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CARNIVAL TIME AT STRÖBECK

Story by
MAY V. HARRIS

Pictures by
KURT WIESE





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CARNIVAL TIME AT STRÖBECK





They walked down the narrow village street

CARNIVAL TIME AT STRÖBECK

By
MAY V. HARRIS



Illustrated by
KURT WIESE

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I

I CAN hardly wait for tomorrow to come," exclaimed Hans enthusiastically.

"Neither can I," sang Elsa. "I wish tomorrow would hurry, hurry!"

To emphasize her happy impatience, she held out her full skirt and did a quick little dance.

"After all, we've waited a whole year for tomorrow," said Hans. "I wonder who will be chosen."

"I know who I wish would be chosen," said Elsa, stopping before her brother. More seriously she added, "I'm glad we live in Ströbeck, Hans. Just think, this is the only place in Germany, if not in all Europe, where children are taught to play chess in school. Just think what all the other boys and girls miss!"

“No chess, no tournament, no chance to have the honor of winning a prize board,” answered Hans thoughtfully “I’m glad we live here, too. It’s fun.”

In the little village of Ströbeck, tucked away high in the Harz mountains, Hans and Elsa lived with their grandmother.

Many, many years ago the Grimm brothers lived in the nearby town of Cassel, where they wrote many of their famous fairy tales. In Ströbeck today, it looks as if the people there came straight out of a fairy-tale book, for they still look just as they did then. In fact, in hundreds of years this village has changed very little. Even the style of the costumes that the people wear is just the same today as it was years and years ago.

Today, being Sunday, Elsa and Hans were dressed in their best. Elsa looked very gay with a little red cap, like an overgrown muffin, perched on her head. It bobbed as she danced but did not slide off, for it was held securely in place by a scarf tied beneath her chin. The very full skirt of her pretty blue dress stood out proudly over many starched petticoats. Around her waist was a red belt that matched the bright embroidery on her bodice. All that showed of a white blouse were the sleeves that ended just below her elbows. Her shoes were black with large square buckles at the ankle, and she wore long white cotton hose.

Hans’ shoes were just like Elsa’s, and he also wore long white cotton stockings. The short straight trousers of his dark suit were almost hidden beneath his knee-length coat. Across the shoulders of his coat stretched brightly embroidered bands, and a thick red cord formed a V across his chest. From the point of the V hung a fat tassel. Hans wore a black bow tie with a



Elsa and Hans were dressed in their best

snow-white shirt, and in his hands he held a round, box-shaped hat.

“Let’s ask Grandmother to tell us the story about the bishop,” suggested Elsa.

“All right,” answered Hans. “That will make the time pass more quickly. Maybe she will tell us the one about the Chess Tower, too.”

Hans and Elsa found their grandmother busy in the kitchen.

“Grandmother, will you please tell us once more the story about the bishop?” asked Elsa.

“And if there’s time, the one about the Chess Tower, too?” added Hans. “Tomorrow, you know, the names of those who are to play in the tournament will be announced at school.”

Grandmother Koester threw up her hands. As a little girl she could remember how eagerly she had waited for this same announcement, and she knew just how Hans and Elsa felt. For many generations now chess had been a required subject in the village school, and it was the most beloved subject of all.

“Yes, of course,” replied Grandmother, smiling and motioning the children to some chairs by the kitchen fireside. “Since you’ve been such good pupils at your game of chess and hope to win high honors, I think you deserve a story. But let us not forget that the geese must be fed at the usual time.”

Grandmother seated herself in the large armchair nearest the fire and took up her knitting.

“Once upon a time,” she began as was her custom. Hans and Elsa always insisted that she begin her stories just as most of the Grimm fairy tales begin.

“Once upon a time many, many years ago in our village of Ströbeck lived some people who were very much like the people in any other village of Germany. They were industrious. They tilled the soil and raised cattle, sheep, geese, and chickens. They dressed just as we do today. They were fun-loving, but when they had time to play, they indulged in games of chance and other amusements. This went on for generations.

“Toward the close of the fifteenth century, however, something eventful happened. A high official of the Cathedral of Halberstadt was exiled and sent here. The people of Ströbeck received him kindly and did all they could to make him comfortable and happy.

“Their generosity and friendliness touched his heart, and he wondered what he could do in return to express his gratitude. He had no money with which to make gifts. After a time he decided that he would teach the people to play the royal game of chess; that was something he could do for them.

“So he went about the village, teaching the game to all who would learn. He showed the people how to make a board just like a checkerboard, on which to play, and he helped them carve the various pieces—kings, queens, rooks, bishops, knights, and pawns, which are known as the chessmen. Then he taught them the rules of the game and played with them until they could go on alone.

“The villagers became very interested in chess, and each one tried to play better than his neighbor. Soon the games of chance and the aimless amusements were forgotten in favor of this game that demanded shrewd thinking and was played only for the honor

of winning. The exile was very pleased about his real success.

“In time he was granted his freedom and eventually was made the Bishop of Halberstadt, but he never forgot his friends in Ströbeck. It was he who founded a school here, requiring that in addition to the usual subjects the children be taught to play his favorite game, chess. And it is said that is why you and I and your great-grandparents and so on back for generations have had the pleasure of learning to play chess skillfully in school.

“The bishop also provided that once a year a contest should be held among the school children and that the prize for the winner should be a new chessboard with a set of chessmen.

“It was considered a great honor to possess a prize board then, just as it is today. Parents who had one willed it to a son or daughter, who valued it highly. The owners regarded their prize boards as outstanding marks of high rank. They felt a little more important than they had before owning one, and everyone else paid them more respect.

“Eventually the skill of the chessplayers of Ströbeck became known all over Germany. They were challenged by chess players from far and near. Tournaments were held, in which the visitors were usually defeated by the Ströbeck players.

“The people did not gamble on the game nor did the players play for money—only for the honor of winning. And to this day,” ended Grandmother, putting her knitting aside, “it is still that way, I am proud to say.”

Hans and Elsa sat quietly for a moment, thinking of how chess came to play such an important part in their lives. Grandmother had told them the story over and over again, but this time,



He never forgot his friends at Ströbeck

almost on the eve of the tournament, it seemed to have a new meaning.

“It’s time for the geese to be fed,” cried Hans, suddenly jumping up.

“Oh, yes,” said Elsa, also arising.

“Feed the geese and come right back in,” said Grandmother, leaning forward in her chair to stir the fire. “Then I will tell you the story about the Chess Tower. Mind that you don’t soil your good clothes!”

Hans and Elsa grabbed their baskets of feed and fled. Out they scampered and threw the bright yellow grain to the beautiful white geese.

“We cannot fail in our duties now,” said Hans to Elsa. “It is very near picking time, and the geese look fine.”

The children’s more important chore was to tend the geese, for goose feathers were very valuable. Each year the feathers and down were carefully plucked and saved. If Grandmother did not need them for a new feather bed, she sold them in the village and they brought a goodly sum.





II

“Well, that didn’t take you long,” Grandmother Koester observed as the children returned to the kitchen. Then she set a pot of soup on the fire.

“We hurried,” replied Hans, “but all the geese are fed and have fresh water.” He set the empty feed baskets in their places, washed his hands in the kitchen wash basin, and then sat down by the fire.

Elsa had already washed her hands. Now she reached for some yarn to wind for her grandmother.

“That is a good child, Elsa,” beamed Grandmother. “Now I will tell you the story about the Chess Tower.”

Grandmother took up her knitting again, and the needles clicked busily as she told the story.

“Once upon a time,” she began with a smile for Hans and Elsa, “also many, many years ago, another man was exiled to Ströbeck. This time King Henry the Second of Germany sentenced a count to solitary imprisonment, and the count was jailed in the building that we now call the Chess Tower. It was once a prison, you know.

“Some people claim that the great enthusiasm of the people of Ströbeck for chess had its beginning during the count’s imprisonment in the tower.

