



Children of Lir

Many years ago on in the Irish region of County Armagh, there lived a handsome young man named Lir and his beautiful wife, Aobh. For many years they lived in peaceful tranquillity and became parents to three sons and a daughter: Aodh, Fionnghuala, Fiachra and Conn. Alas, life and stories are never that simple and, when the children were still young, their mother became gravely ill and passed away.

Sadness stifled their home and cast a shadow over their life for a long time until, whilst carrying out errands in the local market, their father bumped into a kindly woman named Aoife. They soon fell deeply in love and were married within the year. Villagers for miles around came out to celebrate the wedding; Lir was such a generous and welcoming man that they felt he deserved a second chance at happiness.

Lir's four children embraced Aoife as their mother and welcomed her into their home but, despite loving his new wife very dearly, Lir was determined that his love for his children would always come first. Over time, Aoife grew resentful of this affection and yearned to be the centre of her husband's world. She knew that this would never come to pass whilst his children still lived, yet she didn't have the heart or courage to kill them. Instead, she hatched a cunning plan.

One night, whilst Lir slept peacefully, Aoife woke the children and hurried them out of the house. Pretending that they were going to the market to buy their father a present for his birthday, she bundled them into a passing cart. They rode tirelessly until dawn, and the wicked step-mother only stopped the carriage when they were beside a cold, heartless lake. Lake Derravarragh looked bleak and leaden in the low morning light; the four children shivered despite the warm, spring air. Aodh was the eldest of the children, and he quickly fell to his knees and begged their step-mother to return them home: "Our father will worry terribly if we aren't there when he wakes," he pleaded desperately.

His words fell on deaf ears, and Aoife muttered a series of strange words under her breath. A flash of light engulfed them all and, when it passed, the four children had been turned into swans. Honking hysterically, they fled their captor and settled in the middle of the lake.

For the next four hundred years, the children of Lir lived miserably on that bleak lake, unable to speak to each other or to find their beloved father. Their grief was profound; not only had they lost their mother, but now their father had been cruelly taken away as well. Even worse, they knew just how much he would be heartbroken at the loss of his children.

Eventually, Lir's children realised that they must move on and so they travelled from lake to lake, spending the next three hundred years in exile before finally returning home to the village where they were born. Though so many years had passed, they were still saddened to learn that their father had passed away and their village - once thriving with markets and shops - had turned to dust. Upon entering the old market square, they happened upon a missionary who treated them with great kindness and promised to lift their curse.

When at last their enchantment was lifted, they found that they were now old and weak. As a last act of kindness, the missionary baptised the siblings, and they were able to rest in peace.



EXPLAIN

1. Explain how Aoife's character changes over the story.
2. Explain how Lir's children felt about Aoife and how you know.
3. What was Aoife's cunning plan?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

V

What does "stifled" mean?

R

Where were Lir and Aobh from originally?

I

Why did Aoife grow resentful?

V

Find three synonyms for "yearn".

P

What do think happened to Lir and Aoife once the children disappeared?