**The Third Wish**

*After* ***Joan Aiken****,*

*adapted by Vladislava Bystrykh and Emil Sigadullin*

Once there was a man who was driving in his car on a spring evening through the forest of Savernake. His name was Mr. Peters.

There were flowers of primroses but there were no leaves on the trees yet, and it was cold. It was evening, and the birds stopped singing. When Mr. Peters drove on an empty road he heard a cry. He stopped his car and listened. Somebody was struggling and was in trouble far away in the trees. He left his car and climbed the mossy bank near the road. Then he went down to bushes through which he saw the water. He stood for a moment and listened. Suddenly, he heard some strange cries. The voice was almost human, but too harsh at one time and too clear and sweet at another. Mr. Peters ran down the hill and when he came to the bushes he saw something white in the bushes. It was trying to rescue. He came closer and saw that it was a swan that was trapped in the thorns growing on the bank of the canal.

When he came closer the bird struggled even more and looked at him with anger in its yellow eyes. When he wanted to free it, the bird hissed at him, bit him, and defeated with its wings. The swan’s wings were strong enough to break his arm. But he released the swan from the thorns and carried it tightly with one arm, holding the snaky head with the other hand. He took it to the edge of the canal and dropped it in.

The swan looked strong again very soon and sailed out to the middle of the water with dignity. There it splashed and preened, and smoothed its feathers with little drops of water. Mr. Peters waited a little. He wanted to know that the swan was all right.

Soon, the swan floated close to the bank and suddenly, instead of the great white bird, there was a little man. The man was dressed all in green, had a golden crown on and long beard. His eyes were wild and angry, and very unfriendly.

"Well, Sir," he said frighteningly, "I see you know the laws of magic. You think that if you rescued the King of the Forest from a difficulty - and it was a pure good fortune - you must have a great reward.”

"I expect three wishes, no more and no less," answered Mr. Peters, looking at him with calmness.

"Three wishes, he wants, the clever man! Well, I have never heard of the human who made any good of his three wishes, because they often end up worse off than they started. Take your three wishes then -" he threw three dead leaves in the air "- don't blame me if you spend the last wish to undo the work of the first two.”

Mr. Peters caught the leaves and put two of them carefully in his notecase.The swan turned away and floated to the middle of the water and looked angry.

Mr. Peters stood for some minutes and thought how to use his present. He knew very well that the three magic wishes brought trouble more often than happiness. He didn’t want to be like the forester who first wished by mistake for a sausage, and then in an anger wished the sausage on the  end of his wife's nose, and then had to use his last wish to undo all. Mr. Peters had most of the things which he wanted and was very happy with his life. The only thing that troubled him was that he was a little lonely, and had no companion for his old age. He decided to use his first wish and to keep the other two wishes in case of an emergency. He looked at the leaf and then around him at the primroses, great beaches and the blue-green water of the canal, he said:

"I want a wife as beautiful as the forest.’

A great quacking and splashing appeared on the surface of the water. He thought that it was the swan laughing at him. He took no notice and went through the dark woods to his car. He got into his car, covered himself with a blanket and went to sleep.

When he awoke it was morning and the birds were singing. He saw a very beautiful girl,  who was coming to him along the road. Her eyes were as blue-green as the canal, hair as dark as the bushes, and skin as white as the feathers of swans.

"Are you the wife that I wanted for?" asked Mr. Peters.

"Yes I am," she replied. "My name is Leita." She stepped into the car beside him and they drove off to the church not far away from the forest, where they were married. Then he took her to his house in a faraway and lovely valley and showed her all his treasures - the bees in their white hives, the Jersey cows, the hyacinths, the silver candlesticks, the blue cups and the lustre bowl for putting primroses in. She admired everything, but most of all she loved the river which ran in front of his garden.

"Are there swans on your river?" she asked. "Yes, I often see swans there on the river," he told her, and she smiled.

Leita was a good wife. She was kind and friendly, worked in the garden, washed the vases, milked the cows and mended his socks. But Mr. Peters felt that she was not happy. She looked nervous, walked a lot in the garden, and when he came back from the fields he sometimes found the house empty and she returned only after half an hour or so and didn’t say where she had been. On those days she was always especially kind and put out his slippers to warm and cooked his favorite dish - Welsh rarebit with wild strawberries - for supper.

