

## VOCABULARY PREVIEW

Below is a list of words that appear in the story. Read the list and get to know the words before you read the story.

- ascended**—moved upward  
**clusters**—groups; flocks  
**dejected**—unhappy; low-spirited  
**dependable**—trustworthy; responsible  
**destination**—goal; journey's end  
**diversity**—variety  
**fiancé**—man engaged to be married  
**flared**—blazed; burned  
**hue**—color  
**inconstant**—changeable; not dependable  
**predictable**—regular; easy to foretell  
**routine**—habit; regular actions  
**shimmered**—glowed; shone  
**sphere**—ball; globe  
**spontaneity**—tendency to act on impulse or spur of the moment  
**stable**—steady; worthy of trust  
**subjects**—those ruled by a king or queen  
**suitor**—admirer; one who romances another  
**trumped**—announced noisily  
**wheeled**—turned

### Main Characters

- Lindu—queen of the birds; daughter of Ukkko  
Northern Lights—one of Lindu's suitors  
Ukkko—king of heaven; Lindu's father

# LINDU'S VEIL OF STARS

A Finno-Ugric myth from Northern Europe

The lovely Lindu has begun to attract the attention of many admirers. At first she isn't interested. Then along comes a suitor as carefree as she is. But is he too carefree?

The geese arched their necks and paraded up and down the beach. Their cousins, the ducks, bobbed in the water of the Baltic Sea.<sup>1</sup> The smaller birds fluttered in circles and finally perched in the branches of nearby trees. They had all come to see the goddess Lindu<sup>2</sup>—Queen of the Birds.

"Here comes our queen," sang a nightingale. It flew up the beach to meet the young goddess.

"How beautiful she looks," quacked one of the ducks. "She is truly the daughter of Ukko,<sup>3</sup> the King of Heaven."

Lindu walked along the shore of the sea until she reached the clusters of birds. She wore a simple gown and sandals, but her shawl shimmered in the light. It was decorated with

<sup>1</sup> The Baltic Sea is a northern body of water surrounded by Sweden, Finland, Poland, Germany, Denmark, and the former Soviet Union.

<sup>2</sup> (lin' doo)

<sup>3</sup> (oo' kō)



brightly colored feathers the birds had given to her.

In the distance Lindu could see gray clouds. A chilly wind blew across the beach. The wind ruffled the feathers of the birds sitting in the trees. It made Lindu pull her shawl more tightly around her shoulders. Both she and the birds knew that winter was coming soon.

"As your queen, I am responsible for your well-being," Lindu said to the birds. "It is time for us to plan your journey to warmer lands. I will make sure you all travel safely and return to me in the spring."

Each group of birds came forward in its turn. The leaders told Lindu where the group had gone the previous winter. Lindu listened carefully to the leaders' reports. Then she told some of them to change their routes. She advised others to change their **destination**. Finally she was sure she had worked out the best possible plan for the coming winter.

"I shall miss you, my feathered friends," she said to them. "But it is better for you if you start your journeys soon."

In the following days, the head of each group of birds called its flock together. One by one, each great swarm rose and circled over the land. One by one, each group flew past Lindu and called, "Good-bye, our queen."

Finally the last flock set off for the south—toward warmer lands where they could survive the winter.

And so it went, year after year. Each fall, Lindu waved farewell to the birds. Each spring, they returned to their queen. Lindu was always overjoyed to see her **subjects** again. She helped them build their nests and raise their young through the long summer.

By now Lindu had become quite a radiant young woman. She started attracting the attention of numerous gods of the heavens. Many a handsome god spoke to Lindu's father, Ulko, King of the Heavens. Each one wanted Lindu for his wife. But Ulko said that Lindu must make her own choice of a husband.

The Sun was the first to ask Lindu to become his wife. The bright **sphere** waited until a cloudy and dreary day when he would be the most welcome.

The Sun found the Queen of the Birds sitting near the sea, huddling beneath her shawl. Suddenly he burst proudly through the clouds.

"Queen of the Birds," declared the Sun, "your subjects speak highly of you. They love you nearly as much as they love me. Become my wife and we will be the finest couple in the land."

Lindu smiled at the sun. She welcomed the warmth he had brought to the gloomy day. And he usually was very happy. But she shook her head.

"Warm and cheerful Sun," Lindu said politely, "you do me a great honor. But I'm afraid your life would be too boring for me. Every day you rise, cross the heavens, and set again. Why can't you change your **routine** from time to time?"

"But I do change my routine," said the Sun. He laughed and flared even more brightly. "At different times of the year, I rise earlier and set later. Sometimes I travel high into the sky. At other times, I stay closer to the earth. How can you say that my life is boring?"

"It's still the same old path day after day," Lindu answered. "It may seem exciting to you, but I'm used to more diversity."

"I wander on the shore, no matter whether it's day or night. I swim in the sea and climb in the trees. I sleep in the meadow grass whenever I please. I couldn't be happy with you. You're just too **predictable**."