“The story goes that the count, having nothing to do, decided to pass the empty hours by playing chess. He had no chessmen, no chessboard, no opponent, but that did not trouble him long. He carved two sets of chessmen from pieces of wood and, with chalk drew a chessboard on the floor of his cell. Then he began his game, playing one of his hands against the other.

“His guards were peasants from the village. They watched the count with great curiosity and interest. Finally they learned the game from him and found it much to their liking. At home they taught the game to their families and neighbors, and soon everyone in the village was playing chess.

“Now you have heard both of the stories about the origin of chess-playing in Ströbeck,” concluded Grandmother. “Hans, have you ever noticed the date of the Chess Tower?”

“Oh, yes,” replied Hans. “It is 1011.”

“That was such a long time ago,” added Elsa, “I can’t even think back that far.”

“More than nine hundred years,” explained Grandmother,

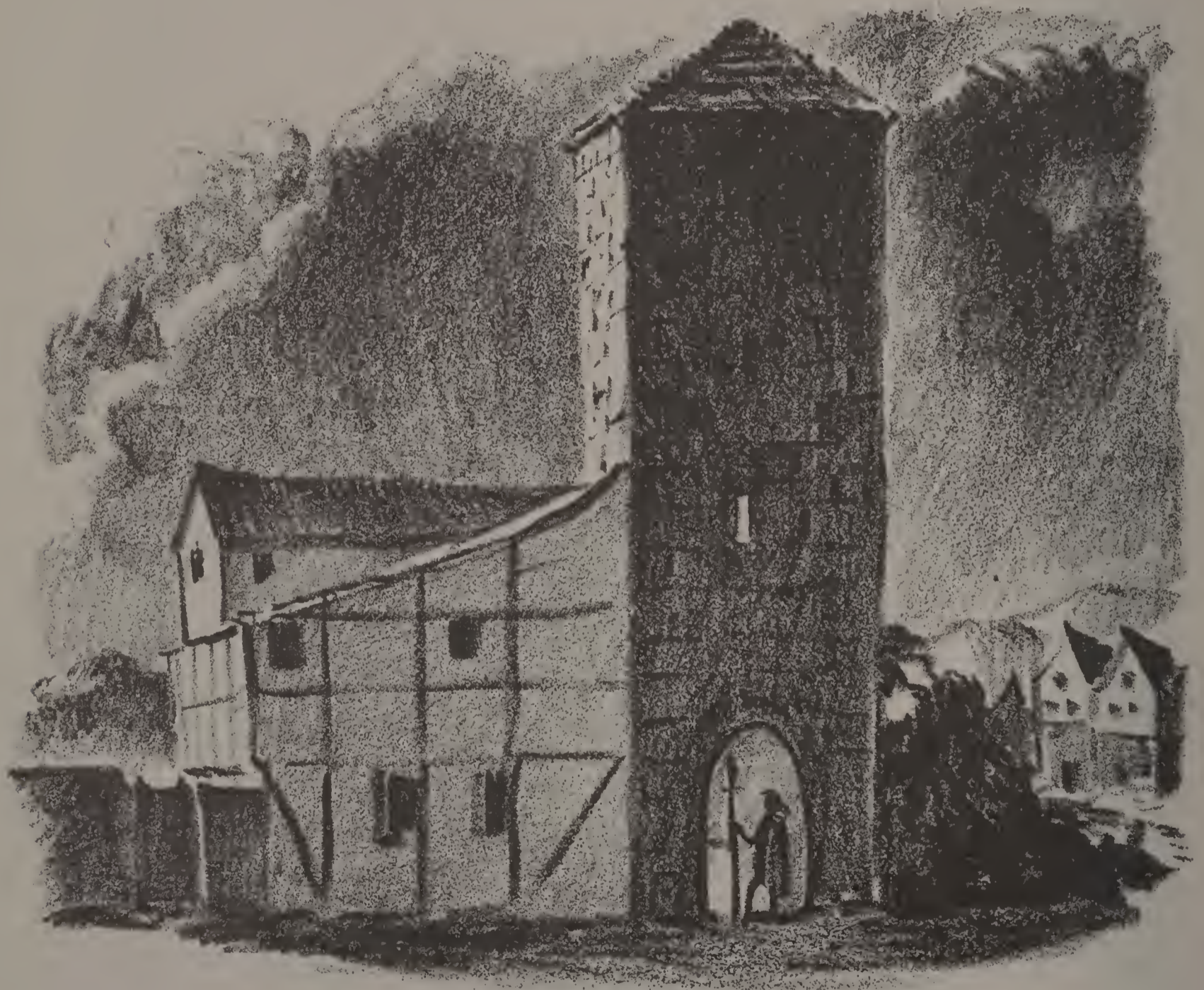


Then he began his game

“and during all that time chess has been a part of life in Ströbeck and games of chess have been played in the tower.”

“The story of the count and the Chess Tower is printed on some of the town’s paper money,” stated Hans, “and during the great World War there was a picture of the Chess Tower on some of it. Herr Gunter still has some at the *Gasthof* and he has showed it to me.”

“That is right,” said Grandmother. “Chess is very important in Ströbeck. But this is all for tonight. You know I haven’t been well, and I’m quite tired.”





III

Hans and Elsa were ready for school early the next morning. Elsa wore a plain blue dress; Hans, a plain dark suit. Their hands and faces were scrubbed. Hans' hair was combed neatly back; Elsa's was divided in the middle and brushed into a braid that ended in a blue hair ribbon. Their eyes sparkled with excitement as they listened to last instructions from Grandmother.

"While I feel better today, I shall not go out-of-doors. So I want you to stop at the *Gasthof* on your way home from school today," Grandmother was saying, "and tell Frau Gunter that we will be picking our geese a day or two after the tournament. Say good day to Herr and Frau Gunter for me, and go also to the bakery and purchase a loaf of bread."

“We will,” Hans and Elsa replied together. “Good-by, Grandmother.” They picked up their chessboards, kissed Grandmother fondly, and hurried through the door, eager to be on their way.

As soon as they were away from the house, Elsa said quickly, “Here is our chance to buy Grandmother the kerchief we have wanted to get with our savings. Besides, it may make her feel better.”

“That’s right,” agreed Hans. “And we can get it while we are doing our other errands after school.”

Side by side, the chessboards under their arms, they walked down the narrow village street, paved with cobblestones from the surrounding fields. They passed low red-tiled houses, houses with black and white targets on them, and tiny chess houses representing black and white chessboards or figures of chessmen.

Nearly every house was built or decorated in some way to suggest chess. As Hans and Elsa approached the schoolhouse, they met other children, coming from all directions. All were carrying chessboards just as children in the United States carry schoolbooks.

“There are Karl and Maria,” Hans exclaimed.

“Oh, you always see them first,” laughed Elsa, waving to their two friends.

These four were constant companions. Hans and Karl were both thirteen years old; Elsa and Maria, eleven. Every morning on the way to school, they watched for each other, and they had made it a game to see who would notice the other first. Hans joined Karl and they walked ahead, followed by



These four were constant companions

Maria and Elsa, walking with their free arms about each other.

The schoolhouse was a part of the schoolmaster's home. A number of rooms in the front part of the big house were used as classrooms; the rest were used as living quarters by Herr and Frau Snider, the schoolmaster and his wife.

This morning as Maria and Elsa neared the schoolmaster's home, they saw Frau Snider watering her potted plants on the sill of an open window. They stopped a moment to greet her.

"*Guten tag, Frau Snider,*" called Elsa. Those are the words German boys and girls use to say, "Good day, Mrs. Snider."

"Good day," repeated Maria. Both girls curtsied.

"And how are you, my dears?" answered the cheery, smiling wife of the schoolmaster. "Aren't you a little excited today because you will learn who is to play in the tournament?"

"Yes, ma'am, we are," both girls replied.

