

LOHENGRIN



RICHARD WAGNER

BERSERKER

BOOKS



“Lohengrin” by Richard Wagner libretto (English)

Contents: Characters; Act One; Act Two; Act Three

CHARACTERS

Henry I, "the Fowler", King of Germany - Bass

Lohengrin - Tenor

Elsa of Brabant - Soprano

Duke Gottfried (Godfrey), her brother

Friedrich (Frederick) von Telramund, a Brabantine count - Baritone

Ortrud, his wife - Soprano

The King's Herald - Bass

Four Noblemen of Brabant - Tenors and Basses

Four Pages - Sopranos and Altos

Saxon and Thuringian Counts and Noblemen. Brabantine Counts and Noblemen. Noblewomen. Pages. Vassals. Ladies. Serfs

Scene of the action: Antwerp, First half of the tenth century

Act One: A plain on the banks of the Scheldt near Antwerp

Act Two: The fortress at Antwerp

Act Three: The bridal chamber; then the plain by the Scheldt

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

(A plain on the banks of the Scheldt near Antwerp. The river curves into the background; the view of it is obstructed on the right by trees, and it is visible again further off as it winds its way into the distance)

(In the foreground king Heinrich is sitting under the Judgement Oak, next to him are Saxon and Thuringian counts, nobles and soldiers comprising the king's levy. Opposite them are Brabantian counts and nobles, soldiers and people. They are headed by Friedrich of Telramund, next to him is Ortrud. The middle ground comprises an open circle. The king's herald and four trumpeters proceed to the middle. The trumpeters play the king's fanfare)

HERALD

Hear ye, counts, nobles and freemen of Brabant!
Heinrich, King of the Germans, has come to this place
to confer with you according to the law of the realm.
Do you willingly obey his command?

BRABANTIANS

We willingly obey his command.

Welcome, welcome, O King, to Brabant!

KING HEINRICH

(standing up)

God greet you, worthy men of Brabant!
Not for nothing have I journeyed here to you!

I come to remind you of the Empire's plight!

Must I first tell of the scourge

that has so often visited German soil from the East?

In the furthest marches of the realm you bade women and children pray:

"Dear Lord, save us from the wrath of the Hungarians!"

But it was I, head of the Empire, who saw fit

to plan an end to such dreadful humiliation;

victory in battle brought me peace

for nine years - this I used to protect the Empire;

I ordered fortified towns and castles to be built

and used the levy as a resistance army.

But now this period is over, the taxes are being denied us

and with threats the enemy is arming itself.

Now it is time to defend the Empire's honour;

East and West, to all I say:

let every acre of German soil put forth troops of solidiers,

never again shall anyone abuse the German Empire!

SAXONS AND THURINGIANS

Let us away! With God for the honour of the German Empire!

THE KING

(sitting down again)

I come to you now, men of Brabant,

to summon you to Mainz, there to join the troops.

How grieved and saddened I am to see

that without a prince you live in discord!

I am told of confusion and wild feuding;
thus I call on you, Friedrich of Telramund!
I know you to be a man of the highest virtue,
speak now, that I may know the reason for this strife.

FRIEDRICH

I thank you, O King, for having come to pass judgement!
I speak the truth, being incapable of deception.
The Duke of Brabant lay upon his death bed
when he assigned his children to my care,
Elsa, the girl, and Gottfried, the boy;
faithfully I tended his great youth,
his life was the jewel of my honour.
Imagine, O King, my grim sorrow,
when I was robbed of this my honour's jewel!
One day Elsa took the boy to the wood for a walk,
but she returned without him;
feigning concern she asked after her brother,
for, having strayed a little from his side,
she could not, so she said, find him again.
All attempts to find the lost youth proved futile;
when I pressed Elsa with threats,
her pale trembling and apprehension
proved to us her terrible crime.

I was seized with a horror of the girl;

the right to her hand, granted me by her father,
I willingly renounced there and then
and took instead a wife who pleased me:

(He introduces Ortrud,
who bows before the king)
Ortrud, scion of Radbod, Prince of Friesland.

(He moves forward a few steps with great ceremony)
Now I bring a charge against Elsa of
Brabant; I accuse her of fratricide.
And I rightfully claim this land for myself,
since I am next in line to the duke
and my wife is of the house that once
gave its princes to these lands.
You hear the charge, O King! Pass rightful judgement!

ALL THE MEN

Ha, Telramund charges her with a dreadful crime!
How this accusation fills me with horror!

THE KING

What a fearful charge you utter!
How could such crime be possible?

FRIEDRICH

My Lord, rapt in dreams is the vain girl
who so arrogantly spurned my hand.
Thus do I accuse her of a secret amour:

she clearly thought that, once rid of her brother,
she as duchess of Brabant
could rightfully refuse the vassal her hand
and openly tend her secret lover.

THE KING

(interrupting the over-zealous Friedrich
with a solemn gesture)

Call the accused!

Let the trial commence!

May God grant me wisdom!

(The herald proceeds solemnly to the middle)

HERALD

Shall trial be held in this place by might and right?

(The King hangs his shield on the oak tree with great ceremony)

THE KING

May I remain unprotected by this shield
until I have passed harsh and compassionate judgement!

ALL THE MEN

(They draw their swords, the Saxons
and Thuringians plunging them into
the ground in front of them, the Brabantians
laying them flat on the ground)

May the sword not return to the scabbard
until it sees justice done through judgement!

HERALD

Where the King's shield hangs,
there shall you now see justice done through judgement!
Thus do I call loudly and clearly:
Elsa, appear at this place!

SCENE TWO

(Elsa appears in a simple white garment: she lingers in the background awhile before moving slowly and timidly towards centre foreground. She is followed by women, also dressed in simple white clothes, but they initially remain in the background at the extreme edge of the Judgement Circle)

MEN

Behold! The accused approaches!

Ah! How resplendent, how pure she looks!

He who dared make such an accusation against her
must be quite sure of her guilt!

THE KING

Are you Elsa of Brabant?

(Elsa nods her head in affirmation)

Do you recognise me as your judge?

(Elsa turns towards the king, looks him
in the eye and, by means of a trusting
gesture, confirms that she does)

Then I further ask you: are you aware of the serious charge
that has been brought against you here?

(Elsa looks at Friedrich and Ortrud,
shudders, bows her head sadly and nods)

What have you to say against the charge?

(Elsa gestures, implying the answer "nothing!")

THE KING

So you admit that you are guilty?

ELSA

(starting sadly
ahead for a while)

My poor brother!

ALL THE MEN

How strange! What peculiar behaviour!

THE KING

Speak Elsa! What have you to confide to me?

ELSA

(quietly transfigured
staring ahead of her)

Lonely, in troubled days

I prayed to the Lord,
my most heartfelt grief

I poured out in prayer.
And from my groans
there issued a plaintive sound
that grew into a mighteous roar
as it echoed through the skies:
I listened as it receded into the distance
until my ear could scarce hear it;
my eyes closed
and I fell into a deep sleep.

ALL THE MEN

How extraordinary! Is she dreaming? Is she enraptured?

THE KING

(as though trying to wake Elsa from the dream)

Elsa, defend yourself before the court!

(Elsa's expression goes from one of dream-like detachment to one of frenzied transfiguration)

ELSA

In splendid, shining armour
a knight approached,
a man of such pure virtue
as I had never seen before:
a golden horn at his side,

leaning on a sword -
thus he appeared to me
from nowhere, this warrior true;
with kindly gestures
he gave me comfort;
I will wait for the knight,
he shall be my champion!

ALL THE MEN

May the grace of Heaven preserve us,
that we may clearly see who is guilty here!

THE KING

Friedrich, you honourable man,

think carefully - whom are you accusing?

FRIEDRICH

Her dreamy state deceives me not;

you hear how she raves about a lover!

I have sound reason to make the accusation I do!

Her crime was reliably testified;

but to have to dispel your doubts with a witness

would truly offend my pride!

Here am I, here is my sword! Who of you

dares fight against my honour?

BRABANTIANS

None of us! We will only fight for you!

FRIEDRICH

And you, O King! Do you remember how I have served you,
how I defeated the wild Dane in battle?

THE KING

Heaven forbid that I should need you to remind me!

I freely admit that you are of the highest virtue;
in nobody's possession but yours
would I wish to know Brabant. -

God alone

must decide in this matter!

ALL THE MEN

Ordeal by battle! Ordeal by battle! Let it begin!

THE KING

I ask you, Friedrich, count of Telramund!