So the Sun continued his path across the sky. He blazed more brightly than ever, but Lindu paid no attention to him.

The Moon was the next to propose to Lindu. He rose grandly over the water one night while Lindu walked alone on the beach. His silvery light reflected off the water at the queen's feet.

"Goddess," said the Moon, "you are almost as radiant as I am. The two of us would make a lovely couple. Become my wife, and we will be the envy of all who see us."

Lindu looked at the Moon thoughtfully. There was no doubt that he was handsome in his shining white robes. She especially liked the soft glow that he gave off wherever he

went. But she did not want to marry the Moon.

"Beautiful Moon," Lindu said respectfully, "you do me a great honor. But I'm afraid that your life would be too boring for me. Every day you follow the same path through the heavens. Don't you get tired of the same old view?"

"My dear, you are mistaken," said the Moon. "Some days I rise earlier, some later. Sometimes I travel the sky during the light of day. Other times I come out at night—when I am most handsome. Why, I even change my shape and size! How can you say that my life is boring?"

"Still, your life lacks **spontaneity**," Lindu answered. "Those small changes may seem exciting to you, but every day is different for me. One day I might explore a cave and play in the sand. The next I might watch as my new birds hatch and grow their feathers. I even help them learn to fly. I could not be happy with your routine life."

So the Moon went on his way and continued his nightly journey across the sky. He was especially large and bright that night. But Lindu wouldn't change her mind.

After a time the Pole Star<sup>4</sup> came to seek the hand of Lindu. He was a noble fellow and kind of heart. But Lindu knew that she could not bear to share the life of the Pole Star. Why, he was even more set in his ways than the Sun and the Moon! Every night, the Pole Star took up the same position. Then he watched as all the other stars **wheeled** busily around him.

Lindu turned the Pole Star down as kindly as she had the Sun and Moon. That night, he smiled down at her from his place in the northern sky. But Lindu wouldn't change her mind.

The next **suitor** for Lindu's hand was not like the others at all. The goddess met him while she was wandering on the beach early one morning. In fact, the world was still dark. Suddenly a hint of gold showed in the northern sky, though it was too early for the dawn. Then more colors

followed. Blue and red and every hue of the rainbow glowed brilliantly.

"Ah," Lindu said in wonder. "It is the Northern Lights.<sup>5</sup> How beautiful he is!"

The colors danced and swirled around the sky for hours. Finally they disappeared.

Lindu felt sad when the colors were gone. She had seen the Northern Lights before, but she could never tell when he would appear again. He came and went whenever he pleased, never following an exact schedule. And tonight he had been handsomer than ever before.

Lindu's feelings confused her. For reasons she couldn't understand, the goddess crept down to the beach every night. There she waited for the Northern Lights to reappear.

Just when it seemed he would never return, the Northern Lights delighted Lindu with a visit early one morning. Once again the dark sky was filled with a whirlwind of colors. Then the Northern Lights spoke. "Lindu, daughter of Ukkö," he said, "you are almost as free and wild as I am. The two of us could go on wonderful adventures together. Become my wife, and we will wander the heavens and the earth as we please."

Lindu looked at the Northern Lights and smiled. Suddenly she understood these new emotions stirring in her heart. She was in love with this beautiful suitor who danced in the sky.

"Northern Lights," Lindu said warmly, "you do me a great honor. And I realize you're the only one I can truly love. Yes, I will be your wife. We'll have a wonderful life together."

Lindu held her hands toward the sky. The Northern Lights glowed even more brightly. The dancing lights reached out and spun around Lindu's upraised hands. But by this time, the sun had started to rise.

"I cannot stay in the bright light of day for long," said the Northern Lights. "I will have to leave you for now."

<sup>4</sup> The Pole Star, or North Star, is always located due north. It is actually two stars which appear to be one.

<sup>5</sup> The northern lights, or aurora borealis, is a display of colors in the sky. It appears in the far north. The lights occur when particles from the sun strike the earth's magnetic field, creating electricity.

"When will you return?" asked Lindu.

"The moment it is dark, I shall come back. Then we'll celebrate our wedding and begin our life together," replied the Northern Lights.

After the glorious lights dimmed and disappeared, Lindu rushed to tell her subjects. The birds sang a joyful song when they heard the wonderful news. The geese flapped their mighty wings in the air and trumpeted their congratulations. Then Lindu climbed to the top of the tallest hill and called to her father, Ukko, the King of Heaven, listened from his throne in the sky.

"Father, I have finally found someone who is just right for me," Lindu said. "I've agreed to marry the Northern Lights. He'll return tonight, and we'll be married."

Ukko was happy that his daughter had at last found someone she loved. But he was a little worried about her choice.

"Are you sure he is dependable?" Ukko asked.

"Of course he is," said Lindu. "He proposed to me. And he promised to return as soon as night falls. I'll have to hurry to get ready."

