pinions shining in the spring sun, was the snow goose. It so happened that Frith was at the lighthouse. Her cry brought Rhayader running from the studio.



'Look! Look! The Princess! She is going away?' Rhayader stared into the sky at the climbing specks, 'Ay,' he said, 'the Princess is going home. Listen! She is bidding us farewell.'

Out of the dear sky came the mournful barking of the pink-feet, and above it the higher, clearer note of the snow goose. The specks drifted northward, formed into a tiny V, diminished, and vanished.

With the departure of the snow goose ended the visits of Frith to the lighthouse. Rhayader learnt all over again the meaning of the word 'loneliness'.

—Paul Gallico

About the Author

Paul Gallico (1897–1976) was an American novelist, short story and sports writer. Apart from *The Snow Goose*, he wrote *Jennie* and *The Poseidon Adventure*.

KRISHNAGAR ACADEMY

10-7-20

CLASS - VI, SUBJECT - ENGLISH II
CHAPTER - THE SNOW GOOSE.

WORDS TO KNOW.

- (i) Grime : dirt.
- (ii) Ferily : Strangely.
- (iii) Ogre : a terrifying person.
- (iv) Kirtle : an old-fashioned loose gown.
- (v) pinions : the outer part of the bird's wing including the flight feathers.
- (vi) 'Can 'ee heal it, Sir?' : Can you heal or cure it?
- (vii) Strips of rigid
- (viii) Splints : Strips of rigid material to support a broken bone.
- (ix) Left : Quick and Skilful.
- (x) Whirled : move or cause to move rapidly round and round.
- (xi) Ordeal : Horrific experience.
- (xii) Sea wall : A type of coastal defence that protects the humans from tides and waves.
- (xiii) 'wi't' : With the