Do you agree to a fight to the death,
to defend your honour in an ordeal by battle?

FRIEDRICH

Yes!

THE KING

And now I ask you, Elsa of Brabant!
Do you agree to let a fight to the death take place here,
to let a champion represent you in an ordeal by battle?

ELSA
(without looking up)

Yes!

THE KING

Whom do you choose to be your champion?

FRIEDRICH

Learn now
the name of her lover!

BRABANTIANS

Pay heed!

ELSA

(She still looks enraptured;
everyone watches her
in expectation)

I will wait for the knight,
he shall be my champion!

(without looking round)

Hear what reward I offer
the one sent by God:
in my father's lands
he shall wear the crown.
I shall consider myself happy
if he takes my possessions -
if he wishes to call me spouse,
I shall give him all that I am!

ALL THE MEN

(to themselves)

A wondrous prize, where it God's to give!
He who fights for it would be wagering a great deal!

THE KING

It is already midday, the sun stands at its zenith:

it is time, let the call go forth!

(The herald comes forward with the four trumpeters; he orders them to the four points of the compass, they proceed to the edge of the Judgement Circle and sound the call)

HERALD

Let him who has come to fight in the trial by combat

for Elsa of Brabant come forward!

(There is a long silence)

(Elsa, who has hitherto been completely calm, now begins to look worried as she waits expectantly)

ALL THE MEN

The calls has died away unanswered!

Things do not bode well for her!

FRIEDRICH

(pointing to Elsa)

Behold, did I accuse her falsely?

I have right on my side!

ELSA

(moving towards the king)

I beseech you, beloved King,
one more call to my knight!

He is surely a long way off and could not hear!

THE KING
(to the herald)

Send out one more call to the trial!

(The herald gives a signal and the trumpeters once again turn to the four points of the compass)

HERALD
Let him who has come to fight in the trial by combat
for Elsa of Brabant come forward!
(Once again there is a long, tense silence)

ALL THE MEN
In dismal silence God passes judgement!

(Elsa sinks to her knees, praying fervently. The women, worried for their mistress, move slightly further into the foreground)

ELSA
You carried my lament to him,
he came to me at your command:
O Lord, tell my knight now

to help me in my need!

Let me see him now as I saw him then,

(with an expression of joyful transfiguration)

as I saw him then, let him be near me!

WOMEN

(sinking to their knees)

Lord! Send her help!

Lord God! Hear us!

(The men standing on the higher ground near the river are the first to witness the arrival of Lohengrin, who is seen in the distance in a barque pulled by a swan. The men in the foreground furthest away from the river bank turn round, initially without leaving their places; their curiosity grows as they look questioningly at those standing on the bank and soon they move from the foreground over to the river to look for themselves)

MEN

Behold! Behold! What strange and wonderous things is this? A swan?

A swan is pulling a barque towards us!

A knight is standing upright in it!

How his armour shines! The eye is dazzled

by such splendour! Behold, he is coming ever closer!

The swan is pulling on a golden chain!

(The last few men hurry over to the background; the foreground is occupied only by the king, Elsa, Friedrich, Ortrud and the women). (From his raised seat the king can see everything; Friedrich and Ortrud are overcome with shock and astonishment; Elsa, who has been listening to the men's cries with increasing rapture, remains in the middle of the stage; she dares not even look round)

MEN

(return to the foreground
in a state of great agitation)

A miracle! A miracle! A miracle has happened,
a miracle never before seen or heard!

WOMEN

We thank you, Lord our God, for protecting this weak woman!

SCENE THREE

(Elsa has turned round and cries out when she sees Lohengrin)

ALL THE MEN AND WOMEN

Greetings, God-sent man!

(The barque, drawn by the swan, reaches the bank in the middle of the background; Lohengrin, dressed in gleaming silver armour, a helmet on his head, a shield on his back and a small golden horn by his side is standing in the boat leaning on his sword. Friedrich looks at Lohengrin in speechless horror. Ortrud, who has

hitherto maintained a cold and arrogant posture, is gripped with terror when she sees the swan. As soon as Lohengrin makes a move to leave the boat, an expectant silence descends on the assembled throng)

LOHENGRIN

(bending down
to the swan)

I thank you, my dear swan!

Go back across the waters

to whence your boat brought me,

return again only to bring us happiness!

Thus will you have carried out your duty faithfully!

Farewell, farewell, my dear swan!

(The swan slowly turns the barque around and swims back up the river. Lohengrin gazes at it wistfully for a while)

MEN AND WOMEN

What sweet and blissful trembling comes over us!

What blessed power holds us spellbound!

How fair and noble to behold is he

whom such a miracle brought ashore!

LOHENGRIN

(leaves the river bank
and proceeds to the foreground)

slowly and solemnly
bowing before the king)

Hail, King Heinrich! May God's blessing
be with your sword!
May your great and glorious name
never vanish from this earth!

THE KING

I thank you! Do I rightly recognise the power
that brought you to this land,
do you come to us as one sent by God?

LOHENGRIN

To stand in combat for a maiden
accused of a great crime
is why I have been sent. Now let me see
whether I am right in coming to her.

(He moves slightly closer to Elsa)

Speak then, Elsa of Brabant:
If I am appointed as your champion
will you without fear or trepidation
entrust yourself to my protection?

ELSA

(All the time she has been looking
at Lohengrin, she has been unable to move,
as if spellbound; but as soon as he
addresses her she seems to wake up and
falls down at his feet, overcome with joy)

My knight, my saviour! Take me to you;
I give to you all that I am!

LOHENGRIN

If I win this fight for you,
do you wish me to become your husband?

ELSA

As surely as I lie at your feet,
so will I freely give you my body and soul.

LOHENGRIN

Elsa, if I am to become your husband,
if I am to protect country and people for you,
if nothing is ever to take me from you,
then you must promise me one thing:
never shall you ask me,

nor trouble yourself to know,
whence I journeyed,
what my name is, or what my origin!

ELSA

(almost unconscious)

Never, my Lord, shall the question come to me!

LOHENGRIN

Elsa! Do you understand what I am saying?

Never shall you ask me
nor trouble yourself to know,
whence I journeyed,
what my name is, or what my origin!

ELSA

(looking up at him with great emotion)

My protector! My angel! My redeemer,
who firmly believes in my innocence!
What crime or doubt could be greater
than that which would rob you of credence?
As truly as you protect me in my need,
so shall I faithfully honour your command!

LOHENGRIN

(deeply moved, he lifts her to his breast

in a transport of joy)

Elsa! I love you!

(Both remain awhile in the same position)

MEN AND WOMEN

What wondrous thing do I see?

Has a spell been cast over me?

I feel my heart fail

at the sight of this noble, blessed man!

(Lohengrin leads Elsa to the king and assigns her to his care before moving solemnly to the middle of the circle)

LOHENGRIN

Hear ye! To all of you, people and nobles alike, I now proclaim:

Elsa of Brabant is free of all guilt!

That your charge was false, Count of Telramund,

will now be shown to you through God's judgement!

BRABANTIAN NOBLES

(first a few, then an increasing number,

whisper to Friedrich)

Stand down from the fight! If you risk it,
you will never win!
He is protected by the highest power,
so of what use is your brave sword?
Stand down! We your loyal friends beseech you!
Defeat, bitter remorse awaits you!

FRIEDRICH

(who has hitherto kept his eye
unwaveringly on Lohengrin,
is gripped with passionate
indecision but finally
makes his mind up)

Sooner dead than a coward!
I know not what magic brought you here,
stranger who stands so bold before me,
but your arrogant threats will never stir me,
for I am not wont to lie.
Thus I will take up the fight with you
and hope for rightful victory!

LOHENGRIN

Command the fight, O King!

(Everyone resumes their previous positions)

THE KING

Come forward, three men for each combatant,
and measure off the battle ring!

(Three Saxons nobles come forward for Lohengrin, three Brabantians for Friedrich; they solemnly pace out the fighting area, marking off a full circle with their spears)

HERALD

(standing in the middle of the circle)

Hear me, listen carefully:

let no man disturb this fight!

Keep away from the battle ring,

for if anyone disrespects the law of peace,

if freeman, he shall pay with his hand,

if serf, he shall pay with his head!

ALL THE MEN

If freeman, he shall pay with his hand,

if serf, he shall pay with his head!

HERALD

(to Lohengrin and Friedrich)

Hear ye likewise, combatants to be judged!

Faithfully respect the law of battle!

Let not the deceit and cunning of magic
spoil the nature of the ordeal!

