

# The Six Swans

Based on the tale from the Brothers Grimm

## Cast of Characters:

*Note: Narrators speak both as storytellers and as characters, fluidly moving from one to the other. The harpist enters initially as an actor, but once the harp music begins, takes on an exclusively musical role.*

The Princess

Narrator 1: Witch, Witch's Daughter, Wise Woman, Huntsman 1,  
2<sup>nd</sup> King, Judge

Narrator 2: 1<sup>st</sup> King, King's Servant, Brothers, Huntsman 2,  
Evil Stepmother, Judge

## Costumes:

Princess: an innocent white gown

All other characters (including the harpist): Light blue, all of the same fabric but differently designed. N 1 and N 2 have some kind of train or cape that allows some differences as they portray various characters.

## Props:

A ball of yarn

A representation of the six brothers

A representation of the six swans

The charmed shirts

A representation of the three children

## Set:

Keep it simple!

Harp is downstage left.

Details on the original set are included in the script with cues.

## Music:

Music cues are abbreviated to number in the script; titles are with stage directions. Cue lines as given in the harp score are underlined. The music is played as underscoring to the text. The exceptions are:

Prologue & M1a—sung as an invocation such as in the original version

#8 (The Princess)—intended to accompany dance-like or playful actions illustrating the Princess's character;

#24 (Time Passes)—during which N1 & N2 do some kind of "movement;

#45 (Finale)—music continues after the final text is completed.

Most music cues have vamps or are otherwise adaptable to whatever length is needed to support the action; there are no substantial breaks between sections, except at the end when the Princess speaks.

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# The Six Swans

## *M1: Prologue*

### *M1a Swans' Wings*

**N1: (M2) Once upon a time a certain King was hunting in a great forest. He chased a wild beast so eagerly, that none of his attendants could follow him. He chased that beast until evening came and it began to grow dark. And then he realized that he had lost his way (M3). And then he met (M4). an old woman A witch, that's what she was.**

M2 (*The King's Hunt*)

(M3 *Lost*).

(M4 *The Witch*)

N2: Good woman, can you show me the way through the forest?

**N1: Oh, yes, that I can, Lord King -- but on one condition. And if you do not fulfill the condition, you will never get out! You will die of hunger before you will find the way!**

N2: What kind of condition (M5) is it?

(M5 *The Condition*)

**N1: I have a daughter who is as beautiful as anyone in the world, and well deserves to be your consort. If you will make her your queen, I will show you the way out of the forest.**

N2: Do you think he wanted to marry that daughter? No, he didn't, he really didn't! But you know what he did?

**N1: He agreed. He said...**

N2: Yes.

**N1&2** When his heart wanted to say no. It hurt his heart, but he was afraid. He didn't know how to get out of the forest otherwise.

*(M6 To the Hut)*

*(M6a The Witch Daughter)*

**N1:** So the witch led him to her hut (M6), where her daughter (M6a) was sitting by the fire. She received the King as if she had been expecting him.

N2: How strange...

**N1:** She was indeed very beautiful...

N2: But she did not please him. In fact, the King could not look at her without feeling a secret horror. He took the maiden up on his horse anyway,

*(M7 Out of the Forest)*

*(M7a The Wedding)*

**N1:** And the old woman showed him the way out of the forest (M7). When he reached his royal palace again, the wedding was celebrated (M7a). This King had been married before, and had by his first wife seven children-six boys and a girl (M8).

*(M8 The Princess)*

N2: He loved them very much (M9)...better than anything else in the whole world. The King was afraid that their new stepmother would treat them badly, or even do them harm. So he took them to a lonely castle in the middle of a forest. This castle was so hidden, and the way was so difficult to find, that even the King himself could not have found it.

*(M9 to the Castle)*

**N1:** A wise woman gave him a magical ball of yarn (M10) with wonderful properties.

*(M10The Ball of Yarn)*

N2: When he threw it down before him, it unrolled itself and showed him the path. Of course he kept this well hidden away from his new Queen!

