

# AESOP'S FABLE: "A Raven & A Swan"

A Dramatic Play Written by Connie Frank

**Narrator of the Story:** based on "A Raven and a Swan"



**Narrator:** The Raven symbolizes prophecy, insight, transformation, and intelligence, representing long-term success in love and finding devoted, faithful partners. In countries such as Serbia, as in many other cultures, the raven is associated with death – more specifically with an aftermath of a bloody or significant battle. Ravens often appear in pairs and play the role of harbingers of tragic news, usually announcing the death of a hero or a group of heroes. Usually, a mother or a wife of a hero will be notified about the hero's death by a visit from a pair of ravens. Sometimes, they are treated as supernatural creatures capable of communicating with humans that report about events directly, bringing along scavenged body parts, such as a hand or a finger with a ring, by which the fate of the hero will be recognized.

The swan, however, is seen as a symbol of wisdom and includes awakening the power of self, balance, grace, inner beauty, innocence, self-esteem, seeing into the future, developing intuitive abilities, grace in dealing with others and commitment. The people of pre-Christian Ireland also saw swans as creatures that could connect to the Otherworld where the gods and goddesses lived and highly respected them. In Germanic myths the Valkyries had the power to transform into swans. They were the 12 maiden attendants of Odin, Goddesses who presided over wars allowing victory to one side and defeat to the other. In Scotland sailors consider the sighting of a swan to be auspicious. The white feathers of the swan signify deception; just as the white feathers hide the swan's black skin so does man's deception hide a sinful heart. As the swan likes to sing in company so are those who live for their desires and seek out like-minded company.

## Characters:

**Narrator:**

**Swan:**

**Raven:**

**Odin:**

**The Valkyries:**

**Freyja, Head of the Valkyries:**

## Script:

**Narrator:** On the Blue Lake in New Zealand, also known as Lake Tititapu, a majestic white swan floated on the pristine waters, occasionally dipping its long neck into the water to sample the many small blue trout that swam by him. The sun was high in the sky, and the air was slightly cooler than the norm for this time of year. Gently sloping mountains made the lake a safe place for the swan to come, away from his many predators, so he could rest and restore himself after a visit with his friends in Australia. The gurgling croaks of Ravens disturbed his quiet retreat, and the Swan jerked his neck in irritation. One Raven floated down to the edge of the water near the Swan and stared at her, turning his head several times.

**Swan:** (Turning his back on the Raven): You are irritating. Go away.

<b>Raven:</b>	(Smiling to himself): I have only come down to have a drink and a quick swim before joining the others (pointing his left wing toward the ravens flying onward).
<b>Swan:</b>	(Turning his head to look at the Raven): Then you should do it quickly and leave.
<b>Raven:</b>	Why should I? I like it here. It is very peaceful and the water is so clear that I can see all the way to the bottom of the lake.
<b>Swan:</b>	Really? Gee! I hadn't noticed.
<b>Narrator:</b>	Turning his back again to the Raven, the Swan saw another tiny blue trout float by him and snatched it up, swallowing greedily, its tail wiggling frantically in the life and death struggle.
<b>Raven:</b>	Hmmm. So you are the Favored One that the gods honor. How does that feel?
<b>Swan:</b>	What do you think? How do you think it feels? It can be a tremendous burden to be connected to the Otherworld. I am expected to be perfection itself.
<b>Raven:</b>	But that sounds so much better than what I have to do. I am in charge of prophecies, and the burden of making sure these prophecies come to fruition can be a tremendous burden.
<b>Swan:</b>	Well, I can outdo that! I have to make myself available to the Valkyries. Those goddesses have trouble making up their minds. They decide which side in these nonsensical human wars will win. I tire of their constant demands and their lofty ways.
<b>Raven:</b>	Okay, I can top that! How would you like to be the harbinger of Death and tragic news! I hate having to be the one to deliver bad news to humans. It depresses me for days.
<b>Swan:</b>	(Contemplative): I see. I think you are right. You do have a more difficult life than I do. I am truly sorry for my arrogance. I guess I am just tired of doing the same thing every year.
<b>Narrator:</b>	The lake grew quiet, except for the few fish that occasionally popped out of the waters. Now that the two very different birds had talked out the situation, both were quiet and more respectful of the other.
<b>Raven:</b>	You really do seem to be the Favored One, and I am envious of your beauty and the respect you receive.
<b>Swan:</b>	(Nodding): I see your point. I have to admit I have a very wicked temper though. I get mad too quickly and my wife sends me away every once in a while, due to my bad habit of emitting gas when I am angry. She has a temper too.
<b>Raven:</b>	(Speaking slowly): I would love to be you though. I do not like being me. I am usually a very happy bird, raucous and fun loving. I wonder if I could ask Odin to allow me to change into a Swan.
<b>Swan:</b>	(Looking at the Raven keenly): I think I would rather that you do this. We could be friends! I have never had a real friend before, so this would be my first time. But...how would you do this? Odin is not exactly, I hate to say the word with his name in the sentence, but...kind.

