

Richard Wagner's
LOHENGRIN

singing translation

Listed for the 2020 John Dryden Translation Prize

by

Abigail Dyer

With illustrations from *The Tale of Lohengrin, Knight of the Swan* (1914).
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Prélude de Lohengrin, Wagner (1892)
Henri Fantin-Latour (French, 1836-1904)
Artvee

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LOHENGRIN

DRAMATIS PERSONAE



HEINRICH the FOWLER, King of Germany.....Bass
LOHENGRIN.....Tenor
ELSA of BRABANT.....Soprano
DUKE GOTTFRIED, her brother
FRIEDRICH, COUNT of TELRAMUND.....Baritone
ORTRUD, his wife.....Soprano
ROYAL HERALD.....Bass
FOUR BRABANTIAN NOBLES.....Tenors and Basses
FOUR NOBLE PAGES.....Sopranos and Altos

Saxon and Thuringian Counts and Nobles; Brabantian Counts and Nobles;
Noblewomen; Noble Pages; Men; Women; Serfs

SETTING

Antwerp--First Half of the 10th Century (approx. 933 AD)

ACT I

Act I, Scene 1

Curtain up. A meadow on the bank of the Scheldt River. King Heinrich sits under the Judgement Oak Tree. At his side are the Saxon counts and nobles of his retinue.

Across from them, stand Brabantian counts and nobles. At their head, Friedrich of Telramund and, at his side, Ortrud. The Herald steps from the King's retinue Center and at his sign four royal trumpeters play a fanfare.

HERALD:

Now hear ye, nobles, free men of Brabant!
Heinrich the King of Germany has arrived
To render justice as the law demands.
Will you all freely follow his commands?

MEN OF BRABANT: *(pounding their weapons)*

We all will freely follow his commands!
Oh Sire, accept our welcome to Brabant!

KING: *(rises)*

God bless you, dearest people of Brabant! The reason that I journeyed here today is for the safety of our royal realms. Already you have heard the tribulation that comes from Eastern lands to German soil. The women and the children there are praying, "Lord God, preserve us from the Magyars' wrath!" But I, because I'm king, must bear the burden to fight this horde and end my people's suffering. The truce I signed had guaranteed us nine years' peace. I used those years for our defense. I fortified our citadels and towns, and trained an army to resist our foe. The treaty's at an end; the peace is o'er. Instead, our enemy prepares for war,

Now we must all protect our kingdom's honor.
From East and West, together we shall band.
Our German troops will raise the German banner--
None shall humiliate our German lands!

MEN: *(pounding their weapons)*

For God and for our king we'll fight!

KING: *(once again, sitting)*

I've come to call you, brave men of Brabant, to join our fight and march with me to battle. But with no prince to lead the people forth, your house divides against itself and falls. Wild rumors, accusations I have heard. Therefore I call Friedrich of Telramund!

I know you as an honorable man.

So tell me how this awful case began.

FRIEDRICH:

Thanks be to you, your royal majesty. Come judge me, for I never tell a lie. As dying lay the old duke of Brabant, he chose me as the guardian of his children: Elsa the maiden and Gottfried the young boy. Their guardian true and faithful I've been since then. Upon my honor I swore to protect them. But hear now, Sire, of my deepest pain, hear now who robbed me of my honor and the boy.

Blithely one morning Elsa led Gottfried to the woods but alone, without him, she returned. She feigned concern and worry for her brother. She left the boy alone for just a moment, so she said. He vanished with no trace.

All our attempts to find him came to nothing. I threatened Elsa so she'd tell the truth. Her pale face and fear were her confession--the visible proof of Elsa's awful crime.

Thus seized with rightful horror of the girl, to whom I'd been betrothed by promise of the duke, I broke it off right then and there and wed the woman who appealed to me:

(he presents Ortrud, who curtsies to the king)

Ortrud, Radbod's, the Prince of Frisia's, heir.

(solemnly steps forward)

Now hear the charge I lay on Elsa of Brabant: she killed her brother in cold blood!

This land I claim now for myself, by right, since I'm the next of kin to Brabant's duke. My wife herself descends from those who ruled as princes once over Brabant's land.

You've heard the charge now, Sire! Judge it well!



Elsa led Gottfried to the woods but alone, without him, she returned

MEN:

The Count speaks of a dreadful crime!
To hear it leaves me horrified!

KING:

What dreadful accusation do you bring? Would such an act not be unthinkable?

FRIEDRICH:

Oh Sir, vain and romantic is the girl. She spurned my hand with arrogance and pride. A secret lover, therefore, she must have. She must have thought that once she'd killed her brother, then she could rule as Duchess of Brabant, deny her guardian her hand in marriage and openly consort then with her lover.

KING:

Call the defendant here!

(Herald solemnly returns to Center)

HERALD:

Is this to be a trial by power and by might?

KING: *(hangs his shield solemnly from the Oak)*

Unguarded by my royal shield I'll be,
Till I've judged mercifully.

MEN: *(All the men unsheathe their swords; the Saxons plant them in the ground and the Brabantians lay them flat on the ground in front of themselves.)*

And may my sword rest on the ground
Till royal justice has been done.

KING:

Here where the royal shield hangs high
Will you find justice royal and wise.
I call the prisoner loud and clear:
Elsa, be judged before us here!

Act I, Scene 2

Elsa enters, lingers Upstage then steps forward very slowly and ashamedly Down Center. Women follow her in but remain Upstage, at the outer boundary of the Judgement Circle.

