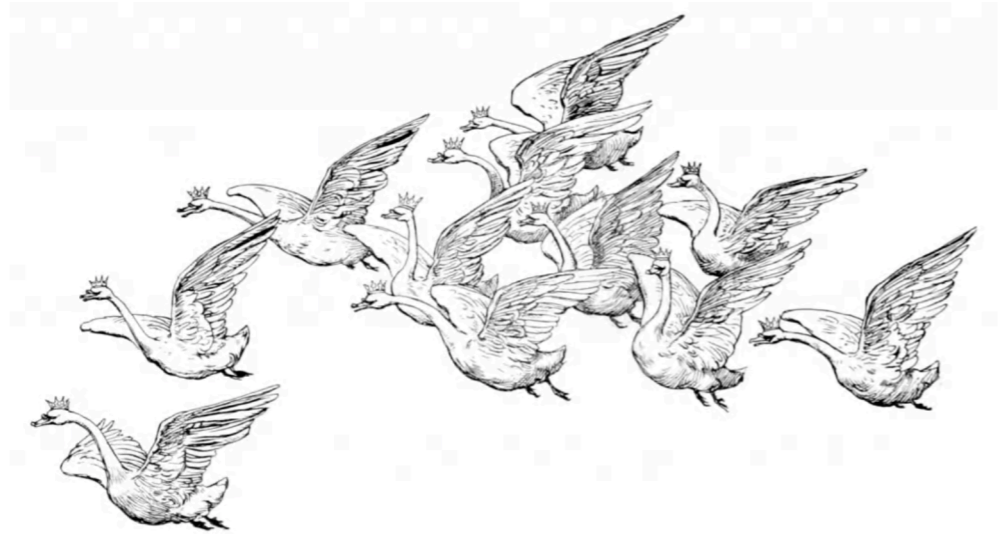


Ririro

# The Wild Swans



Far away from here lived a king with his eleven sons and one daughter. Her name was Elize. The children were well off in the castle.

Unfortunately, that would not always be the case. The king married an evil queen. She did not like the children at all and made that very clear.

Little Elize was sent to the countryside, where she had to live on a farm. The wicked queen cast a spell on the eleven princes. Fly into the wide world like the great birds without voices! Then eleven splendid wild swans stood before her. They spread their wings and flew out of the castle window. Nobody saw where they were flying to.



Meanwhile, little Elize grew up to be a wonderful girl. When she was fifteen, she was to return to the castle. As soon as the queen saw how beautiful Elize had become, she became angry. She disguised Elize so her own father did not recognise her and sent her away. Sadly, Elize ran out of the castle and into the dark forest. She missed her brothers and was determined to find them.

When, during her search, she asked an old woman if she had seen eleven princes by any chance, she replied: 'No, but yesterday there were eleven swans swimming here with golden crowns on their heads. Elise's heart jumped. Could these be her brothers? A little further she found eleven white swan feathers. The Princess sat down next to them on the sand. When the sun was about to set, Elize saw in the distance the shape of eleven large birds in the sky. They landed beside her and as soon as the last rays of the sun had disappeared, there were no swans but princes standing beside her. The brothers and sister fell into each other's arms, crying. They talked for hours with each other and the princes

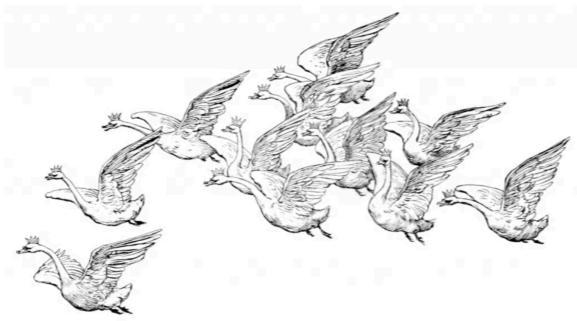


told of their curse. During the day they were swans, but after sunset they immediately became human again.

The next morning, the swans took Elize to a faraway land, far away from the evil stepmother. With all her heart, Elize hoped that there was a way to free her brothers from the curse. That night Elize dreamed of the same woman who had shown her the way. She said, 'There is a way to save your brothers, but you will need a lot of perseverance and courage. You must make eleven jumpers from these nettles. Throw them over the swans and they will be saved. But remember: during this work, no matter how long it takes, you must

not speak a word. If you do, it means the death of your brothers. Startled, but hopeful, Elize woke up.

Elize immediately went to work. Blisters immediately appeared on her hands and feet, but she continued without hesitation. She worked day and night and soon she had finished the first jumpers. One day, she was discovered by the king's hunters. They took the beautiful girl back to the castle, where



the king immediately fell in love with her. Fortunately, she was able to continue working on the jumpers for her brothers in the castle. At night, she snuck out of the castle to collect more nettles. When the king discovered this, he was afraid that his future queen was a witch and had her locked up.

In her cell, Elize was allowed to keep her nettles and the

jumpers she had already made. She worked tirelessly. On the day of her execution, she had finished ten of the eleven jumpers. She hurriedly continued to work to finish the last jumper in time. As soon as Elize was taken out of her cell, the eleven swans came to protect her. Elize knew that this was her last chance and threw the jumpers over her brothers. Immediately eleven handsome princes stood beside her. Only her youngest brother still had one swan wing, because she had not finished the sleeve in time. Relieved, Elize shouted: 'I am not a witch! My brothers were cursed and I had to save them! The king saw that he had made a mistake and embraced Elize.

