

Fairy

THE WILD SWANS HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN

Adapted by Rona Laurie

This is the story of Eleven Princes who are turned into wild swans by their wicked stepmother, and their sister, the Princess Elise, who runs away into the forest in search of them.

In the forest Elise meets an Old Woman who gives her some berries and tells her where the wild swans are living.

In this scene Elise has found her eleven 'swan' brothers, and lies down to sleep with the youngest swan's head resting in her lap. In a dream a FAIRY appears to her with stinging nettles in her hand, and tells Elise what she must do to save the Princes – weave eleven long-sleeved shirts from stinging nettles, despite the pain of picking them, and throw one over each swan. All this must be done in complete silence; one word from Elise, and her brothers' lives will be forfeit.

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Do you remember the old woman who gave you berries in the forest? I was that old woman, in disguise. I have come to tell you how you can free your brothers from the Queen's wicked spell. But it will not be easy. Have you courage and patience enough? Your tender fingers will feel burning pain and your heart will be tormented with grief. Do you see these stinging nettles in my hand? They grow around this place where you are sleeping. But only those which grow here or on the graves in churchyards are of any use. Remember that. You must pluck them though they sting your hand. *(The FAIRY touches Elise's hand with a nettle)* You must trample them with your feet and get yarn from them and with this yarn you must weave eleven shirts with long sleeves. When they are all made, throw them over the eleven wild swans and the spell will be broken. They will become human again. But remember this, Elise, from the moment you begin your work until it is finished you must not speak a word. If you do, the first word that you speak will plunge like a dagger into the hearts of your brothers. Their life depends on your silence. Remember this! *(She drops a nettle by Elise's hand and exits)*