
Christmas
with
Princess Mirror-Belle

Books by Julia Donaldson
illustrated by Lydia Monks

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JULIA DONALDSON

Christmas with Princess Mirror-Belle



Illustrated by

LYDIA MONKS

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For Saoirse

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Swan Lake

It was a Saturday morning in December, and Ellen was drinking a glass of hot lemon and honey at the kitchen table. When she'd finished it she tried to sing:

"On the first day of Christmas, my
True Love gave to me
A partridge in a pear tree.
On the second day of Christmas . . ."



It was no use: her voice was coming out all croaky. Ellen had had a bad cold and, although she felt much better, her throat wasn't quite right yet. The lemon and honey drink hadn't really helped. That meant she almost certainly wouldn't be able to go out carol singing with her friends that night.

She tried one more time:

"On the seventh day of Christmas,
my True Love gave to me
Seven swans a-swimming . . ."

"You sound more like a swan a-*dying*," said Ellen's big brother Luke, who was up early for once. (Usually he slept till lunchtime at weekends.) "Can't you

stop that awful din?"

A dying swan! That reminded Ellen that she should be at her ballet class in ten minutes. They were rehearsing for their end-of-term show. It was going to be a children's version of the famous ballet *Swan Lake*. At least there was no singing in that.

In the ballet, Ellen was one of the maidens who had been turned into swans by a wicked sorcerer.

Ignoring Luke, she ran upstairs and hastily packed her swan costume into a bag. The costume was quite simple: just white tights and T-shirt and a headband with an orange beak and two black eyes stitched on it.

Even though Ellen took the shortcut

through the park, by the time she reached the hall where the ballet class was held, the changing room was empty. "I'm late again," she scolded herself. She hoped that Madame Jolie, the ballet teacher, wouldn't be cross. She put on her costume as quickly as possible, then checked in the mirror that the swan's beak was in the middle of the headband.



"Oh no – don't say the sorcerer turned *you* into a swan like me!" said her reflection. Except that of course it wasn't

her reflection – it was Princess Mirror-Belle. She looked just like Ellen, but was very different in character.

"Mirror-Belle! What are you doing here? You know what happened last time."

Mirror-Belle had come to the ballet class once before, and Ellen didn't want her there again. That time Mirror-Belle had told everyone that her shoes were magic and wouldn't stop dancing. Madame Jolie was not at all impressed, and had ordered her to leave.

"Fear not!" said Mirror-Belle, springing out of the mirror. "I'm not wearing my magic shoes this time. They wore out. But I'm shocked to see you with that beak. I thought the sorcerer's magic only worked on princesses like me."

"It's not a real beak – and the sorcerer is just in a ballet," said Ellen. "Anyway, I can't stay and chat – I'm already late."

Turning her back on Mirror-Belle, she opened the door to the ballet room, hoping that Mirror-Belle wouldn't follow her.

The other pupils in the ballet class were standing in a line with their toes turned out. Almost all of them were wearing swan outfits like Ellen.

"I'm sorry I'm late, Madame," said Ellen in her croaky voice. But instead of telling her off, Madame Jolie fixed her attention on Mirror-Belle who had followed Ellen and was fluttering her arms behind her back like wings. Ellen expected the teacher to be furious, but instead Madame Jolie clapped her hands in delight.

"Yes! Yes! Zat is just ze movement I 'ave been trying to teach you all!" she said. "Everyone watch zees little newcomer and copy 'er. Arms back, fingers spread out, and *flutter*! Well done, my dear, you move just like a real swan."



"That's because I *am* one!" replied Mirror-Belle. "A wicked sorcerer turned me into one, and I see he's been at work here too. There's a whole flock of you!"

Madame Jolie laughed. She obviously didn't recognize Mirror-Belle as the girl

who had once been so cheeky in her class. "Ah, you know already ze story," she said. "Zat is very good. Now, join ze line, please."

"It's not just a *story*," said Mirror-Belle. "It's only too real. Unless we can discover the spell to break the magic we'll all be swans for the rest of our lives."

"Zat is enough talking," said Madame Jolie. "Now, we will practise ze 'ead movements. Everyone, look to ze right, zen to ze left, and zen dip your 'eads as if you are looking down into ze lake. Imagine zat your necks are long, long, like real swans!"

Ellen and the others copied her – all except for Mirror-Belle. "I agree about not wasting time talking," she said. "There's

no time to lose – we need to find the sorcerer and discover the spell, before every maiden in the world is turned into a swan."

Madame Jolie sighed. Her delight in her new pupil was wearing off, but she explained patiently, "We already 'ave a sorcerer." She pointed to a little boy with a black cloak and an innocent expression. "Oscar is doing a very good job," she said. "'E does ze dance very well; 'e just needs to practise looking more – 'ow do you say? – more evil."

"Nonsense!" said Mirror-Belle. "That's a mere child. The sorcerer is a fully grown man. We must go in search of him immediately." She pranced towards the door, flapping her arms wildly as if she

were flying. “Are you coming with me, Ellen?” she asked.

Ellen shook her head and felt her face turn pink.

“What a strange child,” said Madame Jolie once Mirror-Belle had gone. “She looks very like you, Ellen. Did you bring her?”

“No, Madame,” said Ellen. She didn’t feel like explaining how Mirror-Belle had come out of the mirror; no one ever believed her anyway.

“Well, never mind. We ’ave now wasted ’alf ze class. Let us practise ze scene when ze sorcerer comes back. Everyone, bend ze knees, raise ze arms and turn ze ’ead away from Oscar; remember, ’e is a wicked sorcerer and you are terrified of

'im. Oscar, please do not smile! You are evil, remember – evil!"

As the practice continued Ellen tried not to think about Mirror-Belle. When the class had finished they all curtsied to Madame Jolie and trooped into the changing room. Ellen was relieved that no one else was there; perhaps Mirror-Belle had gone back through the mirror to search for the sorcerer in her own world.

