

DAS RHEINGOLD

by Richard Wagner

Characters

WUOLINDE, a Rhine daughter (soprano)
WELLGUNDE, a Rhine daughter (soprano)
FLOSSHILDE, a Rhine daughter (mezzo-soprano)
ALBERICH, king of the Nibelungs (bass-baritone)
FRICKA, goddess of marriage (mezzo-soprano)
WOTAN, ruler of the gods (bass-baritone)
FREIA, goddess of youth and beauty (soprano)
FASOLT, a giant (baritone)
FAFNER, a giant, brother of Fasolt (bass)
FROH, the fair god (tenor)
DONNER, god of thunder (baritone)
LOGE, half-god of fire (tenor)
MIME, brother of Alberich (tenor)
ERDA, earth mother, goddess of wisdom (contralto)

PRELUDE AND SCENE ONE

At the bottom of the Rhine (Greenish twilight, lighter above, darker below. The upper part of the scene is filled with moving water, which restlessly streams from right to left. Toward the bottom, the waters resolve themselves into a fine mist, so that the space, to a man's height from the stage, seems free from the water, which floats like a train of clouds over the gloomy depths. Everywhere are steep points of rock jutting up from the depths and enclosing the whole stage; all the ground is broken up into a wild confusion of jagged pieces, so that there is no level place, while on all sides darkness indicates other deeper fissures.) (The curtain rises. Waters in motion. Woglinde circles with graceful swimming motions around the central rock.)

Woglinde

Weia! Waga! Wandering waters,
swing ye our cradle! wagala weia!
walala, weiala weia!

Wellgunde

(from above)

Woglinde, watchest alone?

Woglinde

If Wellgunde came we were two.

Wellgunde

(dives down to the rock.)

How safe is thy watch?

Woglinde

(eludes her by swimming)

Safe from thy wiles!

(They playfully chase one another.)

Flosshilde

(from above)

Heiaha weia! heedless wild watchers!

Wellgunde

Flosshilde swim! Woglinde flies:

help me to hinder her flying!

(Flosshilde dives down between them.)

Flosshilde

The sleeping gold badly ye guard!
Better beset the slumberer's bed,
or both will pay for your sport!

(With merry cries they swim apart. Flosshilde tries to catch first one and then the other; they elude her and then together chase her and dart laughing and playing like fish between the rocks.)

(From a dark chasm Alberich climbs up one of the rocks. He remains watching the water-maidens with increasing pleasure.)

Alberich

Hehe! ye nixies!

(The maidens stop playing on hearing Alberich's voice.)

How ye delight me, daintiest folk!
From Nibelheim's night fain would I come,
would ye turn but to me!

Woglinde

Hei! Who is there?

Wellgunde

A voice in the dark.

Flosshilde

Look who is below!

(They dive deeper down and see the Nibelung.)

Woglinde, Wellgunde

Fie! Thou grisly one!

Flosshilde

(swimming quickly up)

Look to the gold!

Father warned us such foe to fear.

(The two others follow her, and all three gather quickly around the middle rock.)

Alberich

You, above there!

Rhine Daughters

What wouldst thou below there?

Alberich

Spoil I your sport,
if still I stand here and gaze?

Dive ye but deeper, with you
fain would a Nibelung dally and play.

Woglinde

Would he be our playmate?

Wellgunde

Doth he but mock?

Alberich

How bright and fair in the light ye shine!
Fain are my arms to enfold a maiden so fair,
would she come to me here!

Flosshilde

I laugh at my fear:
the foe is in love!

Wellgunde

The languishing imp!

Woglinde

Let us go near him!

(Woglinde lets herself sink to the top of the rock, the foot of which Alberich has reached.)

Alberich

One sinks down to me.

Woglinde

Come close to me here!

(Alberich climbs with imp-like agility, but with frequent checks, to the top of the rock.)

Alberich

(hurriedly)

Loathsome, slimy, slippery pebbles!

I cannot stand!

My hands and my feet cannot fasten or hold on
the treacherous smoothness!

Water drops fill up my nostrils ...
accursed sneezing!

(He has come near Woglinde.)

Woglinde

(laughing)

Sneezing tells of my love's approach!

Alberich

My sweetheart be, thou loveliest child!
(He tries to embrace her.)

Woglinde*(avoiding him)*

Me wouldst thou woo? then woo me up here!

*(Alberich scratches his head. Woglinde has reached another rock.)***Alberich**

Alas! Thou escap'st?

Come but nearer!

Thou canst fly where I scarcely can creep.

*(Woglinde swims to a third rock, deeper down.)***Woglinde**

Climb to the ground,

then safe wouldst thou clasp me.

Alberich*(climbers hastily down)*

'Tis better down lower!

Woglinde

Now let us go higher!

*(She darts quickly to a high rock at the side)***Wellgunde, Flosshilde***(laughing)*

Ha ha ha ha ha ha!

Alberich

How catch in her flight the timid fish?

Wait a while, false one!

*(He tries to climb hastily after her.)**(Wellgunde has sunk down to a lower rock on the other side.)***Wellgunde**

Heia, thou fair one!

hear'st thou me not?

Alberich*(turning around)*

Call'st thou to me?

Wellgunde

I counsel thee well:

to me turn thee and Woglinde heed not!

*(Alberich climbers hastily over the ground to Wellgunde.)***Alberich**

Far fairer seemest thou than that shy one,

who gleams less brightly and looks too sleek.

Yet deeper dive, if thou wouldst delight me.

Wellgunde*(letting herself sink down a little nearer to him)*

Now, am I not near?

Alberich

Not near enough!

Thy slender arms come fling around me;

that I may touch thee and toy with thy tresses,

with passionate heat on thy bosom

so soft let me press me!

Wellgunde

Art thou bewitched

and longing for love-joys?

Then shew, thou fair one, what favor is thine!

Fie! Thou hairy and hideous imp!

Swarthy, spotted and sulfury dwarf!

Seek thee a sweetheart whom thou dost please!

*(Alberich tries to hold her by force.)***Alberich**

Though foul be my face,

my hands hold thee fast!

Wellgunde*(quickly swimming up to the middle rock)*

Hold fast, I flow from thy hands!

Woglinde, Flosshilde*(laughing)* Ha ha ha ha ha ha!**Alberich***(calling angrily after Wellgunde)*

Faithless thing! Bony, chilly-skinned fish!

Seem I not comely,

pretty and playful, brisk and bright?

Hei! Go wanton with eels then,

if so loathsome am I!

Flosshilde

Why chid'st thou, elf?

So soon cast down?

But twain hast thou wooed: try but the third one,

sweetest balm surely her love would bring!

Alberich

Soothing song comes to my ears!

How good that ye are not but one:

of many, someone I may win me;
 alone, no maiden would choose me!
 If I may trust thee, then glide down to me!

Flosshilde

(dives down to Alberich)

How foolish are ye, senseless sisters,
 if ye find him not fair!

Alberich

(quickly approaching her)

Both dull and hideous well may I deem them,
 now that the fairest I see!

Flosshilde

O sing still on thy soft sweet song,
 its charm enraptures mine ear!

Alberich

(confidently caressing her)

My heart bounds and flutters and burns
 when such sweet praise laughs to me.

Flosshilde

(with gentle resistance)

Thy winsome sweetness makes glad mine eyes,
 and thy tender smile all my spirit cheers!
(She draws him tenderly to her.)
 Dearest of men!

Alberich

Sweetest of maids!

Flosshilde

Wert thou but mine!

Alberich

Might I e'er hold thee!

Flosshilde

(ardently)

O, the sting of thy glance
 and the prick of thy beard,
 for ever to see and to feel!
 Might the locks of thy hair,
 so shaggy and sharp,
 but float round Flosshilde ever!
 And thy shape like a toad,
 and the croak of thy voice,
 o might I, dazzled and dumb,
 see and hear nothing but these!

*(Woglinde and Wellgunde have dived down
 close to them.)*

Woglinde, Wellgunde

(laughing)

Ha ha ha ha ha ha!

Alberich

(starting up, alarmed)

Wretches, laugh ye at me?

Flosshilde

(suddenly darting from him)

As fits at the end of the song!
(She swims quickly up with her sisters.)

Woglinde, Wellgunde

(laughing)

Ha ha ha ha ha ha!

Alberich

(in a wailing voice)

Woe's me! Ah, woe's me! alas! alas!
 The third one, so dear, doth she too betray?
 Ye shameless, shifting,
 worthless and infamous wantons!
 Feed ye on falsehood,
 treacherous watery brood?

