

The Flugel

By K. H. Blackmoore

Smashwords Edition

Copyright 2013 K. H. Blackmoore

Other works by K. H. Blackmoore at:

<https://www.smashwords.com/profile/view/KHBlackmoore>

Or check out the author at his website or Facebook!

<http://khblackmoore-com.webs.com/>

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/K-H-Blackmoore/441447172568286>

It was a beautiful lake. The water was cool and deep, there were sandy beaches backed by soft grass, a perfect environment for a swan. She could transform to her human form without any worries of being spotted, since the lake was surrounded by thick forests. She had left the flock to venture to this lake, even though it stood in the shadow of the Flugel's mountain. Everyone feared him, the greatest of the mythic monsters, strong in body and in magic, his great black wings bringing terror to anyone who saw them.

Which is why she was alone at this enchanting location. All the other swans were too timid to venture here and risk seeing the

Flugel's wrath, but she often grew bored of their mindless chatter and boring lives filled with daily habits. Much to the despair of her parents, she craved excitement and adventure, often choosing to explore unknown territory rather than lead the safe, sheltered lives of the flock. And this lake had delivered promised great rewards for the risk. She swam as a maiden, or donning her feather cloak, chased minnows and other tasty tidbits as she explored the lake.

It seemed to be spring feed, from the northern end, the end of the lake nearest the mountain. She had swum around the corner to explore the ruins she had seen from the sky when the statue startled her. It was a carving of the Flugel, his great black wings folded against his back, his man's body crouched staring into the lake. Someone had painted the statue, giving it even more of a appearance of life than it already had. The statue was so life like she froze in fright, but it never moved, and eventually she slowly retreated around the corner of the lake out of sight, her heart hammering in fear. As soon as she was well away, she took off, the flapping, running gate across the surface of the water that swans used to reach the sky.

It was three weeks before the routine of her life bored her to the point she returned to the lake. This time she left her swan feather cloak hidden in a safe hollow in one of the trees while she swam as a human around in the lake. The ruins seemed to call her and she followed the shore line carefully around the bend, making sure she stayed low in the water to reduce her visibility. The statue was still there, and the sight of it set her heart pounding all over again. She dove deep into the lake, and using the small magic's available to the swan maidens, swam under water back to the beach where she could retrieve her cloak. This time she didn't immediately leave, but stayed prepared to take flight at any time.

Within a month she was returning to the lake every day. Her parents and the other swan maidens begged her and commanded her not to go, but she ignored their objections, the peace of the lake calling her, and a quite magic seeming to thrum in her veins when she was near it. She avoided the ruins on the northern end, the statue still giving her a start whenever she glimpsed it, but it wasn't long before she knew the rest of the lake by heart.

After one particularly vicious fight with her older sister, the leader of the swan flock who had just fallen in love with a farmer boy, she was feeling particularly rebellious. There was a storm on the horizon, but she flew out to the lake any way,

and landing on her favorite beach, transformed into a human. Picking up her feather cloak, she began walking around the edge of the lake, towards the ruins. The magic was stronger here, deeper, a quite strength that reminded her of moonless nights as she walked among the ruins that once appeared to be a small castle. She passed silently through them, as only bare feet on soft grass can be. The rocks were covered in moss and here and there a flower bloomed in a crack. It was peaceful and beautiful to the point that she chided herself for never having explored here before. She still avoided the Flugel's statue, although as she examined an enormous rose bush she was able to see the edge of the statue around a leaning wall.

A motion caught her eye and she slowly turned her head in time to see one enormous black wing stretch out from the statue of the Flugel and then slowly retract to its folded position. Except it wasn't a statue, her frightened mind realized as it tried to catch up to her racing heart, but the Flugel himself. She was so frighten she couldn't move, couldn't breath until at last her breath exploded out in a scream and she swirled and ran into the woods as fast as her legs could carry her, her feather cloak streaming out behind her.

The woods closed in, brushes and limbs tearing at her thin dress, catching her cloak which she would pull free with a yank before continuing her dash into the forest. Finally a root tripped her and she fell, bruising her hands and knees on the rocky ground. She gasped for air, and sobbed softly, expecting any moment the Flugel to be on her, tearing her apart as he did the villagers in their stories. Slowly her breathing calmed as she looked around herself, completely lost in a forbidding section of the forest. There were no sounds other than her rapid breathing, which eventually slowed. She pulled the cloak around herself, cold, and sat there rocking herself trying to escape the last edges of hysteria as time passed.