"We can hardly wait," finished Elsa.

Two minutes after the girls said farewell to Frau Snider, they were in their classroom. Hans and Karl had arrived before them. As other pupils quietly entered, the schoolmaster nodded cheerfully to them.

Hans, Elsa, Karl and Maria belonged to a class of thirty boys and girls aged from eight to fourteen. This year they were in the one grade of the Ströbeck school that is taught the art of chess every week during the last three months of the school year. These are January, February, and March.

In Ströbeck all the children go to school the whole year through; they do not have a summer vacation. During the winter months school hours are from eight o'clock until noon

and from one o'clock until three. In the summertime, because the children are needed to work in the fields, school hours are from seven o'clock until noon only.

This being March, school was still held in the afternoon. During the last period of the day the pupils were instructed in chess. Today when it was time for this period to begin, fifteen pairs of boys and girls sat ready in their places, a chessboard between each pair.

Very soon click, click, click was heard all over the room as the children placed the black and white chessmen on their chessboards. Herr Snider called for the attention of the class and explained a new gambit, as certain moves in chess are called. Then he gave the signal for the games to begin by saying, "Players with the white pieces make the first moves."

The children made their moves thoughtfully and carefully. They were at all times courteous to their opponents, never once forgetting their manners. The room was silent except for the sounds of chessmen being moved or low statements of "Checkmate." For no one ever whispered or talked while the games were in progress.

Some won their games in a few moves; others found their problems more difficult and they played on and on. At the end of a game the players either started a new one or sat quietly. No one boasted when he won, and the losers were good sportsmen. This is the way it was every day, for gracious conduct is a part of chess.

On this afternoon, although the pupils sat as quietly as always when they had finished their games, a spirit of excite-

ment filled the room. They all knew that the time was approaching for the most important event in the village to take place, and that now was the time to announce the names of those who would play in the chess tournament. Each pupil, as well as Hans and Elsa or Karl and Maria, had applied himself seriously to the game all year in the hope that he might be chosen.

Tournament Day means a great celebration in Ströbeck. There is a parade, and nearly everyone dresses in a costume that represents a chessman. Kings, queens, bishops, knights, rooks, and pawns come to life on that festive occasion. Men, women, and children join in the fun on the village square.

Within the schoolhouse serious players do their very best to win their games. Each victor is awarded a coveted prize chessboard and set of chessmen and is escorted home with grand ceremony. No wonder that the pupils were eager with hope and curiosity!

Near the close of the chess period, the schoolmaster arose and said, "Stop your games now, please. I wish to make an important announcement."

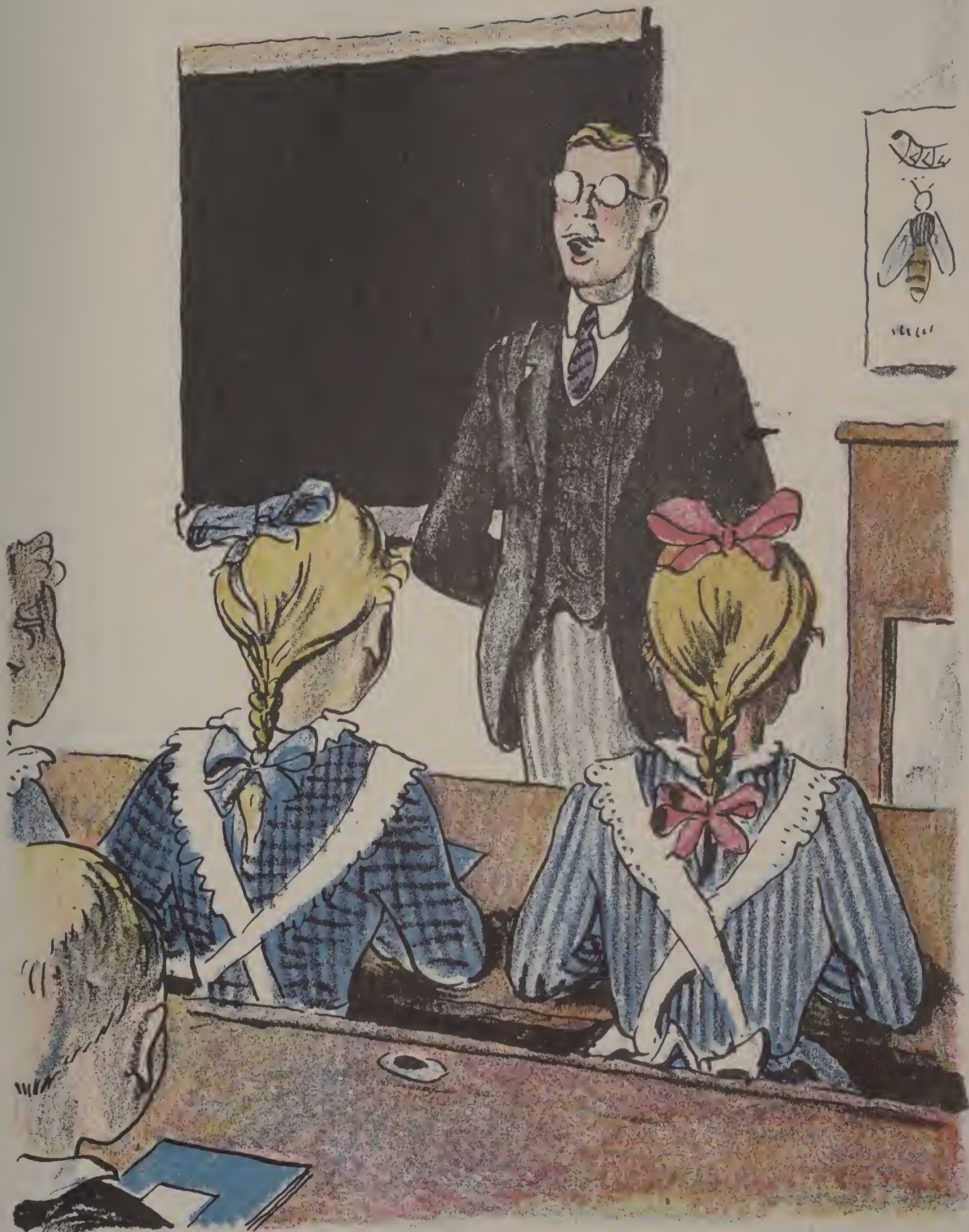
Everyone knew what that meant. The whole class snapped to attention.

"I wish to announce the names of the boy and girl who have been chosen to enter the tournament from our class this year," went on Herr Snider.

There was a breathless silence.

"They are," continued the master, "Hans and Elsa."

Vigorous handclapping echoed in the small room, and smil-



"I wish to make an important announcement."

ing faces turned approvingly toward Hans and Elsa. They were general favorites and everyone was satisfied with their choice.

“Will you come forward, please?” asked the schoolmaster when the noise grew less.

Hans approached the front of the room, a proud and happy boy. Elsa fairly sparkled. She was slower than Hans because her friends reached for her hand to congratulate her as she passed up the aisle.

“I wish to tell you,” said Herr Snider, “just why you have been selected by the committee to represent your class. You have applied yourselves earnestly to the game and learned it well. You have always been courteous. You have behaved well when victorious and also have been good losers. You never have pouted nor been disagreeable because you lost a game. Thus you have passed the test in conduct as well as having won the number of games required to enter the tournament. You will receive written instructions later. School is dismissed.”

There was more clatter and applause for Hans and Elsa. Then the boys and girls put their chessmen in boxes, picked up their chessboards and left the schoolhouse.

Maria ran to Elsa and embraced her. “I’m so glad it was you who was chosen,” she exclaimed.

“Thank you,” replied Elsa. “I do hope I’ll win!”

“Fine work,” said Karl, flinging an arm across Hans’ shoulder. “I thought you would get it.”