**N1: He went to see his dear children often. He went to see them so often, in fact, that the Queen noticed his absence (M11). She became very curious, and wanted to know what he did alone in the forest. So she bribed his servants (M12). She gave them a lot of money. The servants betrayed their King! (M13) They told her about the *children*\*, and about the *castle*\*, and they even told her about the *ball of yarn*\*which led the way. The Queen could not rest (M14) until she had found where the King kept the ball of yarn. Then she sewed little shirts of white silk. She had learned witchcraft from her mother, and she sewed a charm into each one of those shirts.**

*(M11 The Suspicious Queen)*

*(M12 The Bribe)*

*(M13 Betrayal)*

*\*spoken by both N1 & N2.*

Music silence on “ball of yarn”

*(M14 The Queen Plots)*

N2: But the King knew nothing of this. One day, when the King had ridden off to the hunt...

**N1: She took the shirts and went into the forest, led by the ball of yarn. The children saw someone approaching (M15). Thinking it was their father, they ran out joyfully to greet him! The Queen threw the shirts over them, and no sooner had the shirts touched their bodies, than the children were changed into Swans! Off they flew over the forest. The Queen went home quite gleefully delighted, satisfied that she had gotten rid of her step-children!**

*(M15 The children run Out)*

N2: Luckily, the Princess had not run out with her brothers, and the wicked Queen knew nothing about her. The next day (M16) the King went to visit his children. “Where are your brothers?” he asked. “Alas, dear Father,” she answered, “they have gone away and left me alone!” She told him what she had seen--how her brothers had flown off over the forest in the shape of swans. She showed her father the feathers she had gathered. The King had no idea that his Queen had done this terrible thing, no idea at all! He felt afraid that his daughter would also be stolen away, so he wanted to take his daughter back with him. But she was also afraid--afraid of her step-mother (M17). She sensed without knowing! So she begged her Father to let her stay just one more night in the forest castle. He agreed.

*(M16 The King Comes)*

*(M17 The Princess Asks to Stay a Night)*

**N1: But do you know what she was thinking? Ah! The poor girl knew she could not stay there any longer. So she thought she would go and seek her brothers (M18). And when night came, do you know what she did? She ran away. She went straight into the forest, and walked all night without stopping. She walked all the next day without stopping. Finally she was so weary she could go no further, and it happened that just there she saw a forest hut. So she went in, and saw a room with six little beds. She did not get into any of them, but instead crawled underneath and lay on the ground, planning to spend the night there. However, just before sunset, she heard a rustling sound (M19). And then she saw six swans come flying in at the window! They landed, and blew and blew at each other, and blew all the feathers off, and then the swans' skins stripped off like a shirt. The princess looked at them and recognized her brothers! (M19a) They were all overjoyed to see each other! But their happiness could not last.**

*(M18 She Runs Away)*

*(M19 Her Swan Brothers Come)*

*(M19a Joy!) N2 turns tapestry around*

N2: "You can not stay (M20) here," the brothers said, "This is not a place where you can abide, for this is a house of thieves. If they return and find you here they will kill you."

*(M20 The Brothers Tell the Cure)*

**N1: "Can't you protect me?" she asked.**

N2: "No," said the brothers. "We can lay aside our swans' skins and have our human form only for one quarter hour every evening. After that we are again turned into swans.

**N1: "Can you not be set free?" she asked.**

N2: "No, because the conditions are too hard! Much too hard! For six whole years you must neither speak nor even laugh, and during that time you must sew together six shirts of asters, the star-flowers. If you let even one single word fall from your lips, all your work will be lost."

**N1: And when the brothers had said this, their quarter hour was over. Again they changed into swans (M21), and flew out the window (M21a). The girl firmly resolved (M22) to save her brothers, to deliver them from the evil spell, even if it cost her life. She left the hut, and went into the midst of the forest, and climbed up into a tree (M22a), where she spent the night. The very next day(M23) she went out and gathered aster flowers, and began to sew.**

**There was no one to speak to, and she had no desire to laugh; she sat there and looked at nothing but her work.**

N2: A long time passed. (M24)

(M25)And one day it happened that the King of the country was hunting in the forest. His huntsmen came to the tree where the girl was sitting, working. They called up to her,

N1&2 (alternating)(M26):

**(1) Who are you?**

(2)Come down to us!

**We will not harm you! They kept asking questions!**

Questions,

**Who are you**

More questions!

**What could she do?**

Ah!

**She threw down her golden necklace to them-**

Hoping to satisfy them.

**But they didn't stop their questions.**

More questions!

**So she threw down her girdle.**

Who are you?