God will pass rightful judgement,
so trust in Him, not in your own strength!

LOHENGRIN AND FRIEDRICH

(standing opposite each other,
outside the circle)

God will pass rightful judgement on me,
so I shall trust in Him, not in my own strength!

THE KING

(proceeding to the middle
with great ceremony)

My Lord and God, I call upon you

(Everyone bares their head
in deepest reverence)

to be present at this fight!

Proclaim through the sword's victory a verdict
that clearly shows what is deceit and what is truth!
May he who is innocent fight with the arm of a hero,

and may he who is false be sapped of strength!

So help us God in this hour,
for our wisdom is but fooly!

ELSA AND LOHENGRIN

You will now make known your true judgement,
my Lord and God, thus fo I not hesitate!

FRIEDRICH

I faithfully come before you to receive judgement!
Dear Lord, abandon not my honour!

ORTRUD

I rely on his strength,
wherever he fights, it brings him victory!

ALL THE MEN

Give to the innocent's arm the hero's strength,
and take away the strength from the liar:
Make known your true judgement,
O Lord our God, do not hesitate!

WOMEN

Lord my God, give him your blessing!

(Everyone returns to their places, rapt in solemn attention. The six witnesses remain by their spears at the edge of the ring, the rest of the men standing slightly further back. Elsa and the women in the foreground under the oak tree beside the king. At a signal given by the herald, the trumpeters sound the call to battle. Lohengrin and Friedrich finish their preparations for the fight. The king draws his sword and strikes it three times on the shield hanging on the oak. At the sound of the first stroke, Lohengrin and Friedrich take up their respective positions; at the second they draw their swords and adopt the guard position; at the third they begin the fight. After several violent bouts he floors his opponent with one mighty blow. Friedrich tries to stand up again, stumbles back a few steps and falls to the ground)

(As Friedrich does so, the Saxons and Thuringians pull their swords from the ground and the Brabantians likewise seize hold of theirs. The king takes his shield from the oak)

LOHENGRIN

(his sword at Friedrich's throat)

Through God's victory your life is now mine:

(letting him go)

I will spare it you, may you devote it to repentance!

(All the men thrust their swords back into the scabbards. The witness pull their swords from the ground. The nobles and other men joyfully break into what was the fighting area until it is filled with a mass of people)

THE KING

(likewise returning his sword

to its scabbard)

Victory! Victory!

MEN AND WOMEN

Victory! Victory! Victory!

All hail to you, hero!

(The king leads Elsa to Lohengrin)

ELSA

Would that I could find tunes of jubilation

equal to your glory,

worthily to laud you,

tunes rich in the highest praise!

In you I must melt away,

before you I fade into nothingness;

that I may be blissfully happy,

take all that I am!

(She falls upon Lohengrin's breast)

LOHENGRIK

(lifting Elsa from his breast)

I gained victory

through your innocence alone;

now you shall be richly rewarded

for all that you have suffered!

FRIEDRICH

(writhing in anguish on the ground)

Woe, I was beaten by God,
through him has victory eluded me!
I must despair of salvation,
my glory, my honour is no more!

ORTRUD

(furious at seeing Friedrich defeated,
and keeping her sinister eyes
fixed on Lohengrin)

Who is it that beat him
and over whom I am powerless?
Will this man reduce me to despair,
are all my hopes no more?

THE KING AND THE MEN

Ring out, tune of victory,
greet the hero with the highest praise!
Glory be to your journey!
Praise be to your coming!
Hail to your origin,
Protector of the meek!

You have defended
the right of the meek,
praise be to your coming,
all hail to your origin!

We sing the praises of you alone,
our songs ring out to you!
Never again will a knight of your stature
return to these lands!

WOMEN

Would that I could find tunes of jubilation
equal to his glory,
worthily to praise him,
tunes rich in the highest praise!
You have defended
the right of the meek,
praise be to your coming,
all hail to your origin!

(Young Saxon men lift Lohengrin up on his shields and Brabantians lift up Elsa on the king's shield, having first spread it with several cloaks; both are carried off amidst cheers of jubilation. Friedrich falls unconscious at Ortrud's feet)

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

(The fortress at Antwerp. Middle background the Palas [knights' quarters], left foreground the Kemenate [ladies' chambers], right foreground the portal of the minister, exactly behind it the castle gate. It is night. The windows of the Palas are brightly lit; from the building can be heard the sound of triumphal music, horns and trumpets playing merrily into the night. Friedrich and Ortrud are sitting on the steps leading up to the minister portal. Both are dressed in dark, shabby clothes. Ortrud, resting her head in her hands, is staring at the brightly lit windows of the Palas; Friedrich is looking sullenly at the ground. Long, gloomy silence)

FRIEDRICH

(suddenly standing up)

Arise, companion of my shame!

Daybreak must not find us here.

ORTRUD

(without changing position)

I cannot go, I am bound here as if by a spell.

From the splendour of this our enemy's feast

let me suck a terrible, dearly poison

that will end our shame and their joy!

FRIEDRICH

(moving over to Ortrud, darkly)

O fearful woman, what spell binds me

to you still?

Why do I not leave you be

and run away, away

to where my conscience might find peace again!

Through you I lost
my honour, all my glory;
never again shall praise adorn me,
my knighthood is but shame!
I am condemned as an outlaw,
my sword lies smashed,
my coat of arms broken,
and cursed is the house of my fathers!

Wherever I turn
I am shunned, condemned;
lest he be defiled by my countenance,
even the robber flees me!
Would that I had chosen death,

for I am so wretched!

I have lost my honour,
my honour, my honour is no more!

(He falls to the ground, overcome with grief. Music is heard from Palas)

ORTRUD

(still in her first position;
as Friedrich is getting up)

What drives you to such
wild lament?

FRIEDRICH

The fact that I have been robbed of the very weapon

(violently gesturing towards Ortrud)

with which I would strike you down!

ORTRUD

Peace-loving Count
of Telramund! Why do you mistrust me?

FRIEDRICH

You dare ask me? Was it not your evidence, your word
that lured me into accusing the innocent one?
Did you not lie to me, saying that
from your wild castle your own eyes bore witness
to the crime being carried out in the dark wood around you,
that you saw Elsa herself drown her brother
in the pond there? Did you not ensnare
my proud heart by prophesying

that the ancient House of Radbod
would blossom anew and rule in Brabant?
Did you not induce me to renounce the
hand of Elsa, the innocent one, and to take you
for my wife, because you are the last in the Radbod line?

ORTRUD

(softly, but grimly)

Ah, your words cut me to the quick!

(aloud)

Yes, I said and testified all this to you!

FRIEDRICH

And did you not make me, whose name was esteemed,
a man of the very highest virtue,
the shameful companion of your lies?

ORTRUD

Who lied?

FRIEDRICH

You! Did God not pass judgement

and punish me for having done so?

ORTRUD

God?

FRIEDRICH

O horror!

How dreadful his name sounds from your lips!

ORTRUD

Ah, do you call your cowardice God?

FRIEDRICH

Ortrud!

ORTRUD

Do you mean to threaten me? Me, a woman?

O you coward! Had you but addressed such grim
threats to him who now sends you into the misery of exile,
you would have bought victory for ignominy!

Ha! He who knew how to match him would find him

weaker than a child!

FRIEDRICH

The weaker he was,
the greater the might of God in battle!

ORTRUD

The might of God? Ha, ha!
Give me the power and I will surely show you
what a weak god it is that protects him.

FRIEDRICH

(shuddering with fear)

O wild seer, do you mean
by secret means to enchant my reason anew?

ORTRUD

(pointing to the Palas, in which
the lights have been extinguished)

The revellers have lain down to sumptuous rest.
Sit down beside me! The hour has come
for my prophetic eye to enlighten you!

(During the following, Friedrich

moves ever closer to Ortrud,
as if drawn by a mysterious power;
he listens to her attentively)

Do you know who this knight is
who was brought ashore by a swan?

FRIEDRICH

No!

ORTRUD

What would you give to find out
if I told you that, were he forced
to reveal his name and origin,
that strength would vanish
that is granted him by magic alone?

FRIEDRICH

Ah! Now I understand his interdict!

ORTRUD

Listen! Nobody here has the power
to draw that secret from him
save she whom he so strongly forbade

ever to ask him the question.

FRIEDRICH

So Elsa must be brought to the point
where she asks him the question?

ORTRUD

Ha, how quickly, how well you take my meaning!

FRIEDRICH

But how can that be done?

