

The Gull Girl

On hot summer days the geese and the gulls would come to the lake and take off their heavy coats of feathers to swim in the cooling waters. The boy would watch them and tease them and take the feathers to hide them, but he always gave them back. Until the day he grew up and fell in love with a gull girl. Her feathers he took and hid, and he would not give them back, but took her home with him and married her.

Well, the gull girl was happy with her husband. They had two children and would have lived very comfortably together were it not for his mother. She was never happy. She would nag her son and her daughter-in-law morning, noon and night. She was sharp tongued and scornful, and nothing the girl did was ever good enough. In the end the girl had had enough. She took all the feathers from the feather bed and made three coats- one for her and one for each of the children, and away they flew, back to the Land of the Birds. 'Good riddance!' said the mother, but her son was angry and determined to get his wife and children back. He demanded that his mother make him nine pairs of boots, and as soon as the ninth was finished he set off to seek his family.

He wandered far and wide, asking everyone he met where he would find the Land of the Birds, but no-one could help him. He had worn his way through eight pairs of boots and had just put his feet into the ninth when he reached the mountaintop home of the golden eagle. Now, most people would be wary of the golden eagle, if not downright terrified to be there within reach of the sharp talons. But so badly did he want to find his family that he approached the great bird and once again asked where he could find the Land of the Birds. The golden eagle was impressed by his courage. Instead of tearing him apart he sent him down to the shore where, the eagle said, he would find a man building a canoe. Sure enough when he reached the shore there was the man, and there was the canoe, and what's more the boat builder was willing to swap the canoe for the ninth pair of boots.

Now the canoe had magic of its own and it carried him over the sea until they reached the Land of the Birds. The first people to meet him on the beach were his own children.

Hugging them tightly he asked, 'Where is your mother?'

'With King Albatross,' they told him. 'He has chosen her as his bride and she must marry him.'

'No she must not!' he exclaimed, and he strode off at once to the home of King Albatross, where he set about fighting for his wife. So angry was he and so determined to win that he drove King Albatross out of his own house. His wife was delighted to see him and she and the children prepared to leave with him. King Albatross however did not give up so easily and now returned at the head of a great mob of birds, who flew swiftly to attack. Thinking fast, the man snatched up a wet mop and shook it at the birds. As the drops of water froze on their feathers, one by one they dropped out of the sky.

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Safe from the mob the family climbed into the canoe, which carried them back to the boat builder on the shore. The boat builder was willing to give the boots back in return for the canoe but they were still a long, weary way from home. Golden eagle had however been watching from afar and was once again impressed by the courage shown by a mere man. So great was his admiration that he flew down from his mountain top and lent the man his own coat of feathers, on the understanding of course that it would return to him as soon as they were home.

The journey now was swift as they swooped and wheeled through the air, and on arriving home they were overjoyed to find that the mother had remarried in their absence and had gone away with her husband, to nag and find fault with him instead.