

The Swan of Jim Bob Tuonela



Jim Bob Tuonela eked out a modest living as a ferryman, rowing travelers across Lake Meptang, and always accompanied by his faithful pet swan, Gloria. Among the passengers one day was Jean Sibelius who, at the time, worked as a bicycle messenger – and not a very good one, it must be said, because he often lost his lading. On that day, for example, Jean was short a box of peepholes, six chocolate herrings, and a swan. So when he spotted Gloria paddling contentedly by the side of the boat he figured he could at least get part of his missing cargo back. As the boat neared the shore, Jean threw his bicycle into the lake, successfully diverting Jim Bob’s attention. Then he jumped out of the boat, grabbed the swan, and ran off. He had quite forgotten to collect the rest of his cargo from the boat, though, and, swan or no swan, the courier company fired him. Years later, after having embarked on a more successful tunesmithing career, Jean wrote a tone poem that addressed his impetuous theft whose memory still haunted him: *The Swan of Jim Bob Tuonela*. The bird, by the way, had been pregnant, and when she gave birth to a boy chick, Jean promptly named him Gloria Swan’s Son.