ORTRUD

Listen!

The most important thing is not
to flee this place; so use your wit!
To arouse just suspicion in her,
come forward and accuse him of having used magic
to confound the trial!

FRIEDRICH

Ha! Deception and the cunning of magic!

ORTRUD

Should this fail,
there is always the possibility of using force!

FRIEDRICH

Force?

ORTRUD

Not for nothing am I
versed in the darkest of arts;
so heed what I say to you!
Every creature that is made strong by magic,
should but the smallest part of its body
be torn off, it will immediately
show itself to be powerless as it really is.

FRIEDRICH

Ha, were that true!

ORTRUD

Had you but
cut off a finger during the fight,
even just the joint of a finger,

the knight would have been in your power!

FRIEDRICH

O horror! Ha, what is this that I hear?

I imagined myself to have been beaten by God;

but the trial was confounded by deception,
through magic's cunning I lost my honour!

But I could avenge my shame,

I could prove my honesty?

I could smash the lover's deception

and win back my honour?

O woman, whom I see before me in the night,

if you are deceiving me again, woe betide you! Woe!

ORTRUD

Ha, how you rave! Be calm and collected!

I will teach you the sweet delights of revenge!

(Friedrich slowly sits down beside Ortrud on the steps)

ORTRUD AND FRIEDRICH

May the work of revenge be conjured up

from the wild night of my breast!

You who are lost in sweet sleep,

know that disaster awaits you!

SCENE TWO

(Elsa appears on the balcony, dressed in white; she goes over to the balustrade and leans her head on her hand)

ELSA

Ye heavens, so oft filled
with my sad laments,
now I must gratefully tell you
of the happiness that is mine!

He came through you,
you smiled on his journey,
on wild ocean waves
you faithfully preserved him.

To dry my tears
I have oft implored you;
cool now my cheek
which burns with love!

ORTRUD

It is she!

FRIEDRICH

Elsa!

ORTRUD

She shall curse the hour
in which I now behold her face! Away!
Leave this place awhile!

FRIEDRICH

Why?

ORTRUD

She is for me - her knight is yours!

(Friedrich moves off and disappears into the background)

ORTRUD

(still in the same position)

Elsa!

ELSA

Who calls? How terrible and plaintive

is the sound of my name as it rings out through the night!

ORTRUD

Elsa!

Is my voice so strange to you?

Will you completely disown the poor creature

whom you are casting into the furthest reaches of exile?

ELSA

Ortrud! Is that you? What are you doing here,

unfortunate woman?

ORTRUD

"Unfortunate woman"!

How right you are to call me that!

In the distant solitude of the wood,

where I was living quietly and peacefully,

what did I do to you? What did I do to you?

I was joyless, merely lamenting the misfortune

that has long troubled my family.

What did I do to you? What did I do to you?

ELSA

In God's name, what are you accusing me of?

Was it I who brought you suffering?

ORTRUD

However could you envy me
the happiness of being chosen for the wife
of the man you so gladly scorned?

ESA

Merciful God! What am I to make of this?

ORTRUD

He must have been beguiled by some unhappy madness
to have accused you, the innocent one, of a crime -
now his heart is torn by remorse,
he is damned to grim repentance!

ELSA

God of justice!

ORTRUD

Oh, you are happy!
After a brief, sweetly innocent period of suffering
you now see life smiling upon you;
you may gladly take leave of me,
sending me down the road to death,
lest the grim spectre of my misery

ever visit your feasts again!

ELSA

I would scarce be doing justice to your goodness,

O mighty God who smiles upon me so,

If I were to cast aside the misfortune

that stoops before me now in the dust!

Never! Ortrud! Wait for me!

I will take you in myself!

(She hurries back into the Kementate. - Ortrud springs up from the steps in wild delight)

ORTRUD

Ye gods profaned! Help me now in my revenge!

Punish the ignominy that you have suffered here!

Strengthen me in the service of your holy cause!

Destroy the vile delusions of the apostate!

Woden! I call on you, O god of strength!

Freyja! Hear me, O exalted one!

Bless my deceit and hypocrisy,

that I may be successful in my revenge!

ELSA

(still offstage)

Ortrud, where are you?

(Elsa and two maids appear from the lower door of the Kementate carrying lights)

ORTRUD

(humbly throwing herself before Elsa)

Here at your feet.

ELSA

(starting back in alarm

at the sight of Ortrud)

Dear God! Must I behold you thus,

you whom I had but seen in pride and splendour!

I choke with pity

to see you humbled thus before me!

Stand up! O spare me your supplications!

If you bore me hate, I forgive you;

and what you have already suffered through me

I beg you to forgive me in turn!

ORTRUD

I thank you for showing me such goodness!

ELSA

He who tomorrow is to be called my husband

I shall appeal to his loving nature,
that he may show mercy to Friedrich too.

ORTRUD

You bind me in fetters of gratitude!

ELSA

At dawn let me see you ready -
adorned in splendid garments
you shall accompany me to the minster:
there I shall await my knight,

to become his wife before God!

ORTRUD

How can I ever repay such kindness,
for I am powerless and wretched?
If you allowed me to live with you,
I would always be the beggar!

(drawing closer to Elsa)

I am left but one power,
no law robbed me of it;

through it I could perhaps protect you,
save you from the scourage of remorse!

ELSA

What do you mean?

ORTRUD

Let me warn you

not to put too blind a trust in your happiness;
lest you are ensnared by misfortune,
let me look into the future for you.

ELSA

What misfortune?

ORTRUD

Could you but comprehend
the wondrous origin of this man;
may he never leave you
as he came to you - by magic!

ELSA

(Seized with horror, she turns away

in indignation; then she turns back to Ortrud,
filled with sadness and compassion)

Piteous creature, can you not understand
how a heart can love without harbouring doubts?
Have you never known the happiness
that is given to us by faith alone?

Enter here with me! Let me teach you
to know the sweet bliss of true devotion!
Turn then to the belief that
there is a happiness without regret!

ORTRUD
(aside)

Ha! This pride shall help me
fight her devotion!
Against this I shall turn my weapons,
her arrogance will cause her to repent!

(Ortrud, led by Elsa, feigns hesitation as she enters the small door; the maids light the way and close the door
once everybody is inside. - Dawn begins to break)

FRIEDRICH
(emerging from the background)

Thus misfortune enters this house!

Fulfil, O woman, what your cunning mind has devised;

I feel powerless to stop your work!

The misfortune began with my defeat,

now shall she fall who brought me to it!

Only one thing do I see before me, urging me on:

he who robbed me of my honour shall die!

SCENE THREE

(Once he has spotted the palace that will best hide him from the view of the arriving people, Friedrich steps behind one of the minster buttresses)

(Dawn gradually breaks. Two watches sound the morning fanfare from the tower; an answer is heard from a distant tower. As the watches descend from the tower and open the gate, castle servants emerge from several directions, greet one another and go quietly about their tasks etc. Some draw water from the well in metal vessels, knock on the portal of the Palas and are let in. The portal of the Palas opens again, the royal trumpeters emerge, sound the fanfare then go back into the building. The servants have left the stage. Brabantian soldiers and nobles arrive in increasing numbers, some crossing the courtyard, others coming in through the tower gate. They assemble in front of the minister and greet one another in cheerful excitement)

NOBLES AND SOLDIERS

The dawn fanfare bids us assemble,

the day promises much!

He who here performed such great miracles

will perchance do many more wondrous deeds!

(The herald appears from the Palas and moves onto the terrace in front of it, the four trumpeters preceding him. The royal fanfare is sounded once again and everyone turns towards the background in animated expectation)

HERALD

I hereby make known to you the King's word and wish:
so pay heed to what he bids me tell you!
Friedrich Telramund has been outlawed
for daring to enter the trial by combat untrue.
Whosoever shall harbour him or join him
shall himself be outlawed in accordance with the law of the realm.

MEN

A curse on him who was untrue,
who was judged by God!
May the innocent shun him,
may peace and sleep flee him!

(The trumpeters' call once again brings the people to attention)

HERALD

And further the king proclaims
that the God-sent stranger
whom Elsa wishes to take as her husband,
is to be enfeoffed with the land and crown of Brabant.

But the knight does not wish to be called Duke -
you shall call him Protector of Brabant!

MEN

Great is the long-awaited man!
Hail to him who was sent by God!
We will faithfully serve
the Protector of Brabant!