<b>Raven:</b>	I will go ask him. I will be right back.
<b>Narrator:</b>	At that the Raven flew away, dropping one very shiny black feather next to the Swan as he floated on the water.
<b>Swan:</b>	It would be a miracle if Odin let his Messenger of Death switch to becoming a connector to the Otherworld. It almost sounds sinful! I think I like it!
<b>Narrator:</b>	The white fluffy clouds in the sky rolled slowly overhead, and the Swan noted to himself that it would not be raining today. An hour flew by and the Raven was back, looking dejected.
<b>Swan:</b>	What did he say?
<b>Raven:</b>	Odin, our great and mighty Leader of the gods of the North, turned me down. I hate to say it, but he...he laughed at me! How could he laugh at me?
<b>Swan:</b>	I am so sorry.
<b>Raven:</b>	Odin told me that I have a huge responsibility in his kingdom and that I cannot shirk my duties. While I was there, another great hero, Achilles, died in this Trojan War that the Greeks and Trojans are having. I had to bring the news to the entire country of Greece, and the people there are mourning this great and noble hero. I almost cried with them. It is just too difficult of a job for me. I want to be like you.
<b>Swan:</b>	But if Odin said No to you, how can you possibly make it happen?
<b>Raven:</b>	I will change into a Swan, some way or another. I have to be more than I am. I hate being a Raven. It is not fair!
<b>Swan:</b>	But are you not respected for your tireless work in doing the bidding of the Valkyries? They cannot do their jobs without you!
<b>Raven:</b>	You did not see the bereavement of those Greek women! Their tears were flowing so fast that they were hiccupping. I cannot do it again. I will not. I would rather die than be a Messenger of Death ever again.
<b>Narrator:</b>	The Swan nodded and bowed to his friend, who was now determined to watch the Swan and do everything just like the Swan. The Raven began swimming and diving all day long. Since Raven was as intelligent and clever as a seven-year-old human child, he splashed and had great fun in the water with his calm, naysaying Swan friend looking on and shaking his head.
<b>Swan:</b>	The way you are acting, you would think that you had never learned to swim before now!
<b>Raven:</b>	You are right! I am learning to swim and having fun doing it. I never knew it could be so fun!
<b>Narrator:</b>	Swimming and diving were fun, but mealtimes were not as much fun. The Raven watched the Swan eat the weeds and plants that were growing in the waters. After much hesitation, the Raven reached down to taste the weeds in the water, and he threw up, loud enough to get the Swan's attention.
<b>Swan:</b>	You need to stop this nonsense! You do not eat what I eat. How will you survive?

