Lohengrin
by Richard Wagner

Cast
HENRY, “the Fowler,” King of Germany (bass.)
LOHENGRIN (tenor.)
ELSA OF BRABANT (soprano.)
DUKE GOTTFRIED (Godfrey.), her brother (silent.)
FRIEDRICH (FREDERICK.) VON TELRAMUND, a Brabantine count (baritone.)
ORTRUD, his wife (soprano.)
THE KING’S HERALD (baritone or 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

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 honor; East and West, to all I say: let every acre of German soil put forth troops of soldiers, never again shall anyone abuse the German Empire!
SAXONS AND THURINGIANS
Let us away! With God for the honor 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 honor.
Imagine, O King, my grim sorrow, when I was robbed of this my honor’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 Friesia.
(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 center 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 recognize 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 behavior!

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 mightiest 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 armor 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 honorable 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 honor?

BRABANTIOUS
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 honor 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!
ALL THE MEN
The calls have 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 barge
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 wondrous things is this?
A swan?
A swan is pulling a barge towards us!
A knight is standing upright in it!
How his armor shines!
The eye is dazzled
by such splendor!
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 barge, drawn by the swan, reaches the bank
in the middle of the background; Lohengrin,
dressed in gleaming silver armor, 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 barge 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 recognize 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 savior! 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:
ever 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 honor 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 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 far I not hesitate!

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

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.)

LOHENGRIN
(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 honor 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 shield
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.)

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 splendor 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 honor, all my glory;
ever 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 honor,
my honor, my honor is no more!

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

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 revelers 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 honor! But I could avenge my shame, I could prove my honesty? I could smash the lover’s deception and win back my honor? 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 specter 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 Kemenate. — 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!
Wodin! 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 Kemenate 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 splendor!
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 down 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 scourge 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 harboring 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 honor 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 harbor 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, to 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!\n(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.)
I!
(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 forward.)

PAGES
Make way for Elsa, our lady!
She is going in faith to the minister.

(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!

(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.)
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!

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 honored 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 blasphemer! 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 rightfully 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 recognize 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 splendor 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 honor, 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 honor
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 honor!
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 harbor?
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 savior
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 recognized 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.)

Curtain