



The Wild Swans

Jackie Morris

Unbound (Aug 30, 2022)

Hardcover \$24.95 (384pp)

978-1-78352-888-2

Jackie Morris's *The Wild Swans* is a dreamy retold fairy tale that's full of hope, beauty, and love.

A retelling of "The Wild Swans" by Hans Christian Andersen, the story revolves around the princess Eliza and her eleven brothers. When their widowed father remarries, it is to the daughter of a witch, who enchants Eliza's brothers, turning them into swans. Eliza flees with her faithful hound Shadow and learns the secret to disenchanting her siblings from a fairy queen: she must remain silent while sewing each of them shirts of stinging nettles. When a prince stumbles upon Eliza in the forest and brings her back to his palace, she faces unimaginable danger.

Eliza's inability to speak intrigues the prince, though it also invites speculation that she is a witch. But Eliza, who feels kinship to wild animals and has long, beautiful hair, is not a typical damsel in distress. She finds solace during her solitary time in the forest, and she endures the brutal stinging nettles as a necessary condition of saving her brothers. Her dedication to her brothers and to her integrity helps her to stay strong as she faces trials in her new home, emphasizing the power of love to sustain people through difficult times.

Accompanied by gorgeous watercolor paintings, the story utilizes blank space and hand-written notes to add emotional nuance. The white space mirrors the silence that dominates Eliza's world, and both invite pauses for reflection. The textual and extra textual elements of the book thus work together in sophisticated harmony to weave their own spell, inviting contemplation on the voices and transformations therein.

The Wild Swans is an enchanting, delightful representation of a classic fairy tale that's focused on family bonds and a heroine's strength through suffering.

JEANA JORGENSEN (September / October 2022)

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