Rhine Daughters

Wallala! Wallala!

lalaleia! leialalei! heia! heia! ha ha!

Shame on thee, imp!

Why chid'st thou down yonder?

Hear the words that we sing thee!

Say wherefore, faint-heart, didst thou not hold
 the maiden thou dost love?

True are we, free from all guile,
 to him who holds us fast.

Gaily to work, and grasp without fear;
 in the floods not fleet is our flight:

Wallala! lalaleia! leialalei!

heia! heia! ha hei!

*(They swim apart, hither and thither, now
 deeper, now higher, to incite Alberich to chase
 them.)*

Alberich

Through all my frame what passionate
 fire now burns and glows!
 Rage and longing, fierce and mighty,

lash me to madness!

Though ye may laugh and lie,
yearning masters my heart,
and one to me now shall yield her!

(He begins the chase with desperate exertions. With terrible agility he climbs the rocks, springs from one to the other, and tries to catch first one then another of the maidens, who always elude him with mocking laughter.)

(He staggers and falls into the abyss, then clambers hastily aloft again to renew the chase.) (They let themselves sink a little. He almost reaches them, falls back again, and again tries to catch them.)

(Foaming with rage, he pauses breathless and stretches his clenched fist up toward the maidens.)

Alberich

Could I but capture one!

(He remains in speechless rage gazing upward, when suddenly he is attracted and chained by the following spectacle.)

(Through the water from above breaks a continuously brightening glow, which, on a high point of the middle rock, kindles to a blinding, brightly shining gleam; a magical light streams from this through the water.)

Woglinde

Look, sisters!
The waker laughs to the deep.

Wellgunde

Through the waters green
the radiant sleeper he greets.

Flosshilde

He kisses her eyelids,
so to unclose them.

Wellgunde

Look, she smiles in the shining light.

Woglinde

Through the floods afar
flows her glittering ray!

Rhine Daughters

(together swimming around the rock)

Heia jaheia! heia jaheia!

Wallala la la la leia jahei!

Rhine-gold, Rhine-gold! Radiant joy,
thou laughest in glorious light!

Glistening beams thy splendor
shoots forth o'er the waves!

Heia jahei! heia jaheia!

Waken friend! wake in joy!

Games will we play so gladly with thee:

flasheth the foam, flameth the flood,
as, floating around, with dancing and singing,
we joyously dive to thy bed!

Rhine-gold! Rhine-gold! heia jaheia! heia
jaheia!

Wallala la la la heia jahei!

(With ever-increasing mirth the maidens swim around the rock. All the water gleams with golden light.)

Alberich

(whose eyes, strongly attracted by the gleam, are fixed on the gold)

What is't, ye sleek ones,
that there doth gleam and glow?

Rhine Daughters

Where hast thou, churl, ever dwelt,
of the Rhine-gold ne'er to have heard?

Wellgunde

Knows not the elf
of the gold's bright eye, then,
that wakes and sleeps in turn?

Woglinde

Of the wondrous star in watery deeps,
whose glory lightens the waves?

Rhine Daughters

See how blithely
we glide in its radiance!
wouldst thou, faint-heart,
then bathe in brightness,
come float and frolic with us!
Wallala la la leia lalai!
Wallala la la leia jahei!

Alberich

For your water games is the gold alone good?
Then nought would it boot me!

Woglinde

The golden charm wouldst thou not flout,
knewest thou all of its wonders.

Wellgunde

The world's wealth would be won by the man
who, out of the Rhine-gold, fashioned the ring
which measureless might would bestow.

Flosshilde

Our father said it, and bade us ever
guard with wisdom the shining hoard,
that no false one should craftily steal it:
then peace, ye chattering brood!

Wellgunde

Most prudent sister,
why chidest thou so?
Well knowest thou,
only by one the golden charm may be wrought?

Woglinde

He who the sway of love forswears,
he who delight of love forbears,
alone the magic can master
that forces the gold to a ring.

Wellgunde

Secure then are we and free from care,
for all that liveth loveth;
none from love's fetters would free him.

Woglinde

And least of all he, the languishing dwarf
with love-desire wasting away.

Flosshilde

I fear him not,
whom here we have found:
in his passion's blaze nearly I burned.

Wellgunde

A sulfur brand
in the water's surge,
in lover's frenzy hissing loud!

Rhine Daughters

Wallala! Wallaleia la la!
Loveliest Niblung! laugh'st thou not too?
In the golden shimmer how fair thou dost shine!
O come, lovely one, laugh thou with us!

Heia jaheia! heia jaheia!

Wallala la la la leia jahei!

(They swim, laughing, to and fro in the light.)

(Alberich, with his eyes fixed on the gold, has listened well to the sisters' hasty chatter.)

Alberich

The world's wealth by thy spell might I
win for mine own?

If love be denied me,
my cunning shall win me delight?

(terribly loud)

Mock ye then on!
the Niblung neareth your toy.

(Raging he springs to the middle rock and clambers with terrible haste to its summit. The maidens separate screaming and swim upward on different sides.)

Rhine Daughters

Heia! heia! heia jahei!

Save yourselves! The elf is distraught;
how the water swirls where'er he swims:
for love has lost him his wits!
ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!

(With a last spring, Alberich reaches the summit.)

Alberich

Fear ye not yet?

Then wanton in darkness, watery brood!

(He stretches his hand out toward the gold.)

My hand quenches your light,
I wrest from the rock the gold,
fashion the ring of revenge;
for hear me ye floods:
love henceforth be accursed!

(He tears the gold from the rock with terrible force and plunges with it hastily into the depth, where he quickly disappears. Thick darkness falls suddenly on the scene. The maidens dive down after the robber.)

Flosshilde

Seize on the spoiler!

Wellgunde

Rescue the gold!

Rhine Daughters

Help us! Help us! Woe! Woe!

(The water sinks down with them. From the lowest depth is heard Alberich's shrill, mocking laughter.)

(The rocks disappear in thickest darkness, and the whole stage is from top to bottom filled with black water waves, which for some time seem to sink downward.)

(The waves have gradually changed into clouds, which little by little become lighter, and at length disperse into a fine mist.)

(As the mist disappears upward in little clouds, an open space on a mountain height becomes visible in the twilight. At one side, on a flowery bank, lies Wotan with Fricka near him, both asleep.)

SCENE TWO

An open space on a mountain height

(The dawning day lights up with growing brightness a castle with glittering pinnacles, which stands on the top of a cliff in the background. Between this cliff and the foreground, a deep valley through which the Rhine flows is supposed. Wotan and Fricka asleep.)

(The castle has become quite visible. Fricka awakes: her gaze falls on the castle.)

Fricka

(alarmed) Wotan, give ear! Awaken!

Wotan

(dreaming)

The sacred dwelling of joy
is guarded by gate and door:
Manhood's honor, might without bound,
rise now to endless renown!

Fricka

(shakes him)

Up from thy vision's blissful deceit!
My husband, wake and bethink thee!
(Wotan awakes and raises himself a little. His eyes are at once fixed by the view of the castle.)

Wotan

Achieved the eternal work!
On mountain summit the gods' abode!
proudly stand the glittering walls!
As in dreams 'twas designed,
as by will 'twas decreed,
strong and fair stands it in sight:
hallowed glorious pile!

Fricka

What thee delighteth brings me but dread!
Thou hast thy joy, my fear is for Freia!
Heedless one, dost thou remember
the truly promised reward?
The work is finished and forfeit the pledge:
forgettest thou what thou must pay?

Wotan

I mind me well of the bargain
they made who raised me the walls;
by a bond bound were the rebels in thrall,
that they this hallowed dwelling might build me;
it stands now—thank the workers:
for the wage fret not thyself.

Fricka

O laughing impious lightness!
loveless, cold-hearted folly!
Had I but known of thy pact,
the trick I then had withstood;
but ever ye men kept afar from the women,
that, deaf to us and in peace,
alone ye might deal with the giants:
so without shame ye base ones abandoned
Freia, my loveliest sister,
pleased right well with your pact!
What to your hard hearts is holy and good,
when ye men lust for might?

Wotan

(quietly)

Was like greed to Fricka unknown,
when she for the building did beg?

Fricka

For my husband's truth aye in care
with sorrow must I ponder,
how to hold him beside me,
lured by his fancy afar:
halls fair and stately, joys of the homestead,
surely should bind thee in peaceful repose.