**She threw down her garters.**

(M21 *The Swans Leave*)

(M21a *Moment of Decision*) (M22 *Determined*)

(M22a *The Tree*) N1 & N2 sing [notes in harp score]

(M23 *She Begins Her Work*)

(M24 *Time Passes*)

(M25 *The King's Men Find Her*)

(M26 *They Question Her*)

More questions!

**She threw down everything she had on that she could spare,  
Until all she was wearing was her little shift.  
But the huntsmen were still not satisfied.**

N2: They climbed up the tree and carried her down, and brought her before the King (M27)

*(M27 The King and Princess Meet)*

**N1: Who are you? What were you doing in that tree?**

N2: But she remained silent. He asked her questions in every language he knew. But she was able to keep her silence. Even in her

silence, the princess was very, very beautiful. She was so beautiful, the King's heart was deeply touched, and he felt a great love for her. So he put his own robe on her, and put her up on his horse, and brought her back to his castle. He had her dressed in rich clothes, and she shone with beauty like the bright daylight. But she did not say a word. No one could make her speak. The King placed her beside him at his table, and her courtesy and modest bearing pleased him so much that he said,

**N1: She is the one whom I wish to marry, and no other woman in the world."**

N2: And after some days, he united himself to her (M28). But still she did not speak. Now this King had a wicked mother (M29). She didn't approve of this marriage at all! She was quite dissatisfied with this young Queen, and she began to speak against her! (M30) "Who knows," she said, "from whence this creature comes! She can't speak! This is not fitting, she is not worthy of a King!" After a year had passed, the Queen brought her first child into the world (M31). But the wicked mother-in-law stole the child! (M32) She smeared the Queen's mouth with blood as she slept! She told the King that the Queen was a man-eater!

*(M28 They Marry)*

*(M29 The King's Mother)*

*(M30 Vicious)*

*(M31 The First Child)*

*(M32 Evil Deed #1)*

**N1: I do not believe it, (M33) and I will not allow anyone to harm my beloved wife.**

*(M33 The King's Response #1)*

N2: And the Queen--she kept her silence (M34), and she kept at her work sewing the shirts, caring for nothing else. Time passed, and again the young Queen bore a beautiful baby boy (M35). Again the false mother-in-law tried the same treachery (M36).

*(M34 Silence #1)*

*(M35 Second Child)*

*(M36 Evil #2)*

**N1: The Queen is too pious (M37) and good to do such a thing; if she could speak, she could defend herself. Her innocence would come to light. (M38)**

*(M37 Response #2)*

*(M38)*

N2: And a while later the Queen bore their third child (M39). The evil mother-in-law stole the child for the third time! (M40) The Queen could not speak even one word in her own defense, and the King finally had to deliver her over to the judges. She was sentenced to death (M41) by fire!

*(M39 Baby #3)*

*(M40 Evil #3)*

**N1: When the day came for the sentence to be carried out, it was the last day of the six years of her silence! The six shirts were ready, all except part of one of the left sleeves. She was led to the stake, carrying the shirts on her arm. As she stood on high, and they were about to light the fire (M42)**

*(M41 Sentenced)*

*(M42 The Swans Come)*

N1&2: The swans came! They came flying through the air towards her, and her heart leapt for joy! She knew her work was not to be in vain!

Actors hold (if needed) until M 42 finishes,  
**NO MUSIC** until M43 cue line

**N1: As the shirts touched them, the swans' skins fell away**

N2: They stood before everyone as young princes in their true bodily form, vigorous and handsome!

**N1: Only the youngest lacked his left arm, and had instead a swan's wing on his shoulder.**



N2: Then the Queen went to the King, who was greatly moved by what he had just seen. She spoke!

Princess: Dearest husband, now that I may speak I can tell you that I am innocent, and falsely accused!”

N1: She told him of the treachery (M43) of the old woman who had stolen away their three children and hidden them.

*(M43 Treachery Revealed)*

Princess: To their great joy (M44) the children were brought forward!

*(M44 The Children)*

N2: As punishment (M45), they put the wicked mother-in-law at the stake and burned her instead, until all that remained was ashes.

*(M45 The Mother-in-Law's Fate)*

N1: **And now the King**(M46), **the Queen, their three children, and her six brothers lived for many years in happiness and peace.**

*(M46 Finale)*