Lindu spent the day happily preparing for her wedding. Her birds all gave her plenty of help. They cleaned up a small clearing near the sea for the ceremony. Then they scattered flowers and their brightest and shiniest feathers on the grass. A few birds brought sweet-smelling herbs and scattered those around too. Soon the clearing was ready for the royal wedding.

Some of the other gods and goddesses came to help Lindu too. They quickly wove a fine white fabric and fashioned it into a gorgeous wedding dress. Then they knotted shining white threads into a long lace wedding veil.

Finally the goddesses dressed Lindu and combed her hair. When they placed the magnificent veil on her head, Lindu looked lovelier than ever before.

That night the Queen of the Birds stood in the clearing and waited for her fiancé to appear. The birds slept in the trees and on the ground around the clearing. They planned to wake

up the moment the Northern Lights appeared. The gods and goddesses also waited patiently for the service to begin.

At midnight, the Northern Lights had still not arrived. The birds slept peacefully on, but the gods and goddesses grew restless. At dawn, the groom was still missing.

Lindu was very disappointed. But she put on a brave face and said, "Don't worry. He'll come."

The next night, Lindu and the birds and the gods and goddesses again gathered in the clearing. And again the Northern Lights did not show up. This time, Lindu grew even sadder, and the gods and goddesses grew impatient.

"That Northern Lights just isn't dependable," one of the gods said. "You should have chosen someone more stable."

"He's **inconstant**," a goddess murmured. "He never appears when you want him to, even if he promised."

Lindu waited in the clearing for three more nights, but the Northern Lights never showed himself. Each evening Lindu's loyal birds gathered there with her. But the gods and goddesses had all given up and gone home. Only Ukkö sadly watched from his throne in the Heavens. His daughter's increasing unhappiness tore at his heart.

As the morning of the sixth day dawned, Lindu looked around the clearing. The flowers had all wilted. The bright feathers had been trampled underfoot. The sweet smell of the herbs had blown away with the breeze.

The **dejected** goddess looked down at her dress. The lovely white gown was damp with her tears. Lindu sat on a stone in the clearing and began to weep again.

The birds fluttered around Lindu and tried to cheer her up. But their songs did not stop the goddess from shedding tears.

"He was the only one exciting enough for me to love," she wept.

"Please don't cry, our Queen," cooed the nightingale. "You're not alone. You still have all your loyal subjects. We love you."

"But you must go south very soon," wept Lindu. "And then I'll be left here all by myself. How can I bear that?"

Lindu's words caused great concern among the birds.

They chirped and quacked and honked to each other. Then they gathered back around Lindu.

"We will not go south this fall," quacked the leader of the ducks. "We won't leave you here all alone. We'll stay with you until you feel better."

The other birds agreed. They all chirped and sang and honked their decision to stay with their Queen until she felt better.

"No, no, my devoted subjects," Lindu said with a sigh. "If you stay here, you'll all die. You don't know how terrible the winter is. I would be truly miserable if my subjects froze to death in the snow."

The birds strutted and flapped in confusion. They didn't know what to do. Most simply kept promising never to leave their queen alone in her misery. But Lindu continued to shake her head sadly.

Ukko, King of the Heavens, took pity on his daughter. He knew it would be useless to try to force the Northern Lights to marry Lindu. The flashy suitor might go through with the wedding, but he would soon wander off again. Lindu would never be happy if she was married to a husband who disappeared whenever he pleased.

Ukko also knew that those birds who refused to leave their grieving queen would certainly die. So Ukko decided on a different solution to the problem.

"Come, daughter," Ukko said. "Join me here in the heavens."

"Father, I would love to live there near you," Lindu answered. "But who would take care of my birds? Who would see that they all migrate to the right places every fall?"

"From here you can easily oversee their journeys," said Ukko.

Lindu thought for a while. Then she smiled for the first time in days. She nodded happily and reached up toward her father. The birds chirped, sang, quacked, and honked their approval.

Ukko commanded the wind to bring his daughter to him, and Lindu ascended into the heavens. She was lifted higher

than the Northern Lights could ever go—higher than the Moon and higher than the Sun. She rose above the Pole Star into the uppermost heavens where her father lived.

As she was raised into the heavens, Lindu looked behind her. Her long lace wedding veil trailed behind and spread across the sky. The threads of the veil were turned into a million stars which sparkled in the heavens.

Today Lindu's veil can still be seen in the sky at night. The stars from her veil form the band of light we call the Milky Way.<sup>6</sup>

Lindu loves being in the heavens where she can see and enjoy more worlds than she ever imagined existed. And she continues to take care of her beloved birds. She arranges their routes and watches over their journeys as they fly from north to south and back again.

From time to time, Lindu sees the dancing colors of the Northern Lights. But from her place in the heavens, she doesn't find him as charming as before. And she now understands that he is truly undependable. Someone like that could never help take care of her birds. He would never be there when needed.

"What did I ever see in him?" Lindu wonders. Then she puts him out of her mind as she watches a brand new star appear and sparkle in her long veil.

<sup>6</sup> The Milky Way is made up of stars in our own galaxy.