But thou in this work hast dreamed
of war and arms alone:
glory and might ever to win thee,
and ne'er-ending strife to enkindle,
were builded the towering walls.

Wotan

(smiling)

Wouldst thou, o wife,
in the fortress then fix me,
to me, the God, must be granted
that, in the castle prisoned,
yet from outside I must win me the world:
ranging and changing love all who live;
forgo that game, then, I cannot!

Fricka

Cold, unloving, pitiless heart!
For the vain delights of power and sway,
thou stakest in insolent scorn
love and a woman's worth?

Wotan

When I for wife sought to win thee,
an eye, as forfeit, placed I wooing in pledge:
how vainly now dost thou chide!
Women I worship e'en more than thou wouldst;
and Freia, the fair one, will I not grant;
in truth, such thought ne'er was mine.

Fricka

(looking anxiously off the stage)

Then shelter her now: defenseless, in fear,
hither she hastens for help.

(Freia enters, as if in hasty flight.)

Freia

Help me, sister! Shelter me, brother!
From yonder mountain threatened me Fasolt;
he comes now hither to take me.

Wotan

Let him threat! Saw'st thou not Loge?

Fricka

That thou still on the trickster
bestowest thy trust!
Much wrong he ever has wrought,
yet aye again he ensnares thee.

Wotan

Where simple truth serves,
alone I seek no helper.
But, to force the spite of foes to serve me,
guile and cunning alone,
as Loge has learned them, can teach.
He who this treaty designed
gave promise Freia to ransom:
on him I fix now my faith.

Fricka

And he leaves thee alone!
There stride the giants hither in haste:
where lurks thy crafty ally?

Freia

Where linger then my brothers,
when help they should bring me,
now that Wotan abandons the weak!
O help me, Donner! Hither, hither!
Rescue Freia, my Froh!

Fricka

The disgraceful band who betrayed thee,
have all now hidden away!
*(Fasolt and Fafner, both of gigantic stature,
armed with strong clubs, enter.)*

Fasolt

Soft sleep closed thine eyes;
the while we twain unslumb'ring built the walls.
Mighty toil tired us not,
heavy stones we heaped on high;
lofty tower, gate and door
guard and keep thy castle halls secure.
(pointing to the castle)

There stands what we builded,
shining bright in daylight's beams:
wend ye in, pay us our wage!

Wotan

Name, workers, your wage;
what deems ye fitting guerdon?

Fasolt

The price was fixed, as fit it was deemed;
is all so soon forgot?
Freia, the fair one, Holda, the free one,
the bargain holds, we bear her with us.

Wotan*(quickly)*

Has then your bargain blinded your wits?
 Other guerdon ask: Freia may I not grant!
*(For a moment Fasolt stands speechless with
 angry astonishment.)*

Fasolt

What say'st thou? ha!
 Traitor art thou? thy treaty a trick?
 What thy spear wards serves but for sport,
 all the runes of weighty bargains?

Fafner

My trusty brother,
 seest thou, fool, now his guile?

Fasolt

Son of light, light of spirit!
 Hear and heed thyself; in treaties aye keep troth!
 What thou art, art thou only by treaties;
 by bargains bound, bounded too is thy might:
 art wiser thou than wary are we,
 pledged are we freemen in peace to thee:
 cursed be all thy wisdom,
 peace be no more between us,
 if, no more open, honest and free,
 in bargains thou breakest thy faith!
 A foolish giant gives this rede:
 thou wise one, learn it from him!

Wotan

How sly to take in earnest
 what but in sport we have spoken!
 The loveliest goddess, light and bright,
 what boots you dullards her grace?

Fasolt

Mock'st thou us? ha, how unjust!
 Ye who by beauty reign,
 hallowed radiant race,
 how vainly strive ye for towers of stone,
 place for court and hall
 woman's beauty in pledge!
 We dullards plague ourselves,
 sweating with toil-hardened hands
 to win us a woman,
 who, winsome and sweet,
 should dwell aye among us:
 and the pact call'st thou a jest?

Fafner

Cease thy foolish chatter;
 no gain look we to win:
 Freia's charms help little, but much it boots
 from 'mongst the gods now to wrest her.
(softly)

Golden apples ripen within her garden,
 she alone knoweth how they are tended;
 the gardens' fruit grants to her kindred,
 each day renewed, youth ever-lasting:
 pale and blighted passeth their beauty,
 old and weak waste they away,
 if e'er Freia should fail them.,
(roughly)
 From their midst let us bear her away!

Wotan

(to himself)
 Loge lingers long!

Fasolt

Straight speak now thy word!

Wotan

Ask for other wage!

Fasolt

No other, Freia alone!

Fafner

Thou, there! follow us!
*(Fafner and Fasolt press toward Freia. Froh
 and Donner enter in haste.)*

Freia

Help! Help from the hard ones!

Froh

(clasping Freia in his arms)
 To me, Freia!
(to Fafner)
 Back from her, miscreant!
 Froh shields the fair one!

Donner

(planting himself before the two giants)
 Fasolt and Fafner, know ye the weight of my
 hammer's heavy blow?

Fafner

What means thy threat?

Fasolt

Why com'st thou here?
 Strife have we not sought,
 nought ask we now but our wage.

Donner

Full oft paid I, giants, your wage.
 Approach, and take your due,
 weighed with a generous hand.
(He swings his hammer.)

Wotan

(stretching out his spear between the disputants)
 Hold, thou fierce one! Nought booteth force!
 All bonds the shaft of my spear doth shield:
 spare then thy hammer's haft!

Freia

Woe's me! Woe's me! Wotan forsakes me!

Fricka

Is this thy resolve, merciless heart?
(Wotan turns away and sees Loge coming.)

Wotan

There is Loge!
 Such is thy haste bargains to mend that
 were struck by thy evil counsel?
(Loge has come up out of the valley.)

Loge

How? what bargain have I then counseled?
 Belike 'twas the pact that ye
 with the giants did make?
 To hollow and height my whim drives me on;
 house and hearth delight me not.
 Donner and Froh are dreaming
 of household joys;
 if they would wed, a home e'en must they find.
 A proud abode, a castle sure,
 thereto leaned Wotan's wish.
 House and hall, court and keep,
 the blessed abode now standeth firmly built.
 The lordly pile I proved myself,
 if all be firm, well have I tried;
 Fasolt and Fafner faithful I found:
 no stone stirs on its bed.
 Not idle was I like many here;
 who calls me laggard, he lies.

Wotan

Craftily wouldst thou escape?
 If thou betray me, truly I bid thee beware!
 Of all the gods, as thy only friend,
 I took thee up, 'mid the troop
 who trusted thee not.
 Now speak and counsel well.
 When as the builders did crave
 from us Freia as guerdon,
 thou know'st, I only yielded my word
 when, on thy faith, thou didst promise
 to ransom the hallowed pledge?

Loge

With greatest pains thereon to ponder,
 how we might free her, that promise I gave.
 But there to prosper
 where nought will fit and nought will serve
 could e'er such promise be given?

Fricka

(to Wotan)
 See what traitorous knave thou didst trust!

Froh

Loge art thou, but liar I call thee!

Donner

Accursed flame, I will quench thy glow!

Loge

Their disgrace to cover,
 fools now revile me!
(Donner threatens to strike Loge.)

Wotan

(steps between them)
 In quiet leave now my friend!
 Ye know not Loge's craft:
 richer count I his counsel's worth,
 when 'tis haltingly paid.

Fafner

Halt no longer! Promptly pay!

Fasolt

Long waiteth our wage!
(Wotan turns sharply to Loge.)

Wotan

(urgently)

Now hear, crabbed one! keep thy word!
Say truly, where hast thou strayed?

Loge

Thankless was ever Loge's toil!
In care but for thee, looked I around,
and restlessly searched to the ends of the world:
to find a ransom for Freia,
fit for the giants and fair.
In vain sought I, and see now full well:
in the world's wide ring nought is so rich
that a man will take it as price
for woman's worth and delight!
(All show astonishment and perplexity.)
Where life ever is moving,
in water, earth and air,
much sought I, asking of all men,
where force doth but stir,
and life hath beginning:
what among men more mighty seems,
than woman's worth and delight?
But where life ever is moving,
still scorned alone was my questioning craft:
in water, earth and air,
none will forgo the joy of love.
(Varied excitement.)
But one I looked on,
who love's delights forswore,
for ruddy gold renouncing all woman's grace.
The Rhine's fair winsome children
told to me all their woe:
the Nibelung, Night-Alberich,
seeking in vain grace
from the swimmers to win;
the Rhine-gold the robber then stole in revenge:
he deems it now the holiest good,
greater than woman's grace.
For the glittering dross, so reft from the deep,
resounded the maidens' wailing:
to thee, Wotan, turning their prayers,
that thy vengeance fall on the Niblung,
(with growing warmth)
the gold they pray thee now to give them
to shine in the water forever.
This to tell thee I promised the maidens:
and now has Loge kept faith.

