

The Swan Maiden  
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## The Swan Bride

Once upon a time, long ago, there lived a wealthy merchant and his wife. The couple had three sons, Mishka the eldest, Aliosha the middle son, and Ivanushko the youngest. One day the merchant took the three boys out into the woods with him. He gave each of them a slingshot and a large marble, a green one to Mishka, a blue one to Aliosha, and he gave Ivan the red one. “My son’s, each of you is to shoot the marble into the woods with the slingshot. Whoever brings back your marble is to be your bride. If the marble is not brought back, you will not marry.”

Mishka shot his marble into the dark forest and almost instantly a beautiful maiden appeared and walked towards him. Mishka had never seen such a beautiful maiden in all his life, and he took her as his wife. Next, Aliosha shot his marble into the dark forest, and again a maiden came walking back, even more beautiful than the first. Aliosha also took his maiden to be his bride. Ivan was the last to shot his marble into the forest. Instead of a maiden, though, a white swan came back with the marble in its mouth. Ivan was very sad, and he wept and wept. “I don’t want to marry a swan. What am I going to do?” But he had no way of getting out of it, so he married the swan. The three brothers had a lovely wedding, the swan being the only bride without a marvelous dress on. All the townspeople were dazzled by the other two maidens.

One day the wealthy merchant asked the three new brides to make him a shirt. He wanted to know which maiden had the most skill and could take the best care of his sons.

Ivan again became very sad because he thought that the swan could not make anything. That night, when everyone was sleeping, the swan cast off her skin and turned into a beautiful maiden. She reached to the shoulder of her shirt and pulled out a pin. The pin hit the floor and turned into a thumb-sized man. "Please," she begged, "I need to give the merchant a finely woven shirt." Immediately the thumb-sized man fulfilled her request. She took the shirt and the man turned back into a pin. She stuck the pin back in her shirt, then she turned back into a swan.

The next morning everyone woke up, and Ivan was very pleased with the shirt. The sons all brought their shirts to the merchant. The merchant saw Ivan's shirt and exclaimed, "This is the most nicely woven shirt that I have ever seen." When he saw the shirts of Mishka and Alioshka, he was very disappointed. "A peasant would not even wear these rags." The elder brothers were very jealous of Ivan and they decided to spy on his new wife to witness what the swan was doing.

The next day their father asked the maidens to bake him a rich apple pie from the freshest apples in the kingdom, found in the Garden of Eva. This time Mishka sent Alioshka to spy on Ivan's wife. The swan knew this though, so she skinned the apples (these were not the actual apples from the Garden of Eva that she was really going to use), made the dough for the pie crust, and made her pie. Alioshka saw this and ran to tell his brother about the way the pie was made.

The moment the brother left, the swan got out of her skin and dropped the pin on the floor, which again turned into a thumb-sized man. "Please," she begged, "I need to bake the merchant a rich apple pie from the apples of the Garden of Eva." Immediately the man fulfilled her request. The maiden took the apple pie and the man turned back into a pin. Then the maiden turned back into a swan and went to sleep, knowing Ivan would be pleased.

That morning when everyone awoke, Ivan tasted his pie and was very happy with it. It smelled delicious. The brothers all brought their pies to their father. The other wives had made the pies from the same apples they saw the swan using, and their apple pies were horrible. The wealthy merchant tasted each pie and exclaimed, "Ivan's apple pie is the most rich and delicious that I have ever tasted, the other pies are filled with rotten apples, the wives of my eldest sons did not obey my wishes." And he sent their pies back.

That night, the merchant was having a grand party at his home. "I want to know which of my daughter-in-laws can dance the best." Ivan became upset once again, how could a swan dance? The swan told him to go to the party, and that she would be there shortly. The swan removed her skin and became a beautiful maiden once again. She went to the party, and everyone was astonished. She was the most beautiful maiden. While everyone was eating, the maiden cut one side of her dress up to her knee. The other wives saw this and did the same. Then the swan maiden cut the other side up to her

knee also. Again, the other two did the same. When dinner was almost over, the swan maiden cut a large hole in her remaining dress. The other wives did the same.

When everyone was finished eating, the merchant said, "Now let's dance." The wives all stood up and began dancing and dancing around the room. As the swan maiden twirled, her dress again became long and flowing, free of holes, and more beautiful than before. The wives of the elder brothers still had dresses all cut up to pieces. The merchant was very upset. "What a disgrace, these women look like beggars, and they are dancing horribly." The swan maiden continued to dance wonderfully, and everyone could not take their eyes off of her.

After the party, Ivan went home and found the swan skin, and he decided to burn it. When the maiden returned home, she began to cry. "Now I must leave," she said, "you should have waited. I will be in the thrice ninth land in the thrice tenth kingdom if you wish to find me." Then she left.

Ivan searched for his bride, a long time or a short time, and finally he arrived in a distant town. He searched, but could not find his swan maiden. He continued on and came to a second town, bigger than the last. He searched every home for his bride, but he could not find her anywhere, and nobody he asked had seen her. Finally, he came upon a third town, even bigger than the last, where he met an old woman sitting beside a well knitting a shirt. "Grandmother," said Ivan, "tell me if you have seen my swan bride, for I have been searching for her for many nights." The old woman replied, "Take this pin, and go to the next town. Drop the pin on the ground and a thumb-sized man will take

you to your bride.” Ivan thanked the woman and continued on his search, determined to get his true love back.

Ivan took the pin, went to the next town, dropped the pin, and a thumb-sized man suddenly appeared. “Your maiden has been waiting for you,” the thumb-size man told Ivan, “follow me, but do not speak a word or I will disappear.” Ivan followed the thumb-sized man, deep into the thick forest, across a river, and started up a very steep hill. It began to get dark, and Ivan was starting to fear getting lost, but he said nothing.

When they reached the top, he saw the beautiful maiden sitting cross-legged and crying. She saw her prince and jumped up overjoyed. The thumb-sized man turned back into a pin, and the maiden placed it in her shirt. “It’s time now, I will stay a bride for you now.” The two returned home together on the back of a falcon, and everyone rejoiced. Another party was held in her honor. I was there, I drank wine, it dripped out of my mouth, onto my shirt, my pants, and even my shoes, but most of it ended up in my mouth.