“Did you? I had no idea that I really would be chosen, but naturally I hoped I would. There are so many good players,” Hans said modestly.

“Good playing isn’t everything, as the master pointed out,” replied Karl. “Honor counts too, remember.”

“That’s right,” agreed Hans. “Oh, I almost forgot. Elsa and I are not going right home today. We have some errands to do for Grandmother. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“*Auf wiedersehen,*” sang Elsa in farewell to Maria a moment later.





IV

“Aren’t they wonderful!” exclaimed Elsa, referring to their classmates, as she and Hans started off on their errands. “Every one of them tried to be chosen just as hard as you and I, and some must feel very disappointed; yet all were most kind and generous in their good wishes to us.”

“I noticed that too,” replied Hans. “They certainly are good fellows.”

“To think that only yesterday we were looking forward to the announcement today, not knowing that we would be the ones chosen, but hoping, oh, so much! Oh, I can hardly wait to tell Grandmother,” Elsa added joyously.

“She will be proud and pleased, I think,” said Hans, who was quietly proud and pleased himself, “and surprised to learn that both of us are to play.”



The inn stood on one side of the village square

"I was surprised at that myself," commented Elsa. "Two from the same family are hardly ever chosen. I wonder how it happened."

"It didn't happen," replied Hans. "We must have earned the most points. This is an honor won by merit, and the master is very exact on all counts."

"Which pleases me the more," said Elsa happily.

The children walked rapidly and soon arrived at the *Gasthof*, the little town's inn. It stood on one side of the village square, which was the center of the community. As promptly as Hans and Elsa had gone to the *Gasthof*, the news of their good fortune had preceded them.

"Welcome, my children," Frau Gunter greeted them heartily. "What is this good news I just heard about you two winning the highest honors in your class? How pleased Frau Koester will be to hear of it, or does she already know?"

"No," answered Hans, who tried hard not to look too proud and glad. "We just came from the schoolhouse and are surprised that even you know so soon."

"How fast news travels from that schoolroom," said Elsa gaily. "Grandmother bade us, when we left this morning, to come to the *Gasthof* with a message of good day to you and Herr Gunter; and to tell you that we will be picking our geese a day or two after the tournament. Hans and I have not yet been home; so Grandmother does not know that we were chosen—"

"—unless someone else has told her as they did me," finished Frau Gunter. "How is your grandmother?"

"She was feeling much better this morning," Hans replied.

“That’s what I like to hear,” approved Frau Gunter. “I hope she will soon be entirely recovered. Well, I am glad that you two were chosen. It pleases both Herr Gunter and me greatly. Now I have a surprise for you.”

“A surprise?” questioned Elsa.

“Yes,” replied Frau Gunter. “A month or two ago, if you remember, two American children stayed at our inn and visited your chess class. They were very much interested in the tournament and were sorry that they could not be here for it.”

“Oh, I remember them,” broke in Hans. “Weren’t their names Bob and Helen?”

“They are the ones,” Frau Gunter said, nodding her head. “When they went away, they left two gifts, one for the boy and one for the girl who won the honor of representing your class in this year’s contest. Bob gave his to Herr Gunter to keep, and Helen gave hers to me. You wait here, and I’ll find Herr Gunter.”

Frau Gunter hurried from the room, leaving behind her two amazed children. Hans and Elsa looked at each other expectantly.

“What do you suppose they have for us?” asked Elsa, her eyes wide with wonder.

“Something fine, you may be sure,” answered Hans. “I remember how friendly they were.”

“I do too,” said Elsa. “I liked them.”

Before the children had time to say more, Herr and Frau Gunter both came into the room, each carrying a mysterious package.



“Good day, Herr Gunter,” greeted Hans and Elsa. “Grandmother sent her greetings.”

“Thank you,” replied Herr Gunter. “How are you, my dears? What fine news I heard about you, all within this hour. May God bless you, good children. I suppose Frau Gunter has told you about these gifts.”

The kindly old man turned to Hans and held out a long thin package. At the same time Frau Gunter approached Elsa with a smaller something in her hand.

“And this is yours, my dear,” she said cordially to Elsa.

“Oh, shall we open them now?” asked Elsa eagerly.

“Yes, if you like.” Herr Gunter smiled and nodded as Frau Gunter answered.

Hans whipped the paper covering off his gift in a twinkling and revealed an odd cloth-covered object that looked like an umbrella. Yet it hardly seemed long enough to be one. Then he discovered a portion that could be pulled back, and with a flip he did open up a real umbrella.

“Why, it’s a folding umbrella,” he cried.



"Why, it's a folding umbrella," he cried

"So it is!" exclaimed Frau Gunter and Elsa almost in one breath. They had never seen such a thing before.

"Very handy indeed," remarked Herr Gunter. "You will have much use for that, too," he suggested, remembering that the season of frequent rains was about due.

"What is your gift, Elsa?" inquired her brother.

Everyone had been so interested in Hans' umbrella that they had almost forgotten there was another gift. Elsa eagerly tore the tissue paper off her package and opened the box that lay revealed in her hand. Inside was a small bead purse that had been made by Indians in America. Elsa danced for joy.

"Oh, how pretty," she breathed. "I love it dearly."

"Both are typically American gifts," observed Herr Gunter, "one so cleverly devised; the other, Indian."

After examining their presents for a few minutes, Hans said, "We must not linger too long, Elsa. We still have other errands to do." Turning to Herr and Frau Gunter, he added, "Thank you very much for the gifts."

"Bob and Helen are the ones to thank for those," returned Frau Gunter. "And now you must go? Then take our good wishes and congratulations to your grandmother for having two such honored grandchildren."

Hans and Elsa chattered happily as they re-wrapped their packages. They could hardly wait to get home.

"Good luck to you," said Herr Gunter, walking with them to the door.

"Thank you, and *auf weidersehen*," Hans and Elsa called in farewell.



V

From across the square came the tinkle of the tiny bell on the bakeshop door. A small boy came out of the shop, a loaf of bread under his arm and a cookie in his hand.

Tinkle, tinkle went the bell once more as Hans and Elsa entered the bakeshop.

“Good day,” greeted the baker’s wife, who was in charge of the store. “How is Frau Koester today?”

“Quite well, thank you,” answered Hans.

“She has been feeling better lately,” Elsa said.

“I’ve been hearing news about the two of you this afternoon,” the buxom woman went on. “You both won high honors in your class. That is fine.”

Hans and Elsa smiled broadly.

“News travels fast,” said Hans. “We heard it ourselves only an hour ago.”

“Many children have come in, carrying the news during that hour,” the baker’s wife reminded them. “And what will you have?”

“A loaf of pumpernickel, please,” ordered Elsa. “I see your loaves have gone quickly tonight.”

“Such talebearing as I have had is profitable,” smiled the baker’s wife. Then she turned and reached for a loaf of dark rye bread.

While the bread was being wrapped, Elsa gazed into the glass case before her. In it all kinds of German baked goods were neatly arranged—cinnamon buns, buns with caraway seeds, sugar-frosted coffee cakes with raisins and nuts oozing out of them, gingerbread and ginger cookies with pink and white icing, white sugar cookies, loaf cakes, spice cakes, apple cakes, and big pretzels.

Hans wandered over to one corner of the shop where there was a small table holding a chessboard. A game had evidently been in progress earlier in the day, before the rush of business after school.

“Here is a cooky for each of you,” said the baker’s wife, handing the loaf of bread to Hans, then a cooky each to him and to Elsa.

“Thank you,” the children exclaimed in turn.

Tinkle, sang the bell once more as Hans and Elsa went out the door, biting into their cookies.

“Mmm, this is good,” said Elsa.



"I've been hearing news about the two of you."

“It is,” agreed Hans, but his mind was occupied with thoughts of chess. He added, “These cookies are our reward for being chosen to play in the tournament.”

“Now we’ll go to the dry goods store,” directed Elsa, “and then home to tell Grandmother the news.”

