Bonny Swans

A lord there lived in the North Country,
And daughters one and two had he:
The younger bright as is the sun,
But dark as the shadows the elder one.

A suitor William came to their door -
He loved them both but the younger more.
He gave the elder gay gold rings,
But loved the younger above all things.

“O sister, sister give me your hand
And we’ll go down to the river’s strand.”
Long they stood on the windy shore;
The elder pushed the younger o’er.

“O sister, sister lend me your glove
And William sweet shall be your love.”
“It’s your true love I’ll have and more,
But you shall never come ashore.”

Like a milk white bird now the maiden did seem;
The river bore her far downstream.
A minstrel happening thereupon
Cried, “Here’s a mermaid or else a swan!”

For he scarce could see her golden hair,
For strings of pearls that were so rare;
He scarce could see her fingers white,
For diamond rings that shone so bright.

He cut a lock of her golden hair
And with it strung his harp so rare -
Its sound was purer than the river’s flow
But colder than the winter snow.

He traveled on to her father’s hall
To play the harp before them all.
But when he laid it on a stone
The harp began to play alone.

“There stands my William, sweet and kind,
And there my father close behind,
And there does stand my false sister Anne
Who drowned me for the sake of a man.”

Up spoke straightway the dark one, Anne:
“We’ll pay this minstrel to leave our land.”
But father silenced sister then
And said, “We’ll hear that tune again.”

Where the harp had lain now a maiden did stand
And led her sister by the hand;
And where they sank in the river’s flow
Two swans swam so bonny-o.