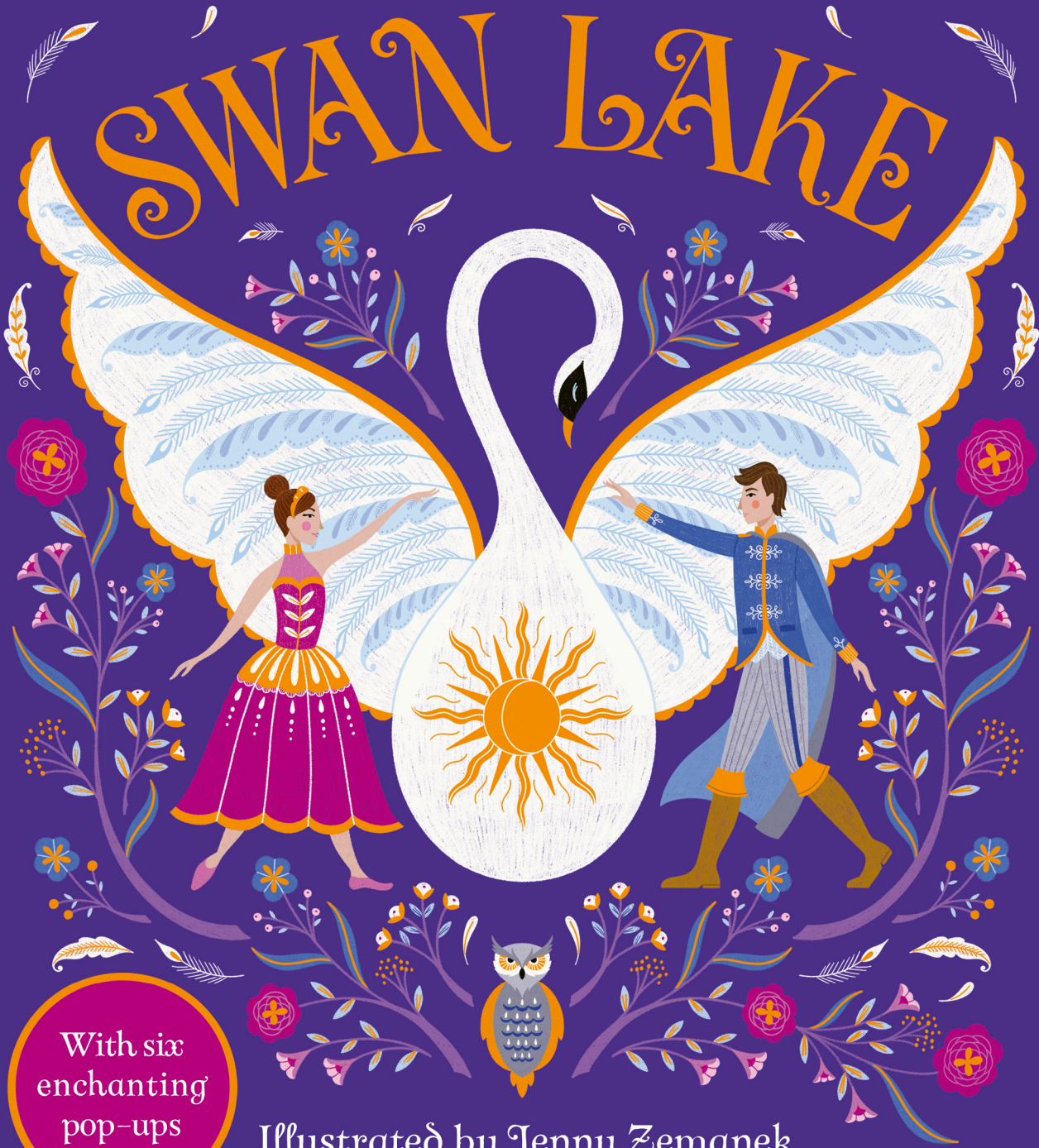


SWAN LAKE



With six
enchancing
pop-ups

Illustrated by Jenny Zemanek



It was a beautiful summer's evening, and Prince Siegfried and his friends had gathered for a party beyond the castle walls. At last, the Prince had some of age; it would be a great celebration. A long table was laid out, piled high with rich foods and dainty pastries, and the trees along the edge of the forest were festooned with lights, just starting to glimmer in the dusky pink light.

A band of musicians serenaded the revelers as they swirled and pruned beneath the open sky. Siegfried had not a care in the world. But then his mother laid a hand on his arm.

"Now that you have come of age, it is time for you to choose a wife."

"When?" asked Siegfried, the happiness fading from his face. "But why so soon?"

"It is right and proper for a prince to have a princess—one day you will be King and you will need a Queen at your side."

But Prince Siegfried was discontent. Life as a prince had many privileges, but sometimes it felt as though his subtle future was already mapped out before him.