When Hans and Elsa entered the dry goods store, they found the shopkeeper, as usual, engaged in a game of chess. Every store in Ströbeck has its chess table, and, like all other villagers, the merchants play the game in all their spare moments.

The keeper of the dry goods store glanced up from his game and, seeing customers, immediately stopped playing and went toward them.

“Well, well,” he said cordially, “here are the honored Hans and Elsa. How are you?”

“Very well, thank you,” answered Hans.

“And I am too,” smiled Elsa shyly.

“You should be two very happy children, and I think you are if I can judge rightly. What can I do for you?”

“We want to buy a kerchief for Grandmother,” replied Elsa.

Hans took a brief glance at the counter near at hand and then walked slowly over to the shopkeeper’s game table, leaving the selection of the kerchief to his sister. He stood looking at the chessboard and realized that it was an old prize board.

With a new interest he leaned down and read the inscription on it, which said that the board had been awarded in 1702. “Over two hundred years ago,” Hans thought, “and during all that time it has been a source of pride to members of the shopkeeper’s family.”

Hans tried to think how many generations had played on the board since the winner had lived in Ströbeck so long ago. And he wondered if he were about to win a board to hand down to generations to come. For the first time he began to realize what a thrill it would be to win one. He must win; he *must*.

“Do you think Grandmother will like this one, Hans?” Elsa broke into his thoughts. She held a filmy square of cloth in her hand.

“What, Elsa? Oh, yes,” answered Hans absently.

Immediately his thoughts returned to chess. He considered how the present shopowner studied problems in chess at this board day after day when not occupied with his business. His father before him had done the same. And before him the grandfather had done the same, and so on back for many, many years.

In all the shops of Ströbeck it was the same. Hans liked the idea. After all, it wasn't so very different. Didn't he and Elsa, like all the other children, practice moves in chess while they were tending the geese?

Elsa completed her purchase and joined Hans. “I'm through. Shall we go now?” she asked.

The shopkeeper smiled and bowed and wished the children success, then he returned to his game of chess.

Hans' and Elsa's feet sped over the ground now that they were on their way home. They could hardly wait to tell their news to Grandmother. Perhaps she had heard already. In no time they reached the door of the kitchen, almost breathless.



“Well, here you are,” welcomed Grandmother.

“Here’s the bread,” said Hans, breathing hard.

“And here’s a present for you from both of us,” said Elsa when she could talk. She held the gift toward Grandmother.

“What? A present?” asked Grandmother Koester in surprise. She opened the package eagerly. “Oh, you sweet children! A new kerchief! How did you know I wanted one?”

“We didn’t. We noticed yours was wearing thin,” explained Elsa. Then she could wait no longer. “Oh, Grandmother,” she cried, “we’ve some news for you.”

“Or maybe you have heard?” asked Hans. “Everyone else in the village knows.”



“What? A present?” asked Grandmother Koester

“Don’t tell me that one of you has been chosen to enter the tournament?” guessed Grandmother, looking from one smiling face to the other.

“No, not one of us,” Hans announced proudly, “but both of us!”

“Both!” exclaimed Grandmother. “How wonderful! Oh, I’m overjoyed. Both of you!” She threw her arms about both children and hugged them to her. “How rare it is for two from one family to be entered. I am proud of you, my children. Now I know why I made an unusually large batch of cookies today.”

“And we have presents, too.” The happy Elsa whirled across the room, holding her box high in the air.

“Here is mine,” said Hans, unwrapping his gift.

“Why, what is that?” asked Grandmother, a surprised and wondering expression on her face.

“A folding umbrella. See? This is how it works,” answered Hans as Elsa came over to see the demonstration also.

“Upon my soul!” exclaimed Grandmother Koester. “I never saw one like that before. What is your gift, Elsa?”

Elsa opened her box and displayed the bead bag. “A purse made by the Indians of the United States,” she said, very pleased.

“How pretty. I never saw anything like this before either. Who gave you these things?” questioned Grandmother.

“Some American children left these gifts with Herr and Frau Gunter to be given to the two chosen from our class to enter the tournament,” explained Hans.

“Do you remember our telling you about Bob and Helen?” asked Elsa.

“Yes, I think I do,” replied Grandmother. “Are they the ones? How thoughtful of them. We must ask if they left their address so that you can write and thank them. But come, we have been so interested in presents that we have forgotten supper. It is on the table, getting cold.”

Hans glanced toward the table. “Liver dumplings,” he exclaimed, and immediately started for his place.

At school the next day Hans and Elsa proudly showed the schoolmaster and their classmates the gifts they had received from the American children, whom all remembered. It became a habit with Hans to carry his umbrella almost everywhere he went. But after one trip to school with her bead bag, Elsa carefully put it away to carry only on Sundays and special occasions.





VI

The next few days passed swiftly. Excitement was in the air and added zest to the usual routine of going to school and coming home immediately afterward to tend the geese. Every day while Hans and Elsa guarded Grandmother's flock until sundown, they studied seriously their game of chess and practiced gambits that had been explained by the schoolmaster. They wanted to be able to play their very best on the day of the contest.

Karl and Maria, however, were free to take part in the merry bustle of the villagers as they prepared for the biggest holiday of the year. On the afternoon before the tournament Karl suggested to Maria, "Let's go to the station and see the visitors who arrive for the tournament."



They studied seriously their game of chess

“Oh, yes, let’s,” agreed Maria. “We can take our little wagon along and help with their luggage.” There are no taxicabs nor express trucks in Ströbeck.

“A good idea. I’ll get it.” Karl ran to the shed behind the house, found the wagon in its usual place, and in a few minutes he and Maria were stepping briskly along the road on the half hour’s walk to the station. Behind them the wagon rattled over the cobblestones.

“It’s been a long, long time since we’ve been down here,” Maria said, catching a glimpse of the brick station through the old elm trees.

“That’s because there isn’t anything to come for,” replied Karl. “Visitors seldom come to Ströbeck except for the tournament. This will be the last train today. Let’s ask Kress if many people came in.”

“Good even to you,” said the children, approaching the ruddy, white-haired station master.

Kress grinned cordially. He was glad to see his little friends. “I spend so many lonely hours here,” he said, “that I am always glad when tournament time rolls around. Then I see people. You have a wagon. Do you expect guests?”

“No. We just thought we might help someone with his luggage,” answered Karl. “Did many arrive today?”

“Yes, a good many,” returned Kress. “Year by year the fame of Ströbeck increases, and year by year more and more people interested in chess come from far and near. This year it seems as though the visitors are even more enthusiastic than usual.” Kress paused to listen to the sounds of an approaching

train. "Here comes the train now," he called as he ran to the track.

When the train had puffed to a stop at the station, Karl and Maria watched the passengers get off. Some of the women from outlying districts wore costumes with elaborately embroidered aprons and on their heads kerchiefs that tied under their chins.

There were more men than women, but in some groups there were whole families. The children in these looked at Karl and Maria, standing beside their wagon, with simple curiosity.

"These children will lead you to the *Gasthof* if you do not know the way," called Kress, coming back to where Maria and Karl stood.

"Put as many bags in the wagon as it will hold," Karl offered hospitably.

Immediately he and Kress busied themselves, packing the largest pieces of luggage into the cart. The newcomers were glad that they did not have to carry more than their small bags when they learned that the village was a half-hour away down the dusty road.

After the cart was loaded, Maria and Karl started the procession, pulling the wagon while the newly arrived children pushed. Behind them a happy jabbering crowd straggled along the country road to the village, only the church spire of which could be seen from the station.

When the strangers reached the streets, they entered a village alive with holiday spirit. They saw people decorating their homes with gay banners, checkered cloth, and pennants.

In the business district merchants were washing the windows of their shops, draping the fronts with checkered muslin, hanging flags, and placing exhibits concerning chess in their show-cases. At the village square workmen were drawing on the ground a huge chessboard with places two feet square where living chessmen would move on the holiday.