Wotan

Foolish art thou, if not e'en knavish!

Myself seest thou in need:
what help for others have I?

Fasolt

(who has listened attentively, to Fafner)
The gold I begrudge the Niblung;
much ill he ever has wrought us,
but slyly still the dwarf
has slipped away from our hands.

Fafner

Still the Niblung broods on new ill
if gold but grant him power.
Listen, Loge! say without lie:
what glory lies in the gold
which the Niblung holds so dear?

Loge

A toy 'tis in the waters sleeping,
serving for children's delight;
but if to a rounded ring it be fashioned,
measureless might it grants,
and wins the world for its lord.

Wotan

(thoughtfully)
Rumors came to me of the Rhinegold:
runes of booty hide in its ruddy glow;
might and wealth unmeasured
a ring would gain.

Fricka

(softly to Loge)
Serves as well
the golden trinket's glittering dross
to deck forth a woman's grace?

Loge

Her husband's faith were fixed by the wife
who ever bore the glist'ning charm
that busy dwarves are forging
toiling in thrall to the ring.

Fricka

(caressingly to Wotan)
O, might but my husband win him the gold?

Wotan

*(appearing more and more under the
influence of a spell)*
Methinks it were wise now

sway o'er the ring to ensure me.
But say, Loge, what is the art
by which the trinket is shaped?

Loge

A rune of magic makes the gold a ring;
no one knows it; but he can use the spell
who blessed love forswears.
(Wotan turns away in ill-humor.)
That likes thee not; too late, too, cam'st thou.
Alberich did not delay.
Fearless the might of the spell he won;
(harsh) and rightly wrought was the ring!

Donner

(to Wotan)
Slaves should we be all to the dwarf,
were not the ring from him wrested.

Wotan

The ring I must win me!

Froh

Lightly now without curse of love were it won.

Loge

(harshly)
Right well, without art,
as in children's play!

Wotan

Then counsel, how?

Loge

By theft!
What a thief stole, steal thou from the thief:
couldst better gain aught for thine own?
But with weapons dire fighteth Alberich;
deep and shrewd must be thy working,
if the thief thou wouldst o'er-reach,
so that thou mayst render
the ruddy dross, the gold
(with warmth)
once more to the maidens,
for therefor pray they to thee.

Wotan

The river maidens?
What boots me that rede?

Fricka

Of the watery brood
let nought be spoken;
to my distress, many a man
they lured to their watery lair.
*(Wotan stands silently struggling with himself.
The other gods fix their eyes on him in mute
suspense. Meanwhile Fafner has been
conferring aside with Fasolt.)*

Fafner

(to Fasolt)
Trust me, more than Freia
boots the glittering gold:
eternal youth would be won
if the golden charm were our own.
*(Fasolt's demeanor shows that he feels himself
convinced against his will. Fafner and Fasolt
approach Wotan again.)*

Fafner

Hear, Wotan, our word as we wait!
Free with you leave we Freia;
guerdon less great shall content us:
for us rude giants enough
were Nibelheim's ruddy gold.

Wotan

Are ye distraught? What is not mine own,
how can I, ye shameless ones, grant you?

Fafner

Hard labor built yonder walls:
light were't for thy cunning and force
(what our spite e'er failed to achieve:)
to fetter the Niblung fast.

Wotan

(quickenning)
For you shall I deal with the Niblung?
for you fetter the foe?
Insolent and greedy, ye dullards,
are ye made by my debt!
*(Fasolt suddenly seizes Freia and draws her
with Fafner to the side.)*

Fasolt

To us, maid! We claim thee now!
As pledge stay thou with us
till thy ransom be paid!

Freia*(screaming)*

Woe's me! Woe's me! Woe!

Fafner

Far from here let her be borne!
 Till evening, heed me well!
 held is she as a pledge;
 at night return we; but when we come,
 if at hand lie not the ransom,
 the Rhinegold fair and red.

Fasolt

At end is her shrift then,
 Freia is forfeit: forever dwell she with us!

Freia*(screaming)*

Sister, Brothers! Save me! Help!
*(Freia is borne away by the hastily retreating
 giants.)*

Froh

Up, to her aid!

Donner

Perish then, all things!
(They look at Wotan enquiringly.)

Freia*(in the distance)* Save me! Help!**Loge***(looking after the giants)*

Over stock and stone they stride
 down to the vale:
 through the water heavily wade now the giants.
 Sad at heart hangs Freia,
 so roughly borne on their shoulders!
 Heia! hei! the churls, how they lumber along!
 Now they tramp up through the vale.
 First at Riesenheim's bound
 their rest will they take.
(He turns to the gods.)

How darkly Wotan doth brood?

Alack, what aileth the gods?

*(A pale mist fills the stage, gradually growing
 denser. In it the gods' appearance becomes
 increasingly wan and aged. All stand in dismay
 and expectation looking at Wotan, who fixes his
 eyes on the ground in thought.)*

Mists, do ye trick me? Mocks me a dream?

Dismayed and wan ye wither so soon!

From your cheeks the bloom dies out;
 and quenched is the light of your eyes!

Courage, Froh! day is at dawn!

From thy hand, Donner, escapeth the hammer!

What grief hath Fricka?

Is she in sorrow for Wotan, gloomy and grey,
 who seems already grown old?

Fricka

Woe's me! Woe's me! What has befall'n?

Donner

My hand doth sink!

Froh

My heart stands still!

Loge

I see now! hear what ye lack!

Of Freia's fruit not yet have ye eaten today.

The golden apples that grow in her garden,
 have made you all doughty and young,
 ate ye them day by day.

ate ye them day by day.

The garden's keeper in pledge now is granted;
 on the branches droops and dies the fruit,
 decayed soon it will fall.

It irks me little;

for meanly ever Freia to me

stinted the sweet-tasting fruit:

but half as godlike am I, ye great ones, as you!

(freely, but quickly and harshly)

But ye set your fortune

on the youth-giving fruit:

that wotted the giants well;

and at your lives this blow now is aimed:

to save them be your care!

Lacking the apples, old and grey,

worn and weary,

withered, the scoff of the world,

dies out the godly race.

Fricka*(anxiously)*

Wotan, my lord! unhappy man!

See how thy laughing lightness has brought us
 all disgrace and shame!

Wotan*(starting up with a sudden resolve)*

Up, Loge! descend with me!
To Nibelheim go we together:
for I will win me the gold.

Loge

The Rhine daughters called upon thee:
ah, may they then hope for a hearing?

Wotan

(violently)

Peace, thou babbler,
Freia, the fair one,
Freia needs must be ransomed!

Loge

At thy command, swiftly we go:
down the steeps shall we make way
through the Rhine?

Wotan

Not through the Rhine!

Loge

Then swing we ourselves
through the sulfur-cleft:
down yonder slip in with me!
*(He goes first and disappears at the side in a
cleft, from which, immediately afterward, a
sulfurous vapor arises.)*

Wotan

Ye others wait till evening here:
the golden ransom,
to win back our youth will I gain!
*(He descends after Loge into the cleft. The
sulfurous vapor issuing therefrom spreads over
the whole stage and quickly fills it with thick
clouds. Those remaining on it are soon hidden.)*

Donner

Fare thee well, Wotan!

Froh

Good luck! Good luck!

Fricka

O soon return to thy sorrowing wife!

*(The vapor thickens to a quite black cloud, which
rises from below upward; this then changes to a
dark, rocky chasm, which continues to rise so*

*that the theater seems to be gradually sinking
into the earth.)*

*(A ruddy glow shines from various places in the
distance, increasing clamor, as from smithing, is
heard on all sides.)*

*(The clang of the anvils dies away. A chasm
appears, which fills the whole scene and seems to
open into narrow clefts on all sides.)*

SCENE THREE

Nibelheim

*(Alberich drags the shrieking Mime from a side
cleft.)*

Alberich

Hehe! hehe! to me! to me!
mischievous imp!
Prettily pinched, now shalt thou be,
if in a trice, thou forgetst me not
the work as I did command.