(another call from the trumpeters)

HERALD

How hear what he bids me tell you:
today he celebrates his wedding feast with you,
but tomorrow you shall come here prepared for battle,
to serve the king as soldiers;
he himself spurns the sweet pleasures of rest,
he will lead you on to enjoy the noble fruits of glory!

(He goes back into the Palas with the four trumpeters)

MEN

Do not delay in going to battle,
the noble one leads you on!
He who fights courageously with the knight

shall see the road to glory smile upon him!

From God is he sent

to make Brabant great!

(As the people surge forward with joy, four nobles, Friedrich's former liegemen, appear in the foreground)

FIRST NOBLE

Now hear, he means to take us from this land!

SECOND NOBLE

Against an enemy who has never yet threatened us!

THIRD NOBLE

Such bold beginnings should not be granted him!

FOURTH NOBLE

Who shall stop him, since he has given the order to leave?

FRIEDRICH

(who has come amongst them unnoticed)

!!

(He bares his head; they recoil in horror)

THE FOUR NOBLES

Ha! Who are you? - Friedrich! Do my eyes deceive me?

You dare show yourself here, the pray of every serf?

FRIEDRICH

I will soon dare even more,

the truth will dawn radiant before your eyes!

He who so boldly commanded you to go to war,

him will I accuse of deceiving God!

THE FOUR NOBLES

What is this I hear? You rave! What is your intent?

Woe unto you! You are lost if the people hear you!

(They push him towards the minster, where they try to hide him from the view of the people. - Four pages proceed from the door of the Kemenate onto the balcony, descend the stairs and take their positions on the terrace in front of the Palas. The assembled throng notices the youths and presses forwards)

PAGES

Make way for Elsa, our lady!

She is going in faith to the minister.

(They press forwards, clearing a broad passage through the retreating nobles, to the minster steps, where they take up their positions. Four other pages proceed solemnly from the Kemenate door onto the balcony and line up to await the procession of ladies whom they are to accompany)

SCENE FOUR

(A long procession of ladies dressed in splendid garments slowly emerges from the door and moves onto the balcony; the procession turns left past the Palas before moving forwards again towards the minster. The ladies take up their positions on the minster steps as they arrive)

NOBLES AND SOLDIERS

(during the procession)

May she be blessed as she proceeds,
she who suffered long in humility!
May God guide her,
may God protect her step!

(The nobles have unwittingly pressed forwards again, but they move back once more as the pages approach, clearing the way for the procession which has arrived in front of the Palas. Elsa, in a sumptuous wedding dress, has appeared in the procession and arrived on the terrace in front of the Palas; a passage been cleared once again and everyone can see Elsa, who lingers awhile)

NOBLES AND SOLDIERS

She approaches, the angelic one,
consumed in a chaste glow!

(Elsa slowly moves

into the foreground

through the avenue of people)

Hail to you, O virtuous one!

Hail, Elsa of Brabant!

(The pages and foremost women have arrived at the minster steps and taken up their positions to watch Elsa enter the church; amongst the women behind her and closing the procession is Ortrud, also sumptuously dressed. The women nearest her are afraid and clearly cannot conceal their indignation. They keep their distance from her, such that she appears to be isolated; the expression on her face is one of increasing wrath. Just as Elsa, hailed loudly by the people, is about to tread on the first step, Ortrud rushes forward. She strides up to the bride and positions herself in front of her on the same step, thus forcing her to move back)

ORTRUD

Back, Elsa! No longer will I suffer

to follow you like a maid!

You shall give me precedence everywhere,

you shall humbly bow down before me!

PAGES AND MEN

What is the woman doing? Back!

ELSA

In God's name! What is this that I see?

What sudden change has come over you?

ORTRUD

Just because I forgot my worth for one single hour,
do you think that I must only crawl before you?
I dare now to revenge my suffering,
I mean to redeem what is due to me!

(General astonishment; the crowd stirs)

ELSA

Woe, did I let myself be led astray by your hypocrisy,
you who stole to me moaning in the night?
How can you arrogantly claim precedence over me,
you, spouse of a man condemned by God?

ORTRUD

(feigning an expression
of deep pain)

False judgement may have banished my husband,
but his name was honoured throughout the land;
he was called the One of highest virtue,
his brave sword was known and feared.
But your husband, pray, who here knows him?

You yourself are unable to utter his name!

MEN, WOMEN AND PAGES

What does she say? Ha, what does she proclaim?

She blasphemes! Silence her tongue!

ORTRUD

Can you utter it, can you tell us

whether he is of worthy and noble descent?

Or whence the waters brought him to you,

when he shall leave you again, and whither he shall go?

No, you cannot!

For to do so would cause him great anguish -

thus did the guileful knight

forbid the question!

MEN, WOMEN AND PAGES

Ha, does she speak the truth? What terrible charges!

She slanders him! How dare she?

ELSA

(after the initial shock,

she has regained her composure)

You blasphemers! Dastardly woman!

Hear the answer that I venture to give you!

So pure and noble is his being,
so virtuous is the distinguished man,
that he shall be smitten with eternal misfortune
who dares to doubt his sending!

MEN

Indeed! Indeed!

ELSA

Did not my worthy champion, with the help of God,
beat your husband in battle?

(to the people)

Pray tell, all ye who are here present,
which of the two is innocent?

MEN, WOMEN AND PAGES

Only he! Only he! Your champion alone!

ORTRUD

Ha, the innocence of you champion
would soon be tarnished
if he had to tell of the magic
that gives him such power!
If you do not dare ask him,

we will all rightsully believe
that you yourself are torn with worry,
that his innocence is not what it seems!

WOMEN

(supporting Elsa)

Help her against the loathsome woman's hatred!

(The Palas doors open, the four trumpeters emerge and sound the fanfare)

MEN

(looking towards the background)

Make way! Make way! The King approaches!

SCENE FIVE

(The king, Lohengrin and the Saxon counts and nobles have emerged from the Palas with great ceremony; the procession is broken up by the disturbance in the foreground. The king and Lohengrin force their way through the confusion in the foreground)

BRABANTIANS

Hail! Hail to the King!

Hail to the Protector of Brabant!

THE KING

What is this dispute?

ELSA

(She rushes over to Lohengrin

in a state of great agitation)

My Lord! O my Master!

LOHENGRIN

What is it?

THE KING

Who, this procession to the church

dares disturb?

THE KING'S RETINUE

What is this dispute that we have heard?

LOHENGRIN

(noticing Ortrud)

What do I see? That unholy woman near you?

ELSA

My deliverer! Protect me from this woman!

Chide me if I have been disobedient to you!

I saw her grieving in front of this portal,
and took her in that she might forget her misery.

Now see what dreadful recompense she pays my goodness:

she chides me for trusting you too much!

LOHENGRIN

(giving Ortrud a steadfast,

damning look;

she is unable to move)

You fearful woman, depart from her side!

You will never be victorious here!

(turning tenderly to Elsa)

Tell me, Elsa,

did she manage to poison your heart?

(Weeping, Elsa hides her face in his breast)

LOHENGRIN

(lifts her head
and points to the minster)

Come, shed these tears there in joy!

(He turns back to Elsa and the king, and leads the procession towards the minster; everybody prepares to follow in an orderly fashion)

(Friedrich appears on the minster steps; the women and pages withdraw in horror when they recognise him)

FRIEDRICH

O King! Princes beguiled by deception! Stop!

THE KING

What does he want here?

MEN

What does he want here? Cursed one! Leave this place!

FRIEDRICH

Listen to me!

THE KING

Back! Leave this place!

MEN

Away! Or you will surely die!

FRIEDRICH

Listen to me, for you have done me a dreadful wrong!

THE KING

Away!

MEN

Away! Leave this place!

FRIEDRICH

The trial by combat was defamed, deceived!

You are beguiled by the cunning of magic!

MEN

Seize the wretch!

THE KING

Seize the wretch!

MEN

Listen! He blasphemes!

(They rush upon him
from all sides)

FRIEDRICH

(making a desperate effort to be heard,
he keeps his eyes fixed on Lohengrin
and ignores the people
pressing towards him)

He whom I see in splendour before me,
him do I accuse of magic!

(Those pressing forwards
are startled by his words
and finally pay attention)

May the power he won through cunning
be scattered as dust before God's breath!
How carelessly you proceeded with the trial
that yet robbed me of my honour,
for you spared him one question
when he came to do battle!
You shall not prevent that question now,
for I shall put it to him:

(assuming a domineering mien)

His name, station and honour
I ask him to reveal before all here present!
(The crowd stirs, deeply shocked)

Who is this who sailed ashore
drawn by a wild swan?
He who avails himself of such magical creatures,
his purity do I consider deception!
Now shall he answer the charge;
if he can, then I received just punishment -
but if he cannot, you shall see
that his innocence is not what it seems!