The Gasthof had already been decorated. Festoons of greenery were draped across its front, pillars were wrapped with checkered cloth, and here and there were large posters representing chessboards. Everyone was bustling around, but no one was too busy to smile and call a greeting to the visitors.

Herr Gunter came out to the street to welcome and assist his customers. He unloaded the bags and boxes, and Maria and Karl helped to carry them in. When the visitors offered to pay the children for their help, they steadfastly refused to take anything. They said that they were glad that they could do something to show that the strangers were welcome in Ströbeck.

While Frau Gunter directed the visitors to their rooms, several of the young people wandered toward the entertainment hall of the inn. Maria and Karl went with them.

The entertainment hall was the best room in the *Gasthof*. Large and homelike, it served as a chess club clubroom or game room. Townspeople, as well as guests at the hotel, often wandered around this room, looking at the paintings and mottoes on the wall and at the interesting chessboards and chessmen arranged on the many tables. Today a few visitors who had arrived earlier were playing chess at some of the tables.

Herr Gunter noticed the children walking around, looking at



Herr Gunter came out to welcome his customers

everything but touching nothing. "Good children," he thought, "I will show them something."

"Come over here," he called, leading the way to a corner of the room. "I will show you something special." He took from its case an old-fashioned chessboard and its set of chessmen. Holding the board carefully so that everyone could see, he explained, "The background of this board was made by piecing together tiny bits of colored glass—that's called mosaic—and it forms a picture of our village of Ströbeck."

"The inscription tells us that this chessboard was given to Ströbeck by the Elector of Brandenburg on May 13, 1661. That was a very long time ago—almost three hundred years. You can see that the board has been carefully preserved. Today it is the treasure of our village."

The children could scarcely understand the meaning of three hundred years old, but they realized that they were looking at something rare. Seeing how impressed they were, Herr Gunter felt rewarded as he put the chessboard back into its case.

Everyone at the *Gasthof* awakened early the next morning. While long thin streaks of coral light were still turning the quiet gray sky to a delicate pink, the children heard the clatter of oxen's hoofs on the cobblestones. Soon they distinguished the loud crowing of haughty roosters and the lowing of cows ready to be milked.

Then those noises were joined by the clacking of many geese and the bow-wow, yip-yip of barking dogs. Tinkle, tinkle went the tiny bell on the bakeshop door across the square. The children at the inn leaped from between their feather beds and

peered out of their windows. Early as it was, the little village was all astir.

Maria and Karl awoke early, too. They jumped out of their beds without a moment's hesitation, for was this not the day for which they had waited a whole year? At last this was the day of the chess tournament in which their friends Hans and Elsa were to compete, and they did not want to miss a single minute of it.

They dressed hastily and ran out to feed their geese and chickens. Afterwards they breakfasted on hot chocolate and bread with wine-colored jam. Then they dressed very carefully in their costumes of king and queen, for they were to be in the parade and also be living pieces in the animated game of chess.

After inspecting each other to see that everything was right, Maria said, "Let's go out and see if anything has been started yet."

"It's a little too early for any of the events," replied Karl, "but let's walk around anyway."

They crossed over the square and came to the center of the village. Shopkeepers who had not completed the decoration of their places the day before were putting on the finishing touches.

"Everything looks very festive and ready for the big event," Karl observed.

"Hans and Elsa must be excited today," Maria thought aloud happily. "I know they were up bright and early."

"Yes, I should think so," replied Karl. He and Maria were approaching the Chess Tower. "There are some of the people who got off the train yesterday," remarked Karl.

“Where?” asked Maria. “Oh, I see. In front of the door to the Chess Tower. Let’s go with them. Herr Gunter is going to show them the tower.”

Just as Herr Gunter opened the heavy door, Maria and Karl joined the group. “Good day to you, my children,” said the kindly innkeeper.

“Good day to you, sir. Good day,” replied Karl and Maria.

“This building was used as a jail in the early days,” commented Herr Gunter as he led the way into the tower.

“Did they really have prisoners here?” asked one of the visiting boys.

“Yes, indeed,” replied Herr Gunter. “In those days it was common for anyone who displeased a king to be placed in solitary confinement. The king of Germany often sent subjects who were in his disfavor to the bishop of Ströbeck, who placed them under guard in this tower until they were released. That wasn’t very pleasant.

“One count, in particular, was confined here, but he was smarter than most of the unhappy prisoners. He is the one who knew the game of chess and played it alone, his right hand against his left. It is said that he finally taught his guards the game and from that time on this building became known as the Chess Tower.”

As Herr Gunter finished speaking, a group of men appeared on the balcony and another on the ground floor. They placed chessboards on tables and prepared for several games. Herr Gunter called the attention of his guests to these groups.

“That is going on all the time,” he explained. “Ever since



the count was released, people have played chess here daily. Before evening comes, they will know which of them is the champion—maybe!”

More people were on the streets now. Villagers dressed as chessmen promenaded elegantly and sooner or later all sauntered to the village square.

“Let’s imagine that all our chess pieces have come to life for just one merry holiday,” Karl said.

“That won’t be hard,” returned Maria. “With the sun shining on the black and white and red and gold of the costumes, our town looks like a fairy tale.”

“It is about time for the tournament at the schoolhouse to begin,” Herr Gunter told his followers, “and while that is going on, there will be a game of chess with living pieces on the village square. I will leave you to enjoy it if you care to and return to my duties at the inn. Karl and Maria here are to take part in the life-sized game; so it should be interesting.” He finished with a fond smile for his little friends.

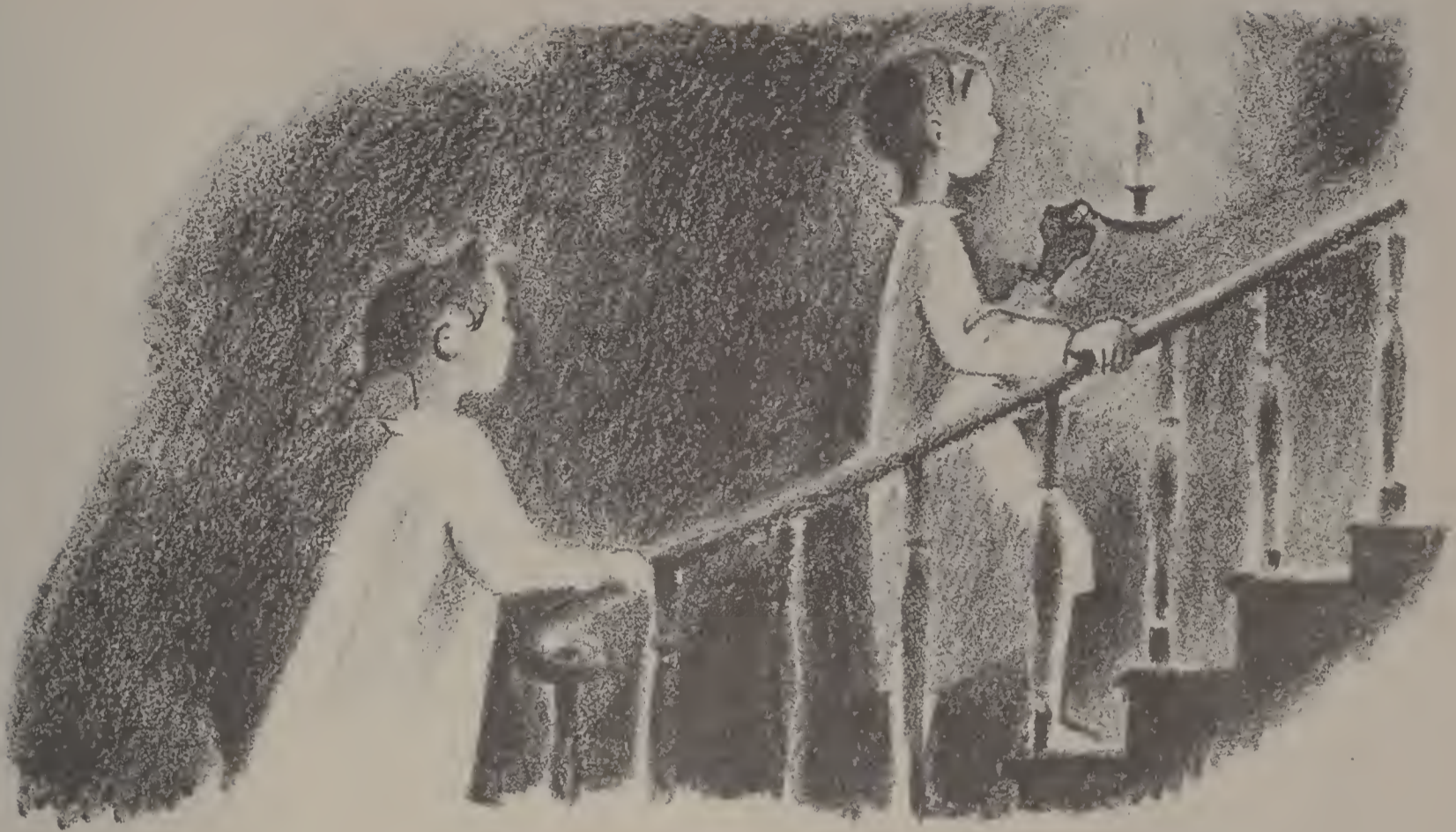
“Karl,” exclaimed Maria. “It’s nearly time for the playing to start at the schoolhouse. Let’s run and try to see Hans and Elsa before they begin.”

