



At Kenfig Pool

A stylized illustration of a woman's profile in shades of purple and blue. A white swan with a golden crown is perched on her head, facing right. The background features flowing, wavy lines in shades of purple, teal, and blue.

Sara was supposed to be collecting driftwood. It had been stormy in the night and spring tides would surely have thrown up plenty of wood for the fire, so her mother had sent her down to Sker beach bright and early. She pushed the empty hand cart down the path, leaning her weight on the old handle and half gliding along. She took no notice of the bumps and potholes underfoot and she didn't mind that her boots were too small and pinching her feet, because in her mind she was a majestic swan, moving gracefully on still water. Sara the swan-girl, with only her feet moving beneath imaginary water, as she trotted along behind the cart.

Sara stopped to rest, as she always did, at Kenfig Pool. She loved to look out at the island in the middle, and think of the treasures buried in the depths of the pool. Her brothers told her there was a whole palace under that pool. Today there were ducks and one heron standing like a statue in the water, but sadly, no swans. Sara had never even seen a swan. But her granny had shown her a beautiful picture in an old book that had come from the big house, and Sara thought the swan was the most beautiful bird she had ever seen.

There was plenty of driftwood on the beach today and among the rocks she found a small wooden bowl that must have washed ashore from a ship. Her brother had once found a huge wooden barrel from a shipwreck and dragged it all the way home. Her father had hoped it would be full of sailor's rum but it was empty.

When they were finishing their supper that night, Sara asked, 'What do swans eat?'

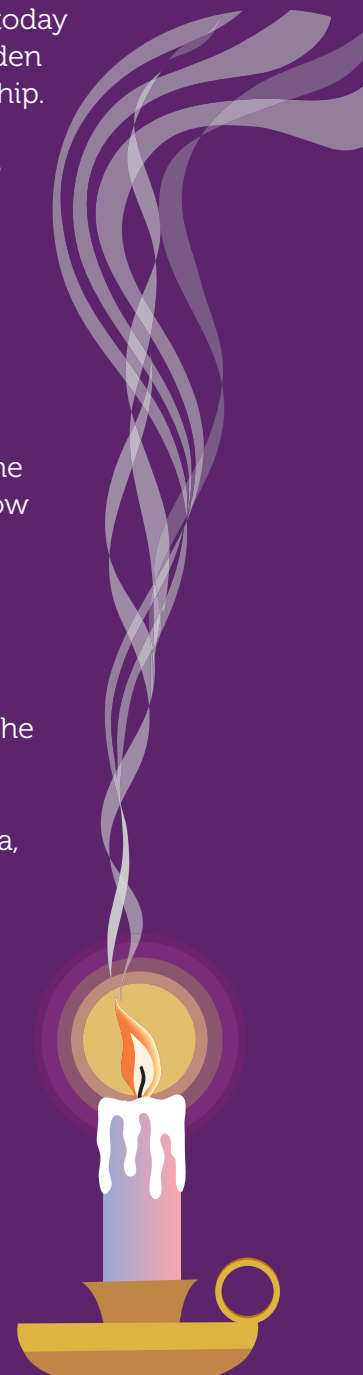
'Oh, Sara fach, are you still harping on about swans?' said Mam. 'I've never seen one, but the cook at the big house says she was taught how to roast one when she was first taken on.'

Sara almost screamed. 'I'd never, ever eat a swan!'

'It's just a bird,' said her father. 'Wildfowl, like the coots and mallards, and the geese.'

'Well I think a swan is like a princess,' said Sara, and her brothers laughed into their stew.

Sara lit her candle and made her way to bed. Her dreams would be full of swans, their long white necks and great wings like silver in the dark.





Sara woke with a start. Was that an owl hooting? Something had certainly called her from her sleep. She looked out of her tiny window and saw a flicker of white. A wing? An owl's wing as it passed by on its hunting? An angel's wing in her dream?

Quickly she dressed and pulled on her boots. She crept past her brothers, still sleeping soundly as dawn was breaking, and unlatched the door. She ran down the path to Kenfig Pool as fast as she could go, her heart thumping. Was this all a dream?

There! On the water, looking as if they had always been there, were two swans. They glided along in the grey light, white and sparkling as snow. Sara could hardly breathe with excitement.



'You've come at last,' she whispered. She stood absolutely still and watched them move noiselessly through the water, investigating their new home. They would build a nest and it would be their home forever, Sara was certain of it. The reeds at the edge of the pool would be perfect for them.

Sara's feet were like blocks of ice and the cold morning air was slowly turning her fingers blue, but still she stayed and watched.

'I won't tell the boys,' she said softly, 'but I shall call you Snowy and Silver.'

Everyone was glad to have the swans at Kenfig Pool. Even Thomas Mansel Talbot, the important man who had filled the pool with tempting fish like perch and terrifying fish like pike. He had paid for the island in the middle to be built as a place for fowl to nest and now that swans had come to his pool, he was very pleased with himself.

One day Sara's father came home for his dinner in very high spirits.

'Sara,' he called, 'I've got a job for you.'

More collecting wood, she thought, or maybe churning the butter, which she hated.



'Those swans you're so fond of, seems the master wants them to stay.'

Sara's heart leapt.

Her father went on, 'And I'll tell you another thing: seems he's willing to pay me for barley to feed them. So every day from now on, you're to go down Kenfig Pool with a cup of barley for them. You'll like that. Just the job for a swan-girl.'

Just the job indeed. Sara couldn't stop smiling. Snowy and Silver were safe, and what's more, they were at Kenfig Pool to stay.



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