(Shocked and expectant, everyone looks at Lohengrin)

THE KING, MAN,
WOMEN AND PAGES

What serious charges! How will he answer them?

LOHENGRIN

I need not stand here and justify myself to you
who so forgot his honour!

I can fend off the doubts of the wicked,
never shall innocence succumb to them!

FRIEDRICH

Since he does not consider me worthy,
I call upon you, your Majesty!
Will he say that you too are ignoble
and refuse to answer your question?

LOHENGRIN

Yes, I can resist even the King,
and the highest counsel of princes!
The burden of doubt will not trouble them,
they saw my good deed!
Only one person must I answer:
Elsa -

(Lohengrin stops in consternation as he turns to Elsa and notices that, with heaving breast, she is standing ahead of her, torn by an inward struggle)

LOHENGRIN

Elsa! How she trembles!

I see her brooding wildly!

Has the lying tongue of hatred beguiled her?

O Heaven, protect her heart from danger!

May the innocent one never be plagued with doubts!

FRIEDRICH AND ORTRUD

I see her brooding wildly,

doubt is stirring within her breast!

he who caused me distress by coming to this land,

he is vanquished once the question is put to him!

THE KING AND ALL THE MEN

What secret must the knight harbour?

If it causes him anguish, may his tongue guard the secret!

We will protect him, the noble one, from danger;

he proved his worth to us through his deed.

ELSA

(oblivious to what is happening

around her, staring ahead)

The secret he conceals would bring him disaster
if he revealed it here to all present;
how woefully ungrateful I should be to betray my saviour
by forcing him to reveal it.
If I knew his lot, I would keep it secret!
Yet my breast is torn with doubt!

THE KING

Great hero, boldly answer the disloyal one!
You are too noble to shy away from his accusations!

MEN

(pressing towards Lohengrin)

We stand with you, never shall we regret
that we recognised you to be a true hero!
Reach us your hand! We faithfully believe
that your name is noble, even if it is never uttered!

LOHENGRIN

You knights shall not regret believing in me,
even if my name and origin are never uttered!

(The men form a circle round Lohengrin, who gives his hand to each one. As he moves into the background, Friedrich pushes through to Elsa. Overcome with worry, confusion and shame, she has not yet dared look at Lohengrin; and still struggling with herself, she is standing alone in the foreground)

FRIEDRICH

(bending towards Elsa)

Trust me! Allow me to tell of a way
of being sure!

ELSA

(shocked, but softly)

Away from me!

FRIEDRICH

Let me take from him but the smallest part,
the tip of his finger, and I swear to you
that what he is keeping from you, you shall clearly see before you,
and, faithful to you, he shall never leave your side!

ELSA

Ha! Never!

FRIEDRICH

I shall be near you tonight, -
just call, and it will be done quickly and painlessly.

LOHENGRIN

(quickly moving to the foreground)

Elsa, who are you talking to?

(Elsa, with an expression of pained, desperate doubt, turns away from Friedrich and sinks at Lohengrin's feet, deeply shaken)

LOHENGRIN

(to Friedrich and Ortrud)

Away from her, cursed ones!

May I never see

either of you near her again!

(Friedrich make a gesture

of bitter rage)

Elsa, arise! I your hand,

in your devotion lies the pledge of all happiness!

Does the force of doubt not leave in peace?

Do you wish to put the question to me?

ELSA

(deeply agitated and in a state

of confused embarrassment)

My deliverer, who brought me salvation!

My knight, in whom I must melt away!

High above the force of all doubt

shall my love stand.

(She sinks upon his breast)

(Organ music is heard from the minster)

LOHENGRIN

Hail to you, Elsa! Let us now go before God!

MEN

Lo, he is sent from God!

WOMEN AND PAGES

Hail! Hail!

(Lohengrin solemnly leads Elsa past the nobles to the king. As they pass, the men respectfully make way for them)

MEN

Hail to you! Hail Elsa of Brabant!

(Led by the king,
Lohengrin and Elsa move slowly
towards the minster)

May you be blessed as you proceed!
May God be with you!

MEN, WOMEN AND PAGES

Hail to you, virtuous one!
Hail Elsa of Brabant!

(As the king reaches the top step with the couple, Elsa turns emotionally to Lohengrin, and he takes her in his arms. As they embrace, Elsa glances apprehensively down the right and side of the steps and sees Ortrud, who has raised her arm as if she were sure of victory; Elsa is alarmed and looks away. Led by the king, Lohengrin and Elsa walk towards the minster door)

ACT THREE

SCENE ONE

(The introductory music depicts the sumptuous splendour of the wedding feast. the bridal chamber, in the middle background the richly adorned nuptial bed; a low chuch under the open bay window. Music off-stage; the singing is first distant, then it draws closer)

BRIDAL SONG

(of the men and women)

Faithfully guided, draw near
to where the blessing of love shall preserve you!
Triumphant courage, the reward of love,

joins you in faith as the happiest of couples!

Champion of youth, proceed!

Jewel of youth, proceed!

Flee now the splendour of the wedding feast,
may the delights of the heart be yours!

(Doors are opened)

This sweet-smelling room, decked for love,
now takes you in, away from the splendour.

Faithfully guided, draw now near
to where the blessing of love shall preserve you!
Triumphant courage, love so pure,
joins you in faith as the happiest of couples!

(The two processions meet in the middle of the stage and Elsa is led to Lohengrin by the women; they embrace and remain standing in the middle. Pages take off Lohengrin's sumptuous outer garments before removing his sword, which they place on the couch; women likewise divest Elsa of her magnificent outer garments)

(Meanwhile, eight women slowly surround Lohengrin and Elsa)

EIGHT WOMEN

(after walking round them)

As God blessed you in happiness,
so do we bless you in joy.

(They walk round them a second time)

Watched over by love's happiness,
may you long remember this hour!

(The king embraces and blesses Lohengrin and Elsa)

(The pages give the signal to leave. The processions form once again and, as the following is sung, pass by the newly-weds, the men filing out of the room to the right, the women to the left)

BRIDAL SONG

Faithfully guarded, remain behind
where the blessing of love shall preserve you!
Triumphant courage, love and happiness
join you in faith as the happiest of couples.
Champion of youth, remain here!
Jewel of youth, remain here!
Flee now the splendours of the wedding feast,
may the delights of the heart be yours!
This sweet-smelling room, decked for love,
has now taken you, away from the splendour.

(Both processions leave the stage;
the doors are closed by the last pages
as they go out. The singing recedes
ever further into the distance)

Faithfully guarded, remain behind,
where the blessing of love shall preserve you!
Triumphant courage, love and happiness
join you in faith as the happiest of couples.

(Once the processions have left, Elsa falls upon Lohengrin's breast, overcome with happiness. As the singing fades away, Lohengrin sits down on the couch near the window and gently draws Elsa to him)

SCENE TWO

LOHENGRIN

The sweet song fades; we are alone,
alone for the first time since we met.
Now we are cut off from the world,
no eavesdropper shall hear the salutations of the heart.
Elsa, my wife! Sweet, pure bride!
Tell me now whether you are happy!

ELSA

How unfeeling it would be of me to say I was merely happy,
when I am filled with heavenly joy!
As I feel my heart go out to you,
I breathe delights that God alone bestows.

LOHENGRIN

If, O fair one, you are able to say you are happy,
then you fill me too with heavenly joy!

As I feel my heart go out to you,
I breathe delights that God alone bestows;
How noble is the nature of our love!
Though we never met, we sensed each other;
I was chosen to be your champion,
love paved my way to you:
your eyes told me that you were free of guilt -
your countenance compelled me to serve your grace.

ELSA

But I had already seen you,
for you had come to me in a wondrous dream;
when in waking hours I saw you standing before me,
I knew that you had come following God's counsel.
I wanted to dissolve before your gaze,
like a stream I wanted to wind around your feet,
like a sweet-smelling flower in the meadow
to incline entraptured towards the fall of your feet.
Is this merely love? What shall I call
this word, inexpressibly divine
as your name - that I, alas, may never know,
that I may never use to address my most revered!

LOHENGRIN

Elsa!

ELSA

How sweet the sound of my name from your lips!

Will you not grant me the fair sound of yours?

Only when we are led to the stillness of love
shall you allow my lips to pronounce it.