Mime

(howling)
Ohe! Ohe! Au! Au!
Let me alone! Forged it is, as thou did'st bid,
with moil and toil all is now done:
take but thy *(shrilly)* nails from my ear!

Alberich

Why waitest thou then,
and shew'st it not?

Mime

I only faltered lest aught were failing.

Alberich

What then was not finished?

Mime

(embarrassed)
Here ... and there ...

Alberich

What here and there? Give me the thing!
*(He tries to catch his ear again. Mime, in his
terror, lets fall a piece of metal work which he
held convulsively in his hand. Alberich picks it
up quickly and examines it carefully.)*
See, thou rogue! All has been forged

as I gave my command, finished and fit.
 Ah, would then the dolt cunningly trick me?
 and keep the wonderful work for himself,
 that which my craft alone taught him to forge?
 Known art thou, foolish thief?
(He places the Tarnhelm on his head.)
 The helm fitteth the head:
 now will the spell also speed?
(very softly)
 "Night and darkness. Nowhere seen!"
*(His form vanishes; in its place a column of mist
 is seen.)*
 Seest thou me, brother?

Mime
(looks about him in astonishment)
 Where art thou? I see thee not.

Alberich
(invisible)
 Then feel me instead, thou lazy rogue!
 Take that for thy thievish thought!
*(Mime writhes under the blows he receives,
 whose sound is heard without the scourge being
 seen.)*

Mime
 Ohe! Ohe! Au! Au! Au!

Alberich
(laughing, invisible)
 Ha ha ha ha ha ha!
 I thank thee, blockhead,
 thy work is true and fit!
 Hoho! Hoho!
 Nibelungs all, bow ye to Alberich!
 Everywhere over you waits he and watches;
 peace and rest now have departed;
 aye must ye serve him, unseen though he be;
 unaware he is nigh ye still shall await him!
 Thrall to him are ye forever!
(harshly)
 Hoho! Hoho! hear him, he nears:
 the Nibelungs' lord!
*(The column of vapor disappears in the back-
 ground. The sounds of Alberich's scolding
 become fainter in the distance. Mime cowers
 down in pain.)*
*(Wotan and Loge come down from a cleft in the
 rock.)*

Loge
 Nibelheim here. Through pallid vapors
 there glisten bright sparks from the smithies.

Mime
 Au! Au! Au!

Wotan
 One groans aloud: what lies on the ground?

Loge
(bends over Mime)
 Say, wherefore moanest thou here?

Mime
 Ohe! Ohe! Au! Au!

Loge
 Hei, Mime! merry dwarf!
 What plagues and pinches thee so?

Mime
 Leave me in quiet!

Loge
 That will I surely, and more yet, hark!
 help I promise thee, Mime.
(He raises him with difficulty to his feet.)

Mime
 What help for me!
 I must obey the behests of my brother,
 who makes me bondsman to him.

Loge
 But, Mime, to bind thee,
 what gave him the power?

Mime
 By evil craft molded Alberich,
 from yellow gold of the Rhine, a ring:
 at its mighty spell we tremble in wonder;
 by that now he enthralls us,
 the Nibelungs' darksome host.
 Blithely we smiths once worked at our anvils,
 forged for our women
 trinkets so fair, delicate Nibelung toys:
 we lightly laughed at our toil.
 The wretch now compels us
 to creep into caverns,
 for him alone we ever must toil.

Through the ring of gold his greed still descries
 where'er new treasure lies hid in the clefts:
 there must we all seek it, trace it and dig it,
 to melt the booty, to forge him the gold,
 with no peace nor rest
 for him to heap up the hoard.

Loge

Just now, then, an idler wakened his ire!

Mime

Poor Mime,
 ah! my fate was the hardest.
 A helm of mail had I to forge him;
 with care he gave commands for its making.
 My wit conceived the mighty power
 that lay in the work I had forged of steel;
 the helm I fain had held for my own;
 to use the spell to free me
 from Alberich's sway:
 perchance ... yes, perchance,
 the tyrant himself to o'ermaster,
 and place him by guile in my power;
 the ring then had I ravished,
 that, as a slave now I serve him,
(harshly)
 in thrall he should then be to me!

Loge

And wherefore, wise one,
 didst thou not thrive?

Mime

Ah! though the work I fashioned,
 the magic that lurks therein,
 the magic I guessed not aright:
 he who planned the work which then he seized,
 he taught me, alas, but now all too late,
 what a spell lay in the helm.
 From my sight he vanished;
 but, lurking unseen,
 sharp strokes he showered on me.
(crying and sobbing)
 Such pay for my pains I, fool, did win.
(He rubs his back. Wotan and Loge laugh.)

Loge

(to Wotan)

Confess, not light will be our task.

Wotan

But the foe will fall, if thou but help!
(Mime observes the gods more attentively.)

Mime

What mean all your questions?
 Who are ye then, strangers?

Loge

Friends to thee; from all their need
 the Niblungen folk we shall free!
*(Mime, on hearing Alberich's approach, shrinks
 back frightened.)*

Mime

Look to yourselves; Alberich nears.
(He runs to and fro in terror.)

Wotan

(seating himself quietly on a stone)
 We wait for him here.
*(Alberich, who has removed the Tarnhelm from
 his head and hung it on his girdle, drives before
 him, with brandished whip, a host of Nibelungs
 from the caverns below. They are laden with gold
 and silver handiwork, which, under Alberich's
 continuous abuse and scolding, they heap to-
 gether so as to form a large pile.)*

Alberich

Hither! Thither! Hehe! Hoho!
 Lazy herd! There in a heap pile up the hoard!
 Thou there, go up! Wilt thou get on?
 Indolent folk! Down with the treasure!
 Shall I then help you? Here with it all!
(He suddenly perceives Wotan and Loge.)
 Hey! who is there? What guests are these?
 Mime, to me! Pestilent wretch!
 Pratest thou here with the vagabond pair?
 Off, thou sluggard!
 Back to thy smelting and smithing!
*(He drives Mime with blows of his whip into the
 crowd of Nibelungs.)*
 Hey! to your labor!
 Get ye hence straight-way! Quickly below!
 From the new-made shafts go get me the gold!
 Who slowly digs shall suffer the whip!
 That no one be idle, Mime be surety,
 or scarce shall he scape
 from my scourge's lashes!
 That I ev'rywhere wander when no one is ware,

that wots he; think I full well!
 Linger ye still? Loiter ye then?
(He draws his ring from his finger, kisses it and stretches it out threateningly.)
 Tremble in terror, ye vanquished host!
 All obey the ring's great lord!
(With howls and shrieks the Nibelungs, among whom is Mime, separate and slip into different clefts in all directions.)
(Alberich looks long and suspiciously at Wotan and Loge.)
 What seek ye here?

Wotan

Of Nibelheim's darksome land
 strange tidings have reached our ears:
 great the wonders worked here by Alberich;
 on these now to feast us,
 greed has made us they guests.

Alberich

Led hither by envy ye came:
 such gallant guests, believe, well I know!

Loge

Know'st thou me well, ignorant imp?
 Then say, who am I? why dost so bark?
 In chilly caves when crouching thou lay'st,
 where were thy light and comforting fire then,
 had Loge not on thee laughed?
 What boots thee thy forging,
 be not thy forge lit by me?
 Kin to thee am I, and once was kind:
 not warm, methinks, are thy thanks!

Alberich

On light-elves laughs now Loge,
 the crafty rogue?
 Art thou, false one, their friend,
 as my friend once thou wert:
 haha! I laugh!
 from them, then, nought need I fear.

Loge

Methinks, then, me may'st thou trust.

Alberich

In thy untruth trust I,
 not in thy truth!

(taking a defiant attitude)
 Undismayed now I defy you.

Loge

Courage high thy might doth confer;
 grimly great waxes thy power!

Alberich

Seest thou the hoard,
 by my host heaped for me there?

Loge

A goodlier never was seen.

Alberich

It is today but scanty measure!
 Proud and mighty shall the hoard be hereafter.

Wotan

But what can boot thee the hoard,
 in joyless Nibelheim,
 where treasure nothing can buy?

Alberich

Treasure to gather,
 and treasure to bury,
 serves me Nibelheim's night.
 But with the hoard, that in caverns I hide,
 shall wonders be worked by the Niblung;
 and by its might
 the world as my own I shall win me!

Wotan

How beginn'st thou that, then, good friend?

