

SWAN FEATHERS
a screenplay adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's "The Wild Swans"
by
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In the following work, I adapt a fairy tale into a modern screenplay, in the tradition of Walt Disney and his storytellers. As Disney's company has done with fairy tales like "The Little Mermaid," I re-tell Hans Christian Andersen's "The Wild Swans," shaping a centuries-old story to fit progressive contemporary social practices. Andersen's original tale is the story of a princess who, after her evil stepmother transforms her brothers into swans, gives up her voice and knits nettles into magical shirts to save them. My screenplay retains the major plot points of the original tale and focuses on its themes of tenacity and family love. However, in adapting the story into something to both entertain and educate contemporary audiences, I instill the narrative with progressive values regarding racial equality, female empowerment, sexual identity, and moral ambiguity. For example, in the original tale, the narration links Princess Elisa's beauty to her pale skin. To challenge this old norm, I have relocated the fictional kingdom that serves as the story's starting-point to the Meriç delta in Turkey, turning Elisa into Elisavet, a dark-skinned, Middle-Eastern princess. With this relocation, I strive to avoid stereotypes and encourage audience empathy with people of other races. Regarding female empowerment, Elisavet does not "give up" her voice for her brothers' sake. Instead, she was born mute, and her struggle to be heard is a constant part of life, not only for Elisavet in the literal sense but also for every other woman in the story. Each woman, spoken-over by the men in her life, manages to make her "voice" heard one way or another by the end of the screenplay. In this adaptation, Elisavet falls not for the prince who "rescues" her, but for a woman who takes the time to get to know her. I have purposefully left the gender of Elisavet's lover unmentioned in the screenplay in order to advocate for acceptance of homosexuality as normal. I also discard Andersen's uncomplicated world in which all characters are strictly good or evil. In my screenplay, everyone, protagonist and antagonist, is driven by a sense that they are doing what is best for the world, whether or not others would agree with them. For example, the princes are cursed not by an "evil stepmother" but by an activist figure who wants to teach the Sultan a lesson about humility.