It was nearly sundown when she had gathered enough courage to stand and begin retracing her steps towards the lake. It was the only open area wide enough for a bird with a swans wingspan to take off, even though she was terrified of the Flugel. The sun had set by the time she crept out of the forest into the edge of the ruins and carefully, slowly made her way back towards the nook of the lake she used for landings and takeoffs. Dusk was fading into true night by the time she made it, and to make matters worse the storm had blown in, although it wasn't raining yet, a strong wind was blowing and thunder boomed on the air. And this storm carried a hint of magic on its breath, perhaps one escaped from the mage wars she heard rumors off.

Throwing the cloak around herself she invoked the magic to turn herself into the great white swan of her birthright. Yet nothing happened, and not comprehending she tried again, failing yet again to transform. Her heart pounding all over again she examined the cloak, noticing for the first time the long tears and rents torn in it. The cloak was nearly useless, the magic torn with its fragile feathers. Silent tears rolled down her face as she sank to her knees, crying softly. But she didn't have time to panic, she told herself, and standing invoked her strongest magic tried the cloak again.

It worked, barely, as she leapt into flight at the same moment a bolt of lightning exploded along the shore of the lake. Struggling to fly with the missing feathers that had translated into the damage to her swan body, she barely reached tree top height when the first wind caught her. It was pitch black, and she had no way of telling direction as the wind carried her up high in the black sky before stopping suddenly, only for another wind caught her and carried her westward. She struggled for control, trying to follow the tugging that would lead her safely home as the wind played with her like a child's toy. She had no way to judge her height or speed, and worse the home direction seemed to be getting further away as the wind played with her.

She had never been this frightened, and she prayed to the gods to make it as she struggled, never knowing if the next wind would dash her into the trees or hills when a bolt of lightning illuminated the sky and the rain began to pelt her. Another bolt blinded her, this one tasting of magic as she squawked a most undignified sound and tried to turn and fly away. A third and final bolt knocked her out of the sky as it barely missed her, the magic in it nullifying her swan cloak, leaving her nothing more than a human maiden screaming as she fell towards the ground.

An impact drove the breath out of her as she rammed into something after only falling a few feet. Instinct caused her to grab at whatever she had struck, and her arms closed around a human neck, human arms around her back and legs, holding her like a child while a sudden surge told her that she and her rescuer were flying. Sudden realization stabbed through her as a cold fist seemed to grab her heart. A bolt of lightning illuminated the sky and her rescuer, revealing the snarling, upturned face of the Flugel.

She screamed and tried to throw herself away, but his arms might as well of been iron, for all that she could budge them. A snarl vibrated through the darkness, seeming to halt even the

storm at the fury and threat held within that sound. At that noise she stopped struggling and lay in his arms shivering as his mighty wings fought the elements. For the storm was not frightened of a mere monster, and gathering its forces, attacked them in earnest. Yet the Flugel did not seem to care, or rather relished the fight, struggling against the elements, pitting his strength against nature's fury. It seemed forever that she lay there, shivering from the cold in his arms as he fought the storm.

Yet finally she sensed a change, a lighting of the weather before a powerful stroke of his wings drove them through the top of the cloud into the moonlit night. Here, far above the height that a swan could fly, where the air was thin and hard to breathe, the world was at peace. The stars winked at her with merry eyes, while the moon seemed to draw nearer and nearer. Below them was a frothing sea of clouds, yet here there was peace and stillness, beauty of the clear night. The moon illuminated the Flugel's face, no longer snarling, she thought he was quite handsome in a stern, sad way. His body was that of a well muscled man's except for the wide, black wings, each longer than a two horse cart. For a moment she forgot her fear as the night took on a dreamlike aspect, unreal in its beauty or her surroundings. The day finally caught up with her and she lost consciousness as they flew through the night towards the dark mountain the Flugel called home.

She awoke in a large, fur covered bed in the middle of a large stone room. A cheerful fire crackled in a fire place, providing dim illumination to her surroundings. It was a rough room, with no trappings or furnishings, only the essentials of life. The table was carved from a single tree and had not been varnished or finished. Neither were the shelves that held blocky cooking utensils, or a few leather bound books. There was a single chair by the table, which drew her attention, for lying across it was her swan feather cloak. Pulling herself from the mound of fur which made up the bedcovers, she tip toed across the room and picked it up.

But the cloak was ruined beyond repair. Torn nearly in two, with several other large tears in it, all its magic had vanished, leaving behind nothing but a damp tattered rag. Even the snow white feathers had lost their gleam, drooping rather sadly in the flickering light. She hugged the cloak to her face as she wept softly into it, leaning on the table for support as the last identifier of her life slipped away.

A soft noise on the other side of the table finally drew her

attention. There, curled on the hard stone floor in front of the fire was the Flugel. He stirred softly in his sleep, muttering in a language she didn't recognize. She started to draw back in fear, but something stirred within her, and instead she returned to the bed. Wrestling a large bear skin off the bed that must have weighed as much as she did, she struggled to cover the sleeping man without waking him, the effort exhausting her again, so that by the time she was done she crept back into bed and slept again.