<b>Raven:</b>	It is true that I am an omnivorous creature. I feed on anything from small mammals to birds, eggs, and berries. But I am turning my back on that life. I am going to become a beautiful Swan that the Valkyries will want to work for them. I will make this happen, and I will be the most beautiful, intelligent Swan ever!
<b>Narrator:</b>	The Swan watched his friend the Raven eat foods that made him sick and washing himself in the water.
<b>Swan:</b>	You need to stop now! This is getting sad. You are getting so gaunt!
<b>Raven:</b>	I have foreseen my future. I will surely die if Odin does not take pity on me and allow me to have a life of dignity and respect. I want to be a Swan, and I will be a Swan or die trying.
<b>Narrator:</b>	The days flowed by, and the Raven grew gaunt. His eyes bulged and yet he would not stop trying to be a Swan.
<b>Swan:</b>	My friend, I have to leave you to go to the Otherworld. The Valkyries have sent for me. It appears that the battles in the Trojan War have grown fiercer, and they are deciding which side should win. Which side would you choose to win?
<b>Raven:</b>	Since I had to announce the death of the brave Achilles, I would hope that the Greeks would win, but I also feel sorry for the Trojans who have lost so many great heroes. I hope that the Valkyries make good choices.
<b>Swan:</b>	Goodbye, my friend. I hope to see you tomorrow.
<b>Raven:</b>	If I am not here, you will know that Odin has decided to let me die rather than make me who I feel that I truly am. I want desperately to be like you, my friend Swan. I would be my greatest joy.
<b>Narrator:</b>	With that, the Swan sadly waved goodbye with his left wing and flew directly into the clouds above. The Raven sighed. He had left his home in the woods and friends. He had flown down to live on the crystal blue lake and in its marshes. But though he washed and washed all day long, almost drowning himself in the water, his feathers remained the same color. The water weeds were not agreeing with him, and he kept throwing up. He was very thin. The next day, Raven looked up into the sky and called out to his friend weakly.
<b>Raven:</b>	My friend Swan! Where are you? I would like to say goodbye just one last time.
<b>Narrator:</b>	As there was no answer, the Raven lay down in the marshes of the beautiful Blue Lake and died alone.
<b>Narrator:</b>	The Swan did come back that day but he was late. The Valkyries as usual had spent more time arguing than taking action. Once they were done with him, the Swan hurried back to the Blue Lake to find his friend dead, so thin and gaunt that it took the Swan a long time to find him.
<b>Swan:</b>	Odin! This angers me! Why did you let him down? How could you let this happen!

<b>Narrator:</b>	The great Swan opened his large wings and flew back into the great sky to the palace of Odin, who was sitting on his throne laughing and carefree. The Swan in his fury knocked some pints of ale to the ground and demanded an audience with Odin. Odin was so surprised that he complied without making a single angry retort.
<b>Swan:</b>	I cannot believe you did this! How could you!
<b>Narrator:</b>	Odin, who was all seeing and all knowing, knew exactly what the Swan was saying. Odin had watched the Raven fall to the ground, dying from starvation, and Odin did not really care. He felt certain he could replace the Raven for a bird less ambitious.
<b>Odin:</b>	Now, Swan. Calm down. You know this was meant to be.
<b>Swan:</b>	(Screaming in anger): What do you mean! Who do you think you are telling me that Raven was meant to die. Just because he wanted to be something more than he was!
<b>Narrator:</b>	Odin was taken aback at the anger shown toward him as the king of the gods. Thunderclouds came into view as Odin went from shock to anger.
<b>Odin:</b>	Don't you dare talk to me that way! You know Raven was never going to be like you. It was written in the cards by the Fates. His place was to be the Harbinger of Death.
<b>Swan:</b>	You knew he did not want to be that way! You knew he wanted to be free and to be happy, yet you denied him the one thing that gave him hope. Why would you do that?
<b>Odin:</b>	A Raven is a Raven, it is what it is!
<b>Swan:</b>	No, you are wrong. Deadly wrong when it comes to Raven. He would rather die than be the Messenger of Death and Sadness. He wanted to be more than you wanted him to be. For that, I will never work with you or for you again.
<b>Odin:</b>	Enough!
<b>Narrator:</b>	The room became quiet. The air was static, and the clouds above thundered. Odin was just about to strike Swan down with a thunderbolt when the Valkyries glided into the room where Odin's hand was raised to do the deed. The Swan was cringing, waiting for the strike that was to come.
<b>The Valkyries:</b>	(Crying out altogether): Stop!
<b>Odin:</b>	(Threatening): You cannot stop me. I am the lord of all!
<b>Freyja, Head of the Valkyries:</b>	Father, you will stop this nonsense and listen to our good advice.
<b>Odin:</b>	Daughters, go away! Leave me be!
<b>Freyja, Head of the Valkyries:</b>	Father, you will not touch our Swan.
<b>The Valkyries:</b>	You will not touch our Swan!
<b>Narrator:</b>	The room was filled with static anger. Odin was breathing heavily, angry at both the Swan and the Valkyries for stopping him from striking. After what seemed like an hour, Odin lowered his arm and stood towering over the Valkyries and the Swan, who was now clinging to the Freyja, who had reached for him.