One evening he was returning home when he saw Leita on the bank of the river. She was crying, with her arms round a swan’s neck. He came nearer and saw that tears were rolling, too, from the swan's eyes.

"Leita, what is it?" he asked, very troubled. "This is my sister," she answered. "I can't live without her.”

Now he understood that Leita was really a swan from the forest, and this made him very sad. When a human marries a bird it always leads to sorrow.

"I can use my second wish to turn your sister into a human, and she can live with us," he suggested.

"No, no," she cried, "I can't ask that of her.”

"Is it very hard to be a human?" asked Mr. Peters sadly.

"Very, very hard," she answered.

"Do you love me, Leita?"

"Yes, I do, I love you," she said, and there were tears in her eyes again. "But I miss the old life in the forest, the cool grass and the mist at sunrise. I miss the water that slide over my feathers when my sister and I floated along the stream.”

"Then shall I use my second wish to turn you back into a swan again?" he asked and sadly thought of the old King's words. The feeling of unhappiness grew inside him.

"Who will mend your socks and cook your meals and see to the hens?”

"I will do it myself. I did it before I married you," he said, trying to look cheerful.

She shook her head. "No, I can not be unkind to you. I am a swan, but I am also a human now. I will stay with you.”

Poor Mr. Peters was very unhappy because of that talk with his wife. He did his best to make her life happier: took her for drives in the car, found beautiful music for her to listen to on the radio, bought clothes for her and even suggested a trip round the world. But she said no to that; she preferred to stay in their own house near the river.

He noticed that she spent more and more time to bake wonderful cakes - jam puffs, petits fours, éclairs and meringues. One day he saw how she carried a basketful to the river and he understood that it was to her sister.

He built a seat for her near the river, and the two sisters spent hours together in silence.

Sometimes he thought that all was well, but then he saw that she was growing thin and pale.

One night when he did not sleep and did his work he came up to bed. She cried and called:

"Rhea! Rhea! I can't understand what you say! Oh, wait for me, take me with you!”

At that moment he understood he had no hopes and she would never be happy as a human. He kissed her for the last time, then took another leaf from his notecase, blew it out of the window, and said his second wish. Next moment instead of Leita there was a sleeping swan on the bed with its head under its wing. He carried it out of the house to the bank of the river, and then he said, "Leita! Leita!" to waken her, and gently put her into the water. She looked at herself in surprise for a moment, and then floated up to him. She put her head lightly on his hand. And soon she was flying away over the trees towards the heart of the forest.

He heard a harsh laugh behind him and turned round. The old King was looking at him with a wild and unfriendly look.

"Well, my friend! Your first two wishes didn’t make you happy, did they? What will you do with the last wish? Do you want to become a swan? Or turn Leita again into a girl?”

"Neither," said Mr. Peters calmly. "People and swans are better when they are people and swans.”

He looked sadly at the forest where Leita had gone, and walked slowly back to his empty house.

Next day he saw two swans.They floated in the river near the garden, and one of them wore the gold chain. It was the chain that he had given Leita after their marriage. She floated up and put her head on his hand.

All people in the country soon knew Mr. Peters and his two swans. People told each other that he talked to the swans and they understood him. Many people were frightened of him. There was a story that one day when thieves wanted to get into his house two large white birds attacked the thieves and dropped them in the river.

Mr. Peters became old. When he was ill with rheumatism people said to him that he had to live in another house, in a dry place far from the river. But he did not want to live far from the river and he lowly did his work, milking the cows and collecting the honey and eggs. The two swans always helped him.

Sometimes people who knew his story said to him:

"Mr. Peters, use the third wish and have another wife!”

"For what?" he answered calmly. "Two wishes were enough for me, I think. I've learned that even if a king gives you wishes, they aren't always good for you. I love Leita and don’t want another wife.”

One autumn night, people heard that the two swans sang a very sad song. They cried and sang all night. The song was sweet and harsh, sad and beautiful. In the morning people came to Mr. Peters’ house and saw that he was dead in his bed with a smile of happiness on his face. In his hand was a dead leaf and a white feather.