Alberich

Lapped in gently wafting
 breezes ye who now live, laugh and love:
 with golden grasp, ye godly ones
 all shall be captured!
 As love by me was once forsworn,
 All that have life shall eke forswear it!
 Enchanted by gold, the greed
 for gold shall enslave you!
 On glorious heights
 abide ye in gladness, rocked in bliss;
 the dark elves ye disdain in your revels eternal!
 Beware! Beware!
 For first your men shall bow to my might,
 then your winsome women,
 who my wooing despised,

shall yield to Alberich's force,
 though love be his foe!
(laughing savagely)
 Ha ha ha ha!
 Hear ye my word? Beware!
 Beware! of the hosts of the night,
 when rises the Niblung hoard
 from silent deeps to the day!

Wotan

(violently)
 Away, impious wretch!

Alberich

What says he?

Loge

(stepping between them)
 Lose not thy senses!
(to Alberich)
 Who were not seized with wonder,
 beholding Alberich's work?
 If only thy craft can achieve
 all thou dost hope of the treasure:
 the mightiest then must I call thee,
 for moon and stars
 and the sun in his splendor,
 could not then withstand thy power,
 they too must be thy slaves.
 Yet ... well 'twould seem before all things
 that the host of the Niblungs,
 who heap up thy hoard,
 should serve thee free from spite.
 When thy hand held forth a ring;
 then trembling cowered thy folk:
 but in they sleep a thief might slink by
 and steal slyly the ring.
 How, crafty one, then wouldst thou speed?

Alberich

The deepest one Loge deems him;
 others takes he ever for fools:
 that e'er I should need him,
 and dearly pay for word and aid,
 that fain would the thief now hear!
 This covering helm myself I conceived;
 the cunningest smith,
 Mime, forced I to forge it:
 swiftly to change me,
 into all shapes at my will
 to transform me, serves the helm.

None can see me, though he may seek;
 yet ev'rywhere am I, though hidden from sight.
 So, free from care,
 not even thy craft need I fear,
 thou kind, provident friend!

Loge

Many wonders oft have I looked on,
 but such a marvel ne'er met my eyes.
 This work without equal
 none would believe in;
 couldst thou but work this wonder,
 thy might then were unending!

Alberich

Think'st thou I lie
 and boast me like Loge?

Loge

Till it is proved,
 I trust not, dwarf, thy word.

Alberich

Art puffed up with prudence, fool,
 well nigh to bursting!
 Then envy me now!
 Command, and say in what shape
 I shall presently stand?

Loge

Be shaped as thou wilt;
 but make me dumb with amaze!

Alberich

(puts the Tarnhelm on his head)
 "Dragon dread, wind thee and coil thee!"
(He immediately disappears. In his place a huge serpent writhes on the floor; it lifts its head and stretches its open jaws toward Wotan and Loge.)

Loge

(pretends to be seized with terror)
 Ohe! Ohe!
 Terrible dragon, oh, swallow me not!
 Spare his life but to Loge!

Wotan

(laughing) Ha ha ha! Ha ha ha!
 Good, Alberich! Good, thou rascal!
 How quickly grew the dwarf
 to the dragon so dread!

(The dragon disappears and immediately Alberich is seen in his place.)

Alberich

Hehe! ye doubters! trust ye me now?

Loge

(in a trembling voice)

My trembling truly may prove it!

A giant snake thou straight didst become:
now I have seen, surely must I believe it.

But, as thou grewest,
canst also shape thee quite small and slender?
The shrewdest way were that,
methinks, all danger to escape:
that, truly, would be too hard.

Alberich

Too hard for thee, dull as thou art!
How small shall I be?

Loge

That the smallest cranny could hold thee,
where a frightened toad might be hid.

Alberich

Pah! nought simpler! Look at me now!

(He puts on the Tarnhelm again.)

“Crooked toad, creep thou hither!”

(He disappears. The gods perceive a toad on the rocks, crawling toward them.)

Loge

(to Wotan)

There, grasp quickly!

Capture the toad!

(Wotan places his foot on the toad. Loge makes for his head and holds the Tarnhelm in his hand. Alberich becomes suddenly visible in his own form, writhing under Wotan's foot.)

Alberich

Ohe! Accurst! Now am I captive!

Loge

Hold him fast till he is bound.

(Loge binds his hands and feet with a rope.)

Now swiftly up: there he is ours!

(Both seize the prisoner, who struggles violently, and drag him to the shaft by which they came down. They disappear, mounting upward.)

(The scene changes as before, only in reverse order. The scene in changing again passes near the smithies. Continuous change of scene upward.)

(Wotan and Loge, bringing with them Alberich bound, come up out of the chasm.)

SCENE FOUR

An open space on a mountain height

(The prospect is shrouded in pale mist, as at the end of the second scene.)

Loge

There, kinsman, take now thy seat!

Look around thee, there lies the world,
that so fain thou wouldst win for thine own:

what corner, say,
wilt give to me for a stall?

(He snaps his fingers, dancing around Alberich.)

Alberich

Infamous robber!

Thou rogue! Thou knave!

Loosen the rope, let me go free;
or dearly shalt pay for thy trespass!

Wotan

A captive art thou, fast in my fetters;
as thou didst ween the living world
now lay at thy will before thee,
thou liest bound at my feet.

Deny it, trembler, thou canst not!

To make thyself free, now pay me the ransom.

Alberich

O, thou dolt, thou dreaming fool,
to trust blindly the treacherous thief!
fearful revenge shall follow the crime!

Loge

Art thirsting for vengeance?

must first, then, win thyself free:
to a man in bonds the free pay nought
for a trespass.

Then dream'st thou of vengeance,
quickly bestir thee,
think of thy ransom betimes!

(He shows him by snapping his fingers the kind of ransom.)

Alberich

Then say what ye demand!

Wotan

The hoard and thy gleaming gold.

Alberich

Thievish and ravenous gang!

(aside)

But if only I keep the ring,
the hoard I may lightly let go;
for anew were it won, and right merrily fed
were it soon by the spell of the ring;
and a warning it were to render me wise;
not dearly the lesson were paid,
though for its gain I lose the gold.

Wotan

Dost yield up the hoard?

Alberich

Loosen my hand to summon it here.
(Loge unties the rope from his right hand. Alberich touches the ring with his lips and secretly murmurs a command.)

Behold, the Nibelungs hither are called!
By their lord commanded
now from the dark to the daylight
they bring up the hoard;
then loosen these torturing bonds!

Wotan

Not yet, till all hath been paid.
(The Nibelungs ascend from the cleft, laden with the treasures of the hoard. During the following the Nibelungs pile up the hoard.)

Alberich

O shame and disgrace!
that my shrinking bondsmen themselves
should see me in bonds!
(to the Nibelungs)
There let it lie, as I command!
In a heap pile up the hoard!
Dolts, must I help you? Nay, look not on me!
Haste, there! haste!
Then hence with you homeward,
straight to your work! Off to your smithing!

Woe, if idlers ye be!

At your heels I follow you hard!

(He kisses his ring and stretches it out commandingly. As if struck with a blow, the Nibelungs rush cowering and terrified toward the cleft, into which they quickly disappear.)

There lies ransom; now let me go;
and the tarnhelm there, that Loge yet holds;
that give me in kindness again!

Loge

(throwing the tarnhelm on the hoard)
The plunder must pay for the pardon.

Alberich

Accursed thief! But wait a while!
He who forged me the one makes me another;
still mine is the might that Mime obeys.
Sad it seems that crafty foes
should capture my cunning defense!
Well then! Alberich all has given;
now loose, ye tyrants, his bonds!

Loge

Art thou contented? shall he go free?

Wotan

A golden ring gleams on thy finger:
hear'st thou, dwarf?
that also belongs to the hoard.

Alberich

(horrificed)
The ring?

Wotan

To win thee free, that too must thou leave us.

Alberich

(trembling)
My life, but not the ring!

Wotan

(more violently)
The ring surrender:
with thy life do what thou wilt.

Alberich

If but my life be left me,
the ring too must I deliver;

hand and head, eye and ear
are not mine more truly
than mine is this golden ring!

Wotan

Thine own thou callest the ring?
Ravest thou, impudent Niblung?
Truly tell how thou gottest the gold,
from which the bright trinket was shaped.
Was't thine own, then, which thou, rogue,
from the Rhine's deep waters hast reft?
To the maidens hie thee, ask thou of them
if their gold for thine own they have given,
which thou hast robbed for the ring!