<b>Freyja, Head of the Valkyries:</b>	The Swan has always been faithful, doing our bidding even when we argue amongst ourselves. Do not ignore him and treat him with disrespect. It is very bad luck to treat the beautiful swan in a disrespectful way.
<b>Odin:</b>	But the Swan defied me! He struck out at me in his anger!
<b>Freyja, Head of the Valkyries:</b>	The Swan has told us of what was happening with the Raven. Father, you could have prevented the death of the beautiful Raven. Why did you allow him to die?
<b>Odin:</b>	(Folding his arms): I thought he was presumptive and arrogant. No one talks to me that way. No one!
<b>Narrator:</b>	Everyone there grew quiet. Odin's guests could hear the arguments, and they feared Odin. When he lost his temper, he was uncontrollable.
<b>Freyja, Head of the Valkyries:</b>	You made a terrible mistake, Father.
<b>Odin:</b>	What? How dare you!
<b>Freyja, Head of the Valkyries:</b>	I dare because it is true. You are not perfect, Father. You make mistakes. The Raven wanted to be more than he was, and you refused him. Now he is dead. Make no mistake. Every god and goddess in the realm will mourn the loss of this Raven. Even as the Messenger of Death, the Raven was obedient and followed your directives. He was faithful, yet you could not allow him the freedom of choice for his own life.
<b>The Valkyries:</b>	Shame on you, Odin!
<b>Narrator:</b>	Moments passed. The tide could turn one way or another. In a few minutes, Odin bowed his head and nodded.
<b>Odin:</b>	You are right. I denied the Raven because I thought of him as a servant, a slave, to my bidding. I refused him, not because I could not replace him, but because he was so humble and honest about who he wanted to be. I bullied him. Even though I liked him the way he was, I should not have demanded that he give up on his right to happiness. You are right.
<b>Freyja, Head of the Valkyries:</b>	So fix this!
<b>The Valkyries:</b>	Fix this!
<b>Narrator:</b>	Zeus looked down at the Valkyries and at the Swan, who was now brimming with tears of fear and relief.
<b>Freyja, Head of the Valkyries:</b>	Keep in mind that the other gods and goddesses will deem you as Odin the Merciful, rather than Odin the Tyrant if you make this one simple gesture, Father.
<b>Odin:</b>	(Waving his hand): It is done. The Raven is alive and he has been changed. I hope he is happy.
<b>Swan:</b>	Really?
<b>Valkyries:</b>	It is as Odin says.
<b>Freyja, Head of the Valkyries:</b>	(Turning to the Swan): You can go home now, dear Swan, and see your friend who awaits you.
<b>Narrator:</b>	With great joy the Swan flew back to the Blue Lake to find a Swan gliding in the waters, eating small blue trout gracefully.

<b>Freyja, Head of the Valkyries:</b>	Father Odin, please remember that every being in your domain has the right to make personal choices.
<b>Odin:</b>	What? You mean I cannot tell them what to do now?
<b>Freyja, Head of the Valkyries:</b>	You may be the king of the gods, and have lived thousands of years, but you can still learn from your family and friends.
<b>Narrator:</b>	Zeus opened the clouds to look down on the two Swans, who were now laughing together as the new Swan flubbed a chance to get a blue trout floating by. The trout turned and whacked its tail on the nose of the new Swan, and both laughed. They were now happy, and peace reigned again over the Blue Lake of New Zealand.
<b>Narrator:</b>	Even though the Raven had requested that he be changed into a Swan, Odin had refused his request, so the Raven risked Death itself to become what he really wanted to be in life. His change of habits, his food, or his environment did not alter the fact that he was a Raven. With the intervention of the king of the gods, Raven finally became the Swan that he had always wanted to be. The story of the Raven is of true perseverance. The Swan learns that friendship is valuable and should never be taken lightly.
<b>The moral of the story:</b>	
<i>"A change of habits will not alter nature."</i>	