Their flying feet, quite undignified for a king and queen, carried them to the schoolhouse in no time. Within, many people were standing about in groups talking. There were to be forty-eight contestants, and officials were busy checking names to be sure all were present.

All were except Hans and Elsa. Karl and Maria looked around for them, carelessly at first and then more and more anxiously as they began to realize that it was only a few minutes before time to play; and Hans and Elsa were not yet there.

“Oh, Karl,” wailed Maria, “what could have happened? Hans and Elsa are never late. No one here has seen them all morning.”

Karl shook his head, bewildered. He and Maria had looked everywhere, and Hans and Elsa had not reported their arrival. Puzzled and quiet, Karl and Maria walked back to the square and took their places in the life-sized game.



VII

Hans and Elsa went to bed early the night before the tournament, looking forward joyfully to the next day. But when they arose in the morning, they found their grandmother was ill again. She did not even feel well enough to get up.

“I’ll get the breakfast, Grandmother,” said Elsa, “and perhaps you’ll feel better after you have eaten.”

“Oh, of all days for me to be ill,” mourned Grandmother. “Why did it have to be today?”

“Don’t you feel badly about it,” Hans sympathized. “It isn’t your fault. We won’t desert you.”

Neither child was brave enough to mention it, but both knew that they could not play in the tournament that day, for there was no one to stay with Grandmother or to tend the geese. When Hans’ face was turned, he quickly shook away tears of disappointment, but he always found a smile for his old grandmother.

"You are a good lad. You are both sweet children to take it this way, but I am so sorry," she moaned.

"Just you lie there and don't worry." Elsa set a tray beside the bed. She too had blinked back tears.

"I will go out and stay with the geese," Hans announced soberly after breakfast. "If you need anything, call me."

He picked up the umbrella that he had carried with pride almost constantly since it had been given to him. This morning he looked at it sorrowfully and wondered if he should keep it if he did not play in the tournament. Perhaps it should go to the boy who did play.

The brother and sister dared not look at each other for fear of bursting into tears. Each went quietly about his duties, Hans with the geese and Elsa with the housework.

After a little while, when Grandmother had fallen into a deep sleep, Elsa slipped out and joined Hans. "Grandmother is sleeping now," she said. "Maybe she will feel better when she wakes up. I came out here so that there wouldn't be any noise. Oh, isn't it just too bad! We'll have to wait a whole year for another chance to play."

"Well, we have a couple of hours yet," said Hans hopefully.

"If only we were on good terms with the Schultzes," lamented Elsa. "Why did they have to quarrel with us over that fence?"

Grandmother Koester's house was the last on the street within the village. She had insisted that her neighbors, the Schultzes, build a fence between her property and their farm to keep their cows out of her yard.



The cows were in a field next to Grandmother Koester's yard

"Yes, why?" questioned Hans regretfully, glancing in the direction of their neighbors. "And not more than a month ago. Look, what are the cows doing in their grain field?"

"Why," gasped Elsa. "I'm sure the Schultzes don't know they are there. The cattle will ruin the field."

"We must chase them out. Come on," said Hans, running.

"Oh, I don't like cows," Elsa said, hesitating.

"Well, I don't like them any too well myself," Hans called back. "Come on. We must act quickly. We wouldn't want our fields ruined."

"All right. I'll help you," Elsa gave in, running after Hans.

The children grabbed two large sticks as they ran, and climbed over the fence into the field of sprouting grain. Then a strange thing happened. The cows turned suddenly and ran toward the children, leaving behind them a trail of trampled grain.

"Quick, go back!" screamed Hans.

Elsa had seen what was happening and had already scurried nimbly back over the fence. When Hans joined her, she suggested, "Let's beat them back with our sticks from this side."

But the beating only enraged the cows more than ever.

"We must do something quick or they'll be over here and scatter our geese," said Hans. After a moment's pause he cried, "I've got it!" and he ran back to where he and Elsa had been sitting.

Elsa did not know what to do with all those angry cows pushing against the fence, but she did not run away. Hans returned at once, carrying his umbrella. He stopped in front of

the cows and suddenly flipped his umbrella open. Surprised and frightened, they turned and fled.

“Come on! Now we can get over the fence and drive them through the opening into their own pasture,” cried Hans. “I’ll keep the umbrella closed until we need it again.”

Hans and Elsa ran after the retreating herd. They shouted, Elsa waved her big stick, and Hans waved his umbrella—but he waved it carefully. The cattle were excited and tried to run here and there. They didn’t know where they were going. Several times Hans had to flip his umbrella open quickly, and each time it served to turn a straying cow. Steadily the boy and the girl drove the herd back to where it belonged.

Just as they were heading the last cows through the break where the animals had come in, Herr Schultz came running wildly and hollered to the children from a distance. “What do you mean by letting those cows out?” he roared angrily.

“We didn’t let them out,” Hans called back, still occupied with the cows.

“We are getting them out of your grain field,” shrieked Elsa.

As Herr Schultz came on, Elsa thought he was going to strike Hans and she ran to her brother, dropping her stick on the way. Just then the last cow turned and began to run after her. She screamed.

Hans went flying to his sister, shooting open the umbrella just in time to head the animal back toward its pasture. The cattle became excited once more. Herr Schultz had to run and bar the opening so that they couldn’t get out again. Then he turned back to Hans.

"See here. Give me that," he demanded angrily, reaching for the umbrella. "That's what's causing all the trouble."

"This is all that saved your field," replied Hans, folding the umbrella and hiding it behind his back.

"I tell you once more, give that to me," thundered Herr Schultz.

Then Frau Schultz came running from the house. She saw the angry expression on her husband's face, and just as he succeeded in taking the umbrella away from Hans, she called sharply to him. But it was too late. He cracked the umbrella over his knee, damaging it badly.

Elsa began to cry. Hans did not weep; the disaster was too great.

Frau Schultz reached them breathlessly. "I saw the whole thing from an upstairs window," she panted. "The cows broke out of their pasture and ran into the grain field. The children were tending their geese and saw what had happened—the very thing that you, Fred, said couldn't happen, and you were angry at the idea of building another fence. If it hadn't been for these children, our field would have been completely ruined."