A sudden noise beyond the party lifted Siegfried from his gloomy thoughts. Looking up, he saw a great flock of swans taking flight. Their long, white necks and powerful wings rose up high above the top of the forest. Then, as one, they turned and vanished into the distance. Siegfried looked longingly after them. "If only I could be like them: flying and free," he thought to himself.

He had no wish to return to the party now. Looking around, he saw the other revelers were occupied in dancing and merry-making. Nobody would notice if he slipped away. So without another moment's hesitation, he stepped silently between the branches of the forest and into the gloom of the approaching evening.



Prince Siegfried ventured further and further into the forest, the music from the party fading behind him. The wind whispered through the leaves, like shared secrets, and the birds were singing their evening song.

At last Siegfried came to a vast shimmering lake, surrounded by tall trees. Across the water drifted a flock of elegant swans – the very birds he had watched take flight. As Siegfried watched them, the sun cast its last rays desperately over the horizon, and sunk from sight, the dark descending instantly. And as this happened, one of the swans rose up, stretched its wings and thrust its neck towards the sky. It turned once on the spot, and then Siegfried found himself looking at the most beautiful young woman he had ever seen. Their eyes locked, and Siegfried looked at her in astonishment as the rest of the swans all underwent the same transformation.

The Prince was no longer looking at a flock of swans, but at a group of girls.

"Who are you?" said Siegfried to them. "And what magic is this?"

The first girl stepped forwards and spoke in a soft, sad voice.

"My name is Odette," she said. "And this is a wicked enchantment. My friends and I have all been put under a spell by a sorcerer. His name is Rothbart, and his magic is too strong to be broken. By day we are doomed to live as swans, only returning to our true form by night."

"But that is awful," said Siegfried. "Can't something be done?"

"The only way to break the spell, is for someone who has never loved another before, to swear his love to me." At this, she looked down with despair.

The Prince wished desperately that there was something he could do.



Siegfried and Odette talked all night, exchanging their stories and sharing their dreams for the future. Siegfried could feel himself falling in love, but Odette kept looking anxiously at the sky, waiting for the sun to rise.

As Siegfried was about to depart, there was a sudden flurry of leaves in the trees above them, as though a great storm had whipped up. Out of it appeared a mighty sorcerer, his cape flying about his shoulders like the wings of some great bird. He glowered at Prince Siegfried as he advanced upon him.

"These swans are mine," Rothbart growled. "I would return to your castle, if I were you, princeling."

"No," shouted Siegfried. "These are people, not swans – how can you have done such a thing to them? You are a wicked man. I will fight you – here and now!"

"Don't," cried Odette, pulling Siegfried away. "You do not know Rothbart's power! And besides, if anything were to happen to him, we would be trapped in this enchantment forever."

"But this isn't fair," said Siegfried. Such was his fury at Rothbart, that he would have drawn his sword and duelled with the sorcerer had Odette's friends not intervened. For seeing the danger they were all in, they came between the prince and the sorcerer, driving them apart by heaving their long arms like wings. As Siegfried searched for Odette's face, the sun's first rays broke through the night. Arms became feathered wings, and with sadness the girls changed back into graceful swans.

"I will find you, again Odette!" Siegfried called, even as the swans beat him away.



Horrified at his mistake, Siegfried hurried from the ball. He found Odette weeping beside the rushes of the lake, surrounded by her friends.

"Please forgive me," begged Siegfried. "I thought it was you at the ball. All my thoughts were of you."

Odette looked up at the Prince's earnest face, and saw the pain written across it. She knew he was honest – it had been a mistake, nothing more than a terrible mistake.

"I forgive you," she said. "But we can never be together now."

"There must be something we can do," said Siegfried.

At that moment, Rothbart appeared, full of swagger and confidence, with Odile close behind him. Rothbart stepped forwards threateningly, but he had underestimated the fury of Odette and the swans. The sun was beginning to rise, and the swans' transformation had begun. Before it could complete, they swept towards the sorcerer in an angry flock, driving him back, back towards the lake. Siegfried, too, was on his feet, rage pulsing through his veins. He grabbed the nearest object – a branch from the woods – and thrust it at Rothbart.

The branch glanced off the sorcerer's side and fell with a splash into the lake.

"You fool," laughed Rothbart. "I am unharmed, you see?"



He held out his arms to show them. But Siegfried's actions had not been in vain – he had snapped a single feather from the sorcerer's great robe. Everyone watched in silence as the feather drifted slowly to the ground. Then, suddenly, the sky was awbirl with feathers of all colours.

"What's happening?" cried Rothbart.

The swan's white feathers were falling away from their limbs, while a flurry of feathers wrapped Rothbart and Odile in a furious whirlwind, spinning them round and around. When the wind finally died down, the sorcerer and the girl had gone: in their place was a scowling owl and a single black swan.