LOHENGRIN

My dear wife!

ELSA

All alone, when everyone is asleep;
never shall it be brought to the ears of the world!

LOHENGRIN

(embracing her lovingly
and pointing through the open window
to the flower-filled garden)

Can you not smell these sweet fragrances?
How wondrously they delight the senses!
Misteriously they approach through the air,
and unquestioningly I give myself over to their magic.

Thus was the magic that joined me to you,
when I first saw you, O fair one;
I did not need to ask where you came from,
my eyes saw you - and my heart understood at once.
Just as these fragrances wondrously beguile my sense,
though they approach me from the enigmatic night,

so did your innocence enchant me,
even if I did find you suspected of a great crime.

(Elsa hides her embarrassment as she humbly presses herself to him)

ELSA

Oh, could I but prove myself worthy of you,
would that I could do more than simply melt away in you;
could but a service join me to you,
could I but see myself suffer for you!
As you found me accused of a great crime,
oh would that I knew you to be in need;
that I might courageously carry a burden,
would that I knew of a trouble that threatens you!
Is this the nature of the secret
that your tongue keeps from the world?

Perhaps misfortune awaits you

if it is revealed to the whole world?
If this were so and if I knew it,
if I had it within my power,
no threats would ever wrest it from me,
for you I would go to my death!

LOENGRIN

My beloved!

ELSA

Oh make me proud through your confidence,
lest I appear utterly unworthy!
Let me know your secret,
that I may clearly see who you are!

LOHENGRIN

Ah, hush, Elsa!

ELSA

To my devotion
reveal your noble worth!
Tell me without remorse whence you came -
may the power of silence be proved through me!

LOHENGRIN

(sternly and gravely,
moving back a few steps)

You have already to thank me for the highest confidence,
since I gladly belived the oath you made;
if you never falter before my command,
I shall consider you to be above all other women!
(turning back to Elsa,
he addresses her tenderly)

Come to me, O sweet, pure one!
Be near my ardent heart,
that the eyes in which I saw all my happiness
may shine upon me softly!

Oh grant me that in sweet raptures
I may breathe in your breath:
oh, let me clasp you to me firmly,
that I may be happy in you!
Your love must be the highest recompense
for that which I left behind for your sake;
no destiny in all God's world
could have been nobler than mine.
If the king offered me his crown,
I should rightfully reject it.
The only reward for my sacrifice
is your steadfast love!

Thus do I ask you to put doubt from your mind,
may your love be my proud recompense!
For I come not from darkness and suffering,
I come from splendour and delight!

ELSA

Dear God, what is this that I hear?
What testimony have you spoken?
You meant to enchant me,
but now misery is my lot!
The destiny that you left behind
was your greatest happiness;
you came to me from a place of delights
and you long to return there!
How am I, poor wretch, to believe
that my devotion will ever satisfy you?
The day will come when I am robbed of you
because you regret your love for me!

LOHENGRIN

Do not torture yourself so!

ELSA

It is you who are torturing me!

Am I to count the number of days
that you will remain with me still?
My worrying about how long you will stay
will drain the colour from my cheek
then you will hurry from me,
and I will remain here in misery!

LOHENGRIN

Never shall your charm diminish
if you remain untainted by doubt!

ELSA

Ah, what power have I
to bind you to me?
Full of magic is your being,
a miracle brought you here;
how can I ever hope to be happy,
how can I ever be sure of you?

(She starts in agitation
and pauses, as if listening)

Did you hear nothing? Did you not hear anyone approaching?

LOHENGRIN

Elsa!

ELSA

Ah, no!

(staring ahead of her)

Yes, there - the swan - the swan!

There he comes, swimming across the water -
you call him - he brings the boat!

LOHENGRIN

Elsa! Stop! Calm your madness!

ELSA

Nothing can bring me peace,
nothing can tear me from my madness,
save - even if it should cost me my life -
knowing who you are!

LOHENGRIN

Elsa, what do you venture to say?

ELSA

Ill-fatedly noble man!

Hear the question I must ask you!

Tell me your name!

LOHENGRIN

Stop!

ELSA

Whence did you come?

LOHENGRIN

Woe unto you!

ELSA

What is your origin?

LOHENGRIN

Woe unto us, what have you done?

(Elsa is standing in front of Lohengrin, who has his back turned to the room, and sees Friedrich and his four men appear through a back door with swords drawn)

ELSA

Save yourself! Your sword, your sword!

(She quickly passes Lohengrin the sword which is lying on the couch; she is holding the scabbard, so he is able to draw quickly. Friedrich approaches with his sword raised, and Lohengrin kills him with one mighty blow. The horrified nobles drop their swords, run to Lohengrin and fall to their knees before him. Elsa, who has thrown herself at Lohengrin's breast, sinks slowly to the floor in a faint)

LOHENGRIN

(He alone
is left standing)

Woe, now all our happiness is gone!

(He bends down to Elsa,
gently lifts her up
and lays her on the couch)

ELSA

(opening her eyes)

Eternal God, have mercy on me!

(Dawn is beginning to break; the candles have burnt lower and are about to go out. Lohengrin signals to the four nobles, and they stand up)

LOHENGRIN

Take the slain man before the king, that he may be judged!

(The nobles pick up Friedrich's body and leave through a door in the background. Lohengrin pulls a bell-cord and four women enter from the left)

LOHENGRIN

(to the women)

Adorn Elsa, my dear wife, prepare her

to be led before the king!

There will I answer her,

that she may know her husband's origin!

(With an expression of sad solemnity, he disappears through the door on the right. The women lead Elsa, who is incapable of moving, off to the left. The dawn sky is slowly brightening; the candles have gone out. Down in the courtyard heralds sound a trumpet call)

SCENE THREE

(The plain by the Scheldt, as in Act One. Dawn gradually gives way to full daylight. A count with his retinue of troops appears right foreground, dismounts from his horse and hands it to a serf. Two pages bring him his shield and spear. He plants his standard in the ground and his troops assemble round it. - As a second count appears in the field, trumpets are heard announcing the arrival of a third. A third count appears with his troops. They too assemble round their standard; the counts and nobles greet one another before examining and praising their arms etc. A fourth count appears with his retinue from the right and positions himself middle background. When the king's trumpets are heard from the left, everyone hurries to assemble round the standards. The king with his Saxon levy enters from the left)

ALL THE MEN

(as the king arrives

under the oak)

Hail King Heinrich!

King Heinrich hail!

THE KING

I thank you, good men of Brabant!
How my heart shall swell with pride
if on every acre of German soil I find
such mighteous throngs of troops!
Let the Empire's enemy now approach,
we will meet him with courage:
from the barren wastes of the East
he shall never dare attack again!
For German soil the German sword!
Thus shall the Empire's might be proved!

ALL THE MEN

For German soil the German sword!
Thus shall the Empire's might be proved!

THE KING

Where now is he whom God sent
to make Brabant great and glorious?

(There is a disturbance in the crowd; the four Brabantian nobles bring in Friedrich's covered body on a bier and lay it down in the middle of the stage. People stare at one another questioningly)

ALL

What do they bring? What does this mean?

They are Telramund's men!

THE KING

Whom do you bring here? What am I about to see?

The sight of you fills me with horror!

THE FOUR NOBLES

This is the wish of the Protector of Brabant;

he will tell you who this is!

(Elsa appears, followed by a large retinue of women. She is unsure of her step as she slowly crosses to the foreground)

MEN

Behold, Elsa the virtuous approaches!

How pale and melancholy she looks!

THE KING

(moving over to Elsa

and leading her

to a high seat opposite him)

How sad you look!

Does the departure affect you so deeply?

(Elsa tries to look up, but she cannot)

(There is a disturbance in the background. Voices are heard)

VOICES

Make way for the hero of Brabant!

ALL THE MEN

Hail to the hero of Brabant!

(The King has resumed his place beneath the oak tree. - Lohengrin, carrying exactly the same weapons as in Act One, appears alone and proceeds gravely and solemnly to the foreground)

THE KING

Hail to your coming, worthy knight!

Those whom you so faithfully called to war

await you, eager to do battle,

confident of victory under you.

BRABANTIAN

We await you, eager to do battle,

confident of victory under you.

LOHENGRIN

My Lord and King, hear my words:
those brave knights whom I have called,
I cannot lead them into battle!

(Everyone expresses great consternation)

ALL THE MEN

God help us! What cruel words he speaks!

LOHENGRIN

I have not come here as a brother-in-arms;
hear me now as a plaintiff before you!