Alberich

Infamous tricksters! Shameful deceit!
Thief, dost cast in my teeth the crime,
so dearly wished for by thee?
How fain wert thou to steal
the gold for thyself,
were but the craft to forge
it as easily gained?
How well, thou knave, it works for thy weal,
that the Niblung, I, from shameful defeat,
and by fury driven,
the terrible magic did win
whose work laughs cheerly on thee!
Shall this hapless and anguish-torn one's
curse-laden, fearfullest deed
but serve now to win thee this glorious toy?
Shall my ban bring a blessing on thee?
Heed thyself, o'erweening god!
If I have sinned, I sinned but against myself:
but against all that was, is and shall be
sinn'st, eternal one, thou
if rashly thou seizest my ring!

Wotan

Yield the ring! No right to that
can all thy prating e'er win.
*(He seizes Alberich, and with violence draws the
ring from his finger.)*

Alberich

(with a horrible cry) Ha!
Defeated! Destroyed!
Of wretches the wretchedest slave!

Wotan

(contemplating the ring)

This ring now lifts me on high,
the mightiest lord of all might.
(He puts on the ring.)

Loge

(to Wotan)
Shall he go free?

Wotan

Set him free!
(Loge sets Alberich entirely free.)

Loge

(to Alberich)
Slip away home!
Not a fetter holds thee:
free, fare thou now hence!

Alberich

(raising himself)
Am I now free?
(enraged laughing)
Free in sooth?
Thus greets you then this, my freedom's
foremost word!
As by curse came it to me,
accurst be aye this ring!
As its gold gave measureless might,
let now its magic deal death to its lord!
Its wealth shall yield pleasure to none,
to gladden none shall its luster laugh!
Care shall consume aye him who doth hold it,
and envy gnaw him who holdeth it not!
All shall lust after its delights,
yet nought shall it boot him who wins the prize!
To its lord no gain let it bring;
yet be murder drawn in its wake!
To death devoted, chained be the craven by fear:
his whole life long daily wasting away,
the treasure's lord as the treasure's slave!
Till again once more
in my hand regained I shall hold it!
So blesses, in sorest need,
the Nibelung now his ring:
then hold it fast,
(laughing)
ward it with heed!
(angrily)
But my curse canst thou not flee.
(He vanishes quickly in the cleft.)

(The thick mist in the foreground gradually clears away.)

Loge

Didst thou listen to love's farewell?

Wotan

(sunk in contemplation of the ring on his hand)

Let him give way to his wrath!

(It becomes continually lighter.)

Loge

(looking to the right)

Fasolt and Fafner hitherward fare:

Freia bring they to us.

(Through the dispersing mist Donner, Froh and Fricka appear and hasten toward the foreground.)

Froh

See, they have returned!

Donner

Now welcome, brother!

Fricka

(anxiously to Wotan)

Bring'st thou joyful tidings?

Loge

(pointing to the hoard)

By cunning and force the task is done:

there Freia's ransom lies.

Donner

From the giant's hold neareth the fair one.

Froh

What balmiest air wafteth to us,
blissful enchantment fills every sense!

Sad, in sooth, were our fortune,

forever sundered from her,

who painless, ne'er-ending youth and

rapturous joy doth bestow.

(The foreground has become bright again, and the aspect of the gods regains in the light its former freshness. The misty veil, however, still covers the background so that the distant castle remains invisible.)

(Fasolt and Fafner enter, leading Freia between them. Fricka hastens joyfully toward her sister.)

Fricka

Loveliest sister, sweetest delight!

art thou to us once more given?

Fasolt

(restraining her)

Hold! Touch her not yet!

Still we claim her ours.

On Riesenheim's fastness of rock

took we our rest;

in truth and honor the treaty's pledge tended we.

Though sorely loth, to you I bring her;

now pay us brothers the ransom here.

Wotan

At hand lies the ransom:

in goodly measure the gold shall be meted.

Fasolt

To lose the woman,

know ye, my spirit is sore:

if from my heart I must tear her,

the treasure hoard heap ye then so,

that from my sight

the blossoming maid it may hide!

Wotan

By Freia's form, then, measure the gold!

(The two giants place Freia in the middle. They then stick their staves into the ground in front of Freia, so that they give the measure of her height and breadth.)

Fafner

Fast fixed are our poles there

to frame her form;

now heap the hoard to their height!

Wotan

Haste with the work: sorely it irks me!

Loge

Help me, Froh!

Froh

Freia's shame straight must be ended.

(Loge and Froh hastily heap up the treasure between the poles.)

Fafner

Not so loosely piled be the gold.
(He roughly presses the treasure together.)
 Firm and close fill up the gauge!
(He stoops down to look for crevices.)
 Here still I see through:
 come, stop me these crannies!

Loge

Away, thou rude one!

Fafner

Look here!

Loge

Touch thou not aught!

Fafner

Look here! this cleft must be closed!

Wotan

(turning away moodily)
 Deep in my breast burns this disgrace!

Fricka

See how in shame
 standeth the glorious maid:
 for release beseeches her suffering look.
 Heartless man!
 our loveliest bears this through thee!

Fafner

Still more! Pile on still more!

Donner

I bear no more; foaming rage
 wakens the rogue in my breast!
 Come hither, hound! wouldst thou measure,
 then take thy measure with me!

Fafner

Patience, Donner! roar where it serves:
 thy thunder helps thee not here.

Donner

(aiming a blow)
 It will serve, scoundrel, to crush thee.

Wotan

Peace, my friend!
 Methinks now Freia is hid.

*(Fafner measures the hoard closely with his eye,
 and looks for crevices.)*

Loge

The hoard is spent.

Fafner

Yet shines to me Holda's hair:
 there, yonder toy throw on the hoard!

Loge

What? e'en the helm?

Fafner

Quickly, here with it!

Wotan

Let it go also.
(Loge throws the Tarnhelm on the pile.)

Loge

Then all is now finished! Are ye contented?

Fasolt

Freia, the fair one, see I no more:
 then, is she released? must I now lose her?
(He goes close up and peers through the hoard.)
 Ah! yet gleams her glance on me here;
 her eyes like stars send me their beams;
 still through a cleft I look on their light.
(beside himself)
 While her sweet eyes shine upon me,
 from the woman will I not turn!

Fafner

Hey! I charge you,
 come stop me this crevice!

Loge

Ne'er contented! see ye then not,
 all spent is the hoard?

Fafner

Nay, not so, friend! on Wotan's finger
 gleams the gold of a ring:
 give that to fill up the crevice!

Wotan

What? this my ring?

Loge

Hear ye counsel!

the Rhine daughters should own the gold;
and to them Wotan will give it.

Wotan

What protest thou there?
The prize that I have won me,
without fear I hold for myself!

Loge

Evil chance befalls the promise
I gave the sorrowing maids!

Wotan

But thy promise bindeth me not:
as booty mine is the ring.

Fafner

But here for ransom must it be rendered.

Wotan

Boldly ask what ye will,
all I will grant you; for all the world
yet I will not yield up the ring!

Fasolt

(angrily pulls Freia from behind the hoard)
All's at end! as erst it stands;
now ours is Freia forever!

Freia

Help me! Help me!

Fricka

Cruel god! give them their way!

Froh

Hold not the gold back!

Donner

Grant them the ring then!
*(Fafner holds back Fasolt who is pressing to go.
All stand confounded.)*

Wotan

Leave me in peace: the ring will I hold!
*(Wotan turns angrily away from them.)
(The stage has again become dark.)
(From a rocky cleft on one side breaks forth a
bluish light in which Erda becomes suddenly
visible, rising from below to half her height.)*

Erda

(stretching her hand warningly toward Wotan)
Yield it, Wotan! Yield it!
Flee the ring's dread curse!
Hopeless and darksome disaster
lies hid in its might.

Wotan

What woman warneth me thus?

Erda

All that e'er was know I;
how all things are,
how all things will be see I too:
the endless world's all-wise one, Erda,
warneth thee now.
Ere the world was,
daughters three of my womb were born;
what mine eyes see,
nightly the Norns ever tell thee.
But danger most dire calleth me hither today.
Hear me! Hear me! Hear me!
All that e'er was endeth!
A darksome day dawns for your godhood:
be counseled, give up the ring!
*(Erda sinks slowly as far as the breast. The
bluish light begins to fade.)*

Wotan

With mystic awe fills me thy word:
go not till more thou tellest!