At this Herr Schultz hung his head in shame. "I was blaming them. I thought they had let the cattle out to try stunts with this." He held up the damaged umbrella.

"Oh, no! We wouldn't do anything like that," Hans protested.

"I'm sorry. Just awfully sorry," Herr Schultz said sincerely.

"My good children," comforted Frau Schultz, putting her arms around them. "But how is it that you are home today?"



Hans had to flip his umbrella open quickly

You two were chosen to play in the tournament, weren't you?"

"Oh," said Elsa, suddenly remembering. "I must go back to Grandmother at once. She may have awakened." She ran toward the fence.

"What has happened to your grandmother?" Frau Schultz asked, speaking rapidly.

Grandmother is quite ill today," Hans answered. "Elsa is taking care of her and I am—or was—tending the geese."

Elsa was out of sight by this time.

"Oh," said Frau Schultz, understanding the situation at once. "And you are giving up the tournament to take care of your grandmother?"

Hans nodded.

"Well, now," said Frau Schultz, "I've always been very fond of you children and your grandmother. I realize what a big sacrifice it meant for you to decide as you did. I am very sorry for my part in the quarrel, and we'll just forget it. I've never been happy about it anyway. Quick, now, you run home and at least one of you go to the celebration. You can get there in time if you hurry. I will stay with your grandmother."

Hans didn't need a second bidding. He sped home and told Elsa and Frau Koester, now awake, what Frau Schultz had said.

Grandmother replied, "Children, I feel better already. I will be very glad to see Frau Schultz, and I am happy that our quarrel is ended. Now, who is to go to the schoolhouse? You must hurry, I know."

"You go, Hans," Elsa said quickly. "You go, and I will tend the geese."

“Oh, no,” Hans replied firmly. “I should say not. You go, and I will stay with the geese.”

“No, Hans,” pleaded Elsa. “You are a boy, and it is right that you should possess a prize chessboard before me. Anyway, I think you are the better player. I know you will win one. Maybe I will have a chance again next year. Please go, Hans, quickly!”

“Yes, Hans. Elsa means what she says, I know.” Grandmother’s weak voice encouraged Hans.

Reluctantly Hans went to change his clothes. In a few seconds his spirits soared, for he was going to play in the tournament! He jumped into his holiday suit and ran to the street, urged on by Elsa calling good wishes from the doorway.

In his rush to the schoolhouse Hans scarcely saw the merry-makers on the streets. His one concern was to get there in time, and now he was determined to win his games. He could not fail after Elsa had stayed at home.

But his mind was topsy-turvy and he felt nervous. Everything else had gone wrong that day. Hans repeatedly told himself that the daily practice of tasks well done would come to his aid, but deep down he wasn’t convinced. Could he really win?

When he breathlessly reached the game room, the contestants were assembled and about to begin playing. He hurriedly explained to the schoolmaster why he was so late. “And Elsa won’t be able to enter at all,” he finished.

“Oh, what a pity!” cried the schoolmaster in dismay. But there was no time for regrets. A substitute was quickly assigned to take Elsa’s place, and the games went on.

Over on the village square properly costumed chessmen stood in their squares on the huge chessboard. Each of the two players stood on a chair behind the line of his side, calling out the moves his men were to make.

Maria made a stately queen. She marched her moves with grace and dignity, but her whole mind was with her friends. She couldn't imagine what had happened to keep Hans and Elsa from the contest, but that something had happened she was sure. As soon as her part in the game was over, she went directly to Elsa's home; she had to be with her friend if there was trouble.

Elsa sat in the goose yard with her chin in her hands, elbows on her knees, looking absently past the geese into space. The little bead purse hung from her wrist.

"There you are! I thought I would find you here," called a voice behind her.

"Why, Maria, what are you doing here?" exclaimed Elsa, jumping to her feet and turning around. "I have been thinking about you and wondering if you were enjoying the celebration."

"Karl and I went to the schoolhouse to see you and Hans, and we couldn't find you. We stayed until just before the games started, and neither of you had come. Why aren't you playing? Where is Hans?" questioned Maria.

"Oh!" Elsa clapped her hand over her mouth, and her eyes were round with dismay. "I wonder if Hans didn't get there in time!"

Then Elsa told Maria about Grandmother and all that had happened that morning, and between them they reasoned that if



Properly costumed chessmen stood in their squares

Hans had been too late, he would have come right back home—and he hadn't. Until they learned otherwise, they would hope.

Elsa sat down again. Maria found a place near her.

"But, Maria, can you stay now? You are in the animated chess game and the parade," Elsa reminded her friend.

"My part in the chess game is over," replied Maria, "and I just couldn't bear to be in the parade without you."

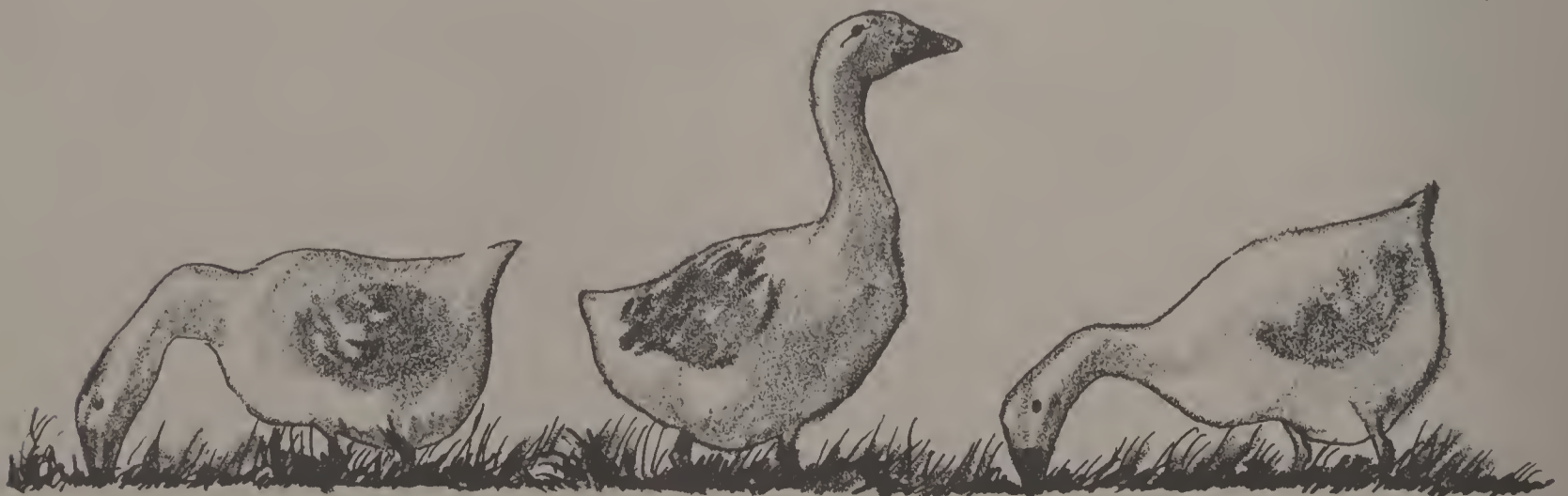
"How kind of you," said Elsa earnestly. Then she brightened. "You tell me all about what you have seen and what is going on. Then I shall feel as though I had been to the celebration too."

The two girls were still talking together much later on when Elsa caught the sound of voices. "Oh, what time is it?" she cried, jumping up. Then she caught Maria by the arm. "The parade," Elsa shouted. "It is coming this way. Oh, I wonder if it could be for Hans." She finished starry-eyed, afraid to move.

Herr Schultz came running toward the girls, waving his arms, his face beaming.

"Children!" he called out to them, "go and welcome Hans. I will watch the geese."

When Hans finally reached his own house, his grandmother and Elsa were full of praise for him. And Hans never forgot his joy in having won the coveted chessboard.







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