The next few weeks were extremely trying for her. The loss of her wings ached like an open wound, and she spent a great deal of time moping about the Flugel's eyrie. For she did spend some time exploring whenever she could muster the interest, but all exits led to steep cliffs with no way down. The Flugel's eyrie was extensive, easily the size of a castle built into the tall mountain he called home. Most of the rooms were unoccupied and filled with dust. The only ones which seemed maintained were the bed room, the work room filled with magical equipment and the library. She continued to sleep in the bed, the Flugel sleeping in front of the fire.

The Flugel himself was extremely accommodating, with one exception. He wouldn't take her home, and she did not pressure him, still being more than partially frightened of him. He rarely spoke, spending most of his days inside the library or magical workshop. Every so often he would leave the eyrie, not returning until night fall or later. Occasionally he brought provisions, which out of boredom she would cook into their meals. She spent a great deal of time in the massive library, until one day the Flugel took her with him on one of his excursions. They spent the afternoon in the deep forest, collecting a mushroom that he showed her. After that she would accompany him on his excursions, waiting while he captured the deer which provided them with meat, helping him collect the fruit for their meals or the strange, random objects he would disappear into the workroom with for hours at a time.

It was nearly two months after her arrival, and while not happy with her life, certainly much more settled, when another storm approached the mountain. The evening air was filled with the scent of rain and magic, when the Flugel lifted his head and sniffed, tasting a quality of the air that she couldn't sense. Leaving the library where they had both been seated reading; he stalked towards the nearest exit, every line of his body screaming predator. She caught up with him barely before the exit, the storm outside boiling in fury against the mountain, and begged him not to go. Turning to face her he smiled,

revealing bright white teeth and two very prominent canines, he spread his black wings and with a snap drove himself backwards into the night. She listened to the storm in worry that night, unsure what would happen to her if he never returned, worried strangely about the man himself, listening to the booming of the thunder and the roaring of a beast who's home she shared, struggling against a force even gods could not command.

He returned a few hours before dawn stalking down the passage which the bedroom opened on to, something sparking and shining in his hand, his wings dripping on the stone floor. He shut the door to the work room, secluding himself inside. She was able to finally able to fall asleep now that he returned, sleeping late into the afternoon. The work room door was still shut when she awoke, and when she touched the handle intending to check on him, a snarl ripped through the hallway, shaking the rocks themselves, halting her entry more effectively than a lock. She fled back to the bed room and hid beneath a pile of furs, weeping softly. The Flugel had never snarled at her after the once in the storm, and had almost seemed gentle at times in caring for the wounds she received that night. She had no idea what she had done to upset him, and his rejection stung. Finally she fell asleep, her head pillowed on her arm.

The bed creaking under sudden weight woke her with a start just before a hand shook her shoulder. She sat up slowly, wondering what he wanted. He stared at her for a moment, his face expressionless, before handing her a bundle wrapped in spider silk. Wondering, she slowly unwrapped the package, and her swan cloak fell out. She lifted it softly, not daring to believe, to reveal a restored cloak. Running her fingers over it in disbelief, she stared at the Flugel, who pulled her in for quick hug before stalking away. The last time she saw him was crouching on a ridge high above the eyrie like some gargoyle from a nightmare as she flew away.

The rest of the flock greeted her with tears and rejoicing, and it seemed as if she never left. Yet there were subtle differences, differences that nagged at her. The flocks voices, which had always sounded like a gaggle of geese, now sounded a great deal more like the nagging of hens. The air was thicker, and she missed the glorious views she had seem from the eyrie. Even flying didn't seem to bring back the happiness she used to have known. Her parents were overjoyed to have her back as well, but there seemed to be a wall between them that had not been there before.

It wasn't long before the unhappiness she felt at her return

engulfed her, and the ones around her noticed the change as she slowly drooped. Finally one evening, as she sat on a rock and watched the moon rise, her mother approached her holding her swan cloak. Holding it out her mother spoke: "It's okay to return to him you know, if that is where your heart is." She stared at her mother in shock before bursting into tears and throwing herself in her mother's arms. "How did you know?" She asked her mother, who in response held out the cloak. Puzzled, she examined the swan feathers.

There, barely visible around the edge of each feather was a hint of black that hadn't been there before. "Follow your heart," her mother said, tears running down her face, "and your father and I will always love you." She wished them goodbye the next morning, before throwing the cloak around herself and taking off for the lake. As she flew over the shadowed forest surrounding the Flugel's mountain, a familiar shape winged its way out of the trees, flying to greet her as they danced upon the wind together.

Brave souls who dared to enter the forest and managed to return safely, told stories when they got back, of two large shapes in the sky, a man with black wings flying next to an enormous, beautiful black swan.

The End.