Erda

(disappearing)
I warned thee; thou know'st enough;
brood in care and fear!
(She completely disappears.)

Wotan

If then care shall torment me,
thee must I capture, all must thou tell me!
*(Wotan tries to go into the chasm to stay Erda.
Froh and Fricka throw themselves in his way
and hold him back.)*

Fricka

What wouldst thou, raging one?

Froh

Go not, Wotan!

Touch not the Wala, heed well her words!
(Wotan gazes thoughtfully before him.)

Donner

(turning to the giants with resolution)
 Hear, ye giants! come back and wait ye!
 the gold shall be your guerdon.

Freia

Dare I then hope it?
 Deem ye Holda truly such ransom worth?

(All look attentively at Wotan; he, rousing himself from deep thought, grasps his spear and brandishes it in token of a bold decision.)

Wotan

To me, Freia! Thou shalt be freed.
 Bought with the gold,
 bring us our youth once again!
 Ye giants, take now your ring!
(He throws the ring on the hoard. The giants let Freia go: she hastens joyfully to the gods, who for some time caress her in turn, with the greatest delight.)

(Fafner meanwhile spreads out a huge sack and goes to the hoard, preparing to pack it all up.)

Fasolt

(to Fafner)
 Stay, thou greedy one!
 Something give me too!
 Justice in sharing fits us brothers.

Fafner

More for the maid than the gold
 hungered thy lovesick look;
 I scarce could bring thee, fool, to the bargain;
 as without sharing Freia
 thou wouldst have wooed,
 if now I share,
 trust me to seize on the greater half for myself.

Fasolt

Shame on thee, thief! Tauntest thou me?
(to the gods)
 You call I as judges:
 say how the hoard shall justly be halved!
(Wotan turns contemptuously away.)

Loge

The hoard let him ravish;
 hold but thou fast to the ring!
(Fasolt throws himself on Fafner, who has meanwhile been busily packing up.)

Fasolt

Away! Thou rascal! mine is the ring;
 mine was it for Freia's glance!
(He snatches hastily at the ring. They struggle together.)

Fafner

Touch thou it not! the ring is mine!
(Fasolt wrests the ring from Fafner.)

Fasolt

I have it, fast I hold it!

Fafner

(striking out with his staff)
 Hold it fast lest it should fall!
(With one blow he stretches Fasolt on the ground: from the dying man he then hastily wrests the ring.)
 Now gloat thou on Freia's glance!
 For the ring seest thou no more!
(He puts the ring into the sack and quietly goes on packing the hoard. All the gods stand horrified. A long solemn silence.)

Wotan

(deeply stirred)
 Fearful now, appeareth the curse's power!

Loge

Thy luck, Wotan, where were its equal?
 Much was gained when the ring thou didst win;
 but that now thou hast lost it
 boots thee yet more:
 for thy foe-men—see!—murder their friends
 for the gold thou hast let go.

Wotan

What dark boding doth bind me?
 Care and fear fetter my soul:
 how I may end them, teach me, then, Erda:
 to her must I descend!

Fricka

(caressing him cajolingly)

Where stay'st thou, Wotan?
Lures thee not friendly the fortress proud?
Now it awaits with kindly shelter its lord.

Wotan

(gloomily)

With evil wage paid was the work!

Donner

(pointing to the background which is still wrapped in a veil of mist)

Sultrily mists float in the air;
heavy hangeth the glomy weight!
Ye hovering clouds,
come now with lightning and thunder
and sweep the heavens clear!

(Donner has mounted on a high rock by the precipice and now swings his hammer: during the following the mists collect around him.)

Heda! Heda! Hedo!

To me, all ye mists! Ye vapors, to me!

Donner, your lord, calleth his hosts!

(He swings his hammer.)

At his hammer's swing hitherward sweep!

Vapors and fogs! Wandering mists!

Donner, your lord, calleth his hosts!

Heda! Heda! Hedo!

(Donner disappears entirely in an ever-darkening and thickening thundercloud.)

(The stroke of his hammer is heard to fall heavily on the rock. A vivid flash of lightning comes from the cloud; a violent clap of thunder follows.)

(Froh has also disappeared into the clouds.)

(unseen)

Brother, to me!

Show them the way o'er the bridge!

(Suddenly the clouds disperse; Donner and Froh become visible: from their feet a rainbow bridge stretches with blinding radiance across the valley to the castle which now glows in the light of the setting sun.)

(Fafner, who beside his brother's body has collected the entire hoard, puts the enormous sack on his back and during Donner's magic thunderstorm leaves the stage.)

(Froh points with outstretched hand to the bridge as the way across the valley.)

Froh

(to the gods)

The bridge leads you homeward,
light yet firm to your feet:
now tread undaunted its terrorless path!
(Wotan and the other gods contemplate the glorious sight, speechless.)

Wotan

Golden at eve the sunlight gleameth;
in glorious light glow fastness and fell.
In the morning's radiance, bravely it glistened,
lying lordless there, proudly luring my feet.
From morning till evening, in care and fear,
unblest, I worked for its winning!

The night is nigh:

from all its ills shelter it offers now.

(as though seized by a great thought, very firmly)

So greet I the home,

safe from dismay and dread!

(He turns solemnly to Fricka.)

Follow me, wife! In Walhall dwell now with me.

Fricka

What meaneth the name, then?

Strange 'tis, methinks, to my hearing.

Wotan

What my spirit has found
to master my dread,
when triumph is won,
maketh the meaning clear.

(He takes Fricka by the hand and walks slowly with her toward the bridge: Froh, Freia and Donner follow.)

Loge

(remaining in the foreground and looking after the gods)

They are hasting on to their end,
who now deem themselves
strong in their greatness.

Ashamed am I to share in their dealings;
to flickering fire again to transform me,
fancy lureth my will:

to burn and waste them who bound me erewhile,

rather than blindly sink with the blind
 e'en were they of gods the most godlike
 not ill were it, meseems!
 I must bethink me: who knows what may hap?
*(He goes, assuming a careless manner, to join
 the gods.)*

Rhine Daughters

(in the valley, unseen)

Rhinegold! Rhinegold! guileless gold!
 how brightly and clear
 shimmered thy beams on us!
*(Wotan, preparing to set his foot on the bridge,
 stops and turns around.)*

Wotan

What complaints come hither to me?

Rhine Daughters

For thy pure luster
 now lament we:

Loge

(looks down into the valley)

The river children bewailing the stolen gold.

Rhine Daughters

Give us the gold,
 give us the gold!

Wotan

Accursed nixies!

Rhine Daughters

O give us its glory again.

Wotan

Cease their clamorous taunts.

Loge

(calling down toward the valley)

Ye in the water! why wail ye to us?
 Hear what Wotan doth grant!
 Gleams no more on you maidens the gold,
 in the newborn godly splendor
 bask ye henceforth in bliss!
*(The gods laugh and cross the bridge during the
 following.)*

Rhine Daughters

Rhinegold! Rhinegold! guileless gold!
 O would that thy treasure
 were glittering yet in the deep!
 Tender and true 'tis but in the waters:
 false and base are all who revel above!

*(As the gods cross the bridge to the castle, the
 curtain falls.)*

English translation by Frederick Jameson

GLOSSARY

aught — anything
 aye — always, forever
 bondsman — slave, servant
 boot — to profit, benefit
 craven — coward
 dross — metal
 eke — also
 erewhile — until now
 erst — before, formerly
 fain — gladly, willingly
 fell — a barren hill or highland
 fly — to flee
 forswear — to renounce, give up
 guerdon — payment, reward
 hap — to happen
 hie — to hurry
 Holda — another name for Freia
 loth — reluctant, unwilling
 mete — to give out
 moil — hard work
 Nibelheim — land where the Nibelungs live
 Nibelung, Niblung — a race of dwarves
 Norns — daughters of Erda,
 goddesses of fate
 nixie — a water spirit (the Rhinedaughters are
 nixies)
 pile — a large building
 prate — to talk idly
 rede — advice; story
 reft — stolen, deprived
 Riesenheim — land where the giants live
 (literally, “giant home”)
 ruddy — red
 scape — to escape
 shew — to show
 sooth — truth

stint — to hold back, restrict
stock — log, stump
thrall — slave; slavery
troth — faith
twain — two
wanton — flirt
wala — an earth spirit (in the *Ring* operas, “the wala” is Erda)
ware — aware
weal — prosperity, advantage
ween — to imagine, believe
wot — to know