(He uncovers Friedrich's body;
everybody turns away
in horror)

(Solemnly, before the dead body)
Firstly I bring a complaint before you,
and ask you to pass rightful judgement:
since this man attacked me in the night,
say whether I was right to slay him?

THE KING AND ALL THE MEN

(solemnly stretching out their hands
towards the body)

As your hand struck him down on earth,
so shall God punish him in Heaven!

LOHENGRIN

Secondly, you shall hear another charge:
before all here present I now complain
that the woman whom God made my wife
has let herself be tricked into betraying me!

THE KING

Elsa! How could you do such a wrong?

MEN

Elsa! How could that happen?
How could you do such a wrong?

WOMEN

(looking at Elsa,
reproachfully)
Woe unto you, Elsa!

LOHENGRIN

You all heard her promise me
that she would never ask who I am!
But now she has broken her solemn vow,
her heart has succumbed to perfidious counsel!
(Everyone expresses deep shock)
That the wild questionings of her doubt might now be stilled,
I shall no longer withhold the answer:
I rightly refused to yield to the enemy's entreaties,
but now I must reveal my name and origin.

(His countenance grows
ever more transfigured)

Judge now whether I must shy away from the day:
before all here present, before King and Empire,
I now faithfully reveal my secret.

(standing up straight)

Hear now whether or not I am equal to you in nobility!

THE KING AND ALL THE MEN

What incredible thing must I now learn?
Oh could he but spare himself this enforced proclamation!

LOHENGRIN

(looking ahead,
solemnly transfigured)

In a far-off land, inaccessible to your steps,
there is a castle by the name of Montsalvat;
a light-filled temple stands within it,
more beautiful than anything on earth;
therein is a vessel of wondrous blessing
that is watched over as a sacred relic:
that the purest of men might guard it,
it was brought down by a host of angels;
every year a dove descends from Heaven
to fortify its wondrous power:
it is called the Grail, and the purest, most blessed faith
is imparted through it to the Brotherhood of Knights.
Whosoever is chosen to serve the Grail
is armed by it with heavenly power;
the darts of evil prove powerless against him,
once he has seen it, the shadow of death flees him.
Even he who is sent by it to a distant land,
appointed as a champion of virtue,
will not be robbed of its holy power,
provided that he, as its knight, remains unrecognised there.
For so wondrous is the blessing of the Grail
that when it is revealed it shuns the eye of the uninitiated;
thus no man should doubt the knight,
for if he is recognised, he must leave you.

Hear how I reward the forbidden question!

I was sent to you by the Grail:
my father Parzival wears its crown,
I its knight - am called Lohengrin.

ALL THE MEN AND WOMEN

To hear him thus attest his sacred origin
causes my eyes to brim with tears of blessed joy!

ELSA

(devastated)

I swoon! What dreadful darkness!
I gasp! I gasp for air, wretch that I am!

(She is about to collapse when
Lohengrin catches her in his arms)

LOHENGRIN

O Elsa! What have you done to me?
When I first set eyes upon you
I felt myself overwhelmed with love for you
and I quickly recognised a new happiness:
the noble might, the wonder of my origin,
the strength granted me by my secret,

all these I wanted to dedicate to serving the purest of hearts:

why did you force me to reveal my secret?

Now, alas, I must be parted from you!

THE KING AND ALL THE MEN

Woe! O woe! Must you leave us,

you noble, God-sent man?

If Heaven's blessing flee us,

where shall we find comfort when you are gone?

ELSA

My husband! No! I will not let you leave this place!

Remain here, that you might witness my repentance!

You must not escape my bitter repentance,

I lie before you, that you may punish me!

WOMEN

Woe, now he must leave you!

LOHENGRIN

I must, I must! My sweet wife!

The Grail is already angry that I have not returned!

ELSA

If you are truly as divine as I believed,

banish not God's mercy from your heart!

If this most wretched of women expiates her great sin in misery,
let not your gracious presence flee her!
Do not repudiate me, however great my crime,
Do not leave me, oh do not leave me, most wretched of women!

LOHENGRIN

There is but one punishment for your crime!
Alas! I, as you, feel its cruel pain!
We must be parted, separated:
this must be the punishment, this the atonement!

(Elsa falls back with a cry)

THE KING AND THE NOBLES

(crowding around Lohengrin)

Stay, do not leave this place!
Your men await you, O leader!

LOHENGRIN

Hear me, O King! I cannot lead you!
If, now that he has been recognised, the knight of the Grail
should prove disobedient by going into battle with you,
he would be divested of all human strength!
But, mighty King, this do I foretell:
a great victory awaits you, O pure one!
Never, not even in the most distant future,

shall the hordes from the East rise up in victory against Germany!

(General excitement. From the
background is heard the cry:)

The swan! The swan!

(The swan is seen on the river, pulling behind it the barque, just as it had done when Lohengrin first appeared)

MEN AND WOMEN

The swan! The swan!

Behold, it approaches once again!

The swan! Woe, it approaches!

ELSA

(Waking up from her dazed state,
she sits up in the seat
and looks over towards the river bank)

O horror! Ah, the swan!

(She remains sitting up in the same position
as if frozen)

LOHENGRIN

(touched)

The Grail sends for the one who is late in returning!

(Everybody looks on in tense
expectation as he goes over
to the bank; he bends down to the swan
and looks at it wistfully)

My dear swan!

Ah, how gladly I would have spared you
this last, sad journey!
At the end of a year
your time of service would have come to an end -
then, freed by the power of the Grail,
you would have appeared to me in a different form!

(Wracked with grief,
he turns back to Elsa,
who is standing in the foreground)

O Elsa! I had longed to witness
just one year of happiness by your side!
Then your brother, whom you thought dead, would have returned,
accompanied by the blessed retinue of the Grail!

(All express their astonishment)

LOHENGRIN

(hands Elsa his horn,
his sword and his ring)

When he comes home, I shall be far away;
give him this horn, this sword and this ring.
The horn shall bring him soccour in danger,
the sword shall bring him victory in wild battle;
but the ring shall remind him of me,
who once freed you too from shame and need!

(He repeatedly kisses
Elsa, who is incapable
of speech)

Farewell! Farewell! Farewell, my sweet wife!
Farewell! The Grail will be angry with me if I stay longer!

(Elsa has been clinging desperately to Lohengrin; finally she loses her strength and sinks into the arms of the women; Lohengrin leaves her with them and hurries over to the river bank)

THE KING, MEN AND WOMEN

Woe! Woe! You noble, distinguished man!
What terrible distress you cause us!

ORTRUD

(she comes to the foreground)

gesturing jubilantly)

Go home! Go home, you proud knight,
that I may jubilantly tell the foolish girl
who it was that brought you in the boat!
By the chain that I wrapped around him
I clearly recognised this swan:
he is the heir of Brabant!

ALL

Ah!

ORTRUD

(to Elsa)

Thank you for driving away the knight!
Now the swan will lead him home:
if the hero had stayed any longer,
he would have freed the brother too!

ALL

Loathsome woman! Ha, what a crime
you have confessed to in your brazen scorn!

ORTRUD

Learn how the gods take vengeance on you
who no longer worship them!

(She remains standing, wildly ecstatic. Lohengrin, who has arrived at the river bank, has heard Ortrud's every word; he solemnly sinks to his knees in silent prayer. Everybody looks at him in tense expectation. The white dove of the Grail descends and hovers over the barque. Lohengrin sees it; with a look of gratitude he jumps up and frees the swan of the chain, whereupon it sinks beneath the waves. In its place Lohengrin brings ashore a handsome youth in shining silver armour - it is Gottfried)

LOHENGRIN

Behold the Duke of Brabant!

He shall be your leader!

(When Ortrud sees Gottfried, she falls to the ground. Lohengrin quickly jumps into the boat and is immediately drawn away by the dove, who has taken hold of the chain. Elsa, transfigured in a last moment of joy, looks at Gottfried, who moves forwards and bows before the king. Everyone looks at him in joyous amazement, the Brabantians sink to their knees in homage before him. Gottfried then rushes into Elsa's arms. Elsa, after a brief moment of rapture, quickly turns her gaze to the river bank, but she can no longer see Lohengrin.)

ELSA

My husband! My husband!

(Lohengrin is visible again in distance; he is standing in the barque, his head sunk in sorrow on his shield. Elsa, whom Gottfried is holding in his arms, slowly sinks lifeless to the ground. Lohengrin is seen receding into the distance)

BERSERKER

BOOKS