MEN:

Look there! She comes, the pale prisoner! She seems to shimmer with purity. To level such an accusation, he must be certain of her guilt.

KING:

Is your name Elsa of Brabant? *(she nods)* Do you accept me as your judge today? *(Elsa turns her head to face the king, looks him in the eye and with a sad gesture, nods yes.)* So then I must ask you: Do you know why you are here? What charges have been laid against you?

(Elsa glances and Friedrich and Ortrud and shivers. Shakes her head softly, then nods.)

What's your answer to these charges? *(Elsa gestures "none.")*

So you recognize your guilt? *(Elsa stares for a while in front of her, sadly.)*

ELSA:

My poor dead brother!

MEN:

We wonder at her very strange behavior!

KING:

Speak, Elsa! What confession will you make? *(expectant silence)*

ELSA: *(quietly staring out in front of her)*

Lonely and cast in darkness
I prayed that God would know
The whisper of my heart's wish
The sorrow of my soul.

My soul let out a sigh
As I poured my heart out in prayer;
That sound became a thunderous cry,

Echoing loud throughout the air.

I heard its echo dying,
A murmur in the deep--
My eyes had ceased their crying;
They closed instead in sleep.

MEN:

She must be enchanted, or does she dream?

KING: *(as if trying to wake Elsa from a dream)*

Elsa, defend yourself before the court!

ELSA: *(Elsa's expression changes from dreamy enchantment to passionate transfiguration)*

In brightly gleaming armor
Appeared to me a knight.
Such purity and honor,
I'd never seen his like!
A golden horn in his left hand,
A broadsword in his right,
Thus, came to me the bless'd man,
My champion in the fight.
He crossed the space between us,
He spoke consolingly --
I await the knight I dreamed of!
He'll come and fight for me!

MEN:

May Heaven favor us with sense
So we'll know guilt from innocence!

KING:

Friedrich, you honorable knight,
Are you quite sure you've got it right?

FRIEDRICH:

I won't be fooled by her dreamy daze. It's plain, she raves about her lover! The charge is true. I know because I've heard eyewitness testimony to the crime. But to assuage your doubts and bring the witness here would offend my pride and my good name!

Here I am; here's my sword! Which one of you would dare to test my honor in a fight?

MEN:

Not one of us! We only fight for you!

FRIEDRICH:

And, Sire, you! Remember well my service in battle, how I fought the wild Danes?

KING:

How sad if I should ever need reminding! Well you deserve each honor that you've won, and only in your hands would I entrust the safekeeping of Brabant. God alone must judge this case and render His own verdict!

MEN:

Let God be the judge! Let God be the judge! Let God!

KING: *(takes his sword and plants it in the ground in front of him)*

Answer me, Friedrich, Count of Telramund. Will you be tried by combat to the death with God as the judge of all that you have charged here?

FRIEDRICH:

Yes!

KING:

Now you must answer, Elsa of Brabant. Will you be tried by combat to the death with God as your judge and someone as your champion?

ELSA: *(without looking up)*

Yes!

KING:

Which knight will be your champion?

FRIEDRICH:

She'll say the name now of her secret lover!

BRABANTIAN MEN:

Listen well!

ELSA: *(still in a state of passionate transfiguration; everyone watches her expectantly)*

Hear ye what gifts I pass to
This man God will send down:
Here in my father's castle
His head will wear the crown.
My goods I will entrust him.
I'll love him all my life!
If I may call him husband
I'll be his faithful wife!

MEN:

A pretty prize --if it is God's to give!
He who fights for it has more to lose than win!

KING:

The sun is high. It's noon already. This is the time to call out far and wide!

HERALD: *(steps forward with four trumpeters who turn and disperse to the four corners of the stage to send their call)*

Who in this trial by combat comes to fight for Elsa of Brabant? Let him come forth! Let him come forth!

Elsa, who until this point has been patiently waiting, becomes increasingly worried.

MEN:

We hear no answer to the call. This is not going well for her.

FRIEDRICH:

Observe, was my accusation false? My cause is right, as God confirms.

ELSA: *(approaches the King)*

Beloved Sire, may I ask you for one more call to find my champion, that he'll hear if he's far away?

KING: *(to the Herald)*

Give one more call for Justice's sake!

At the Herald's sign, the trumpeters repeat their call.

HERALD:

Who in this trial by combat comes to fight for Elsa of Brabant? Let him come forth! Let him come forth!

MEN:

In somber silence, God has judged!

Elsa kneels in fervent prayer. The women gather worriedly around their Lady, coming a bit further downstage.

ELSA:

I trust in You and trust in Your Word.
At Your command, he came to me,
O God, now bring my champion forward
To help me in my hour of need.

WOMEN:

God! Send Your help to her!
Lord God! Hear our plea!

ELSA:

Let him appear to one and all,
To one and all,
Oh, hear my call!

Chorus I spots Lohengrin approaching the riverbank. He approaches on a small boat drawn by a swan.

MEN:

Look! Look! What a wondrous, strange thing! What? A swan? A swan pulling a raft up to our shore? A knight stands there! Ha! A knight stands upon it proud and tall! He holds a gleaming sword! A knight comes! Look, a knight comes! Look, there's a knight! A swan?

Chorus II, Downstage and so further from the riverbank, react with curiosity. Chorus members gradually leave their spots to walk Upstage and see for themselves.

What? A swan? I scarcely can believe my eyes! Look, the raft draws close to our shore! He's coming over here --Look, a knight comes! Look! There! Look, now the knight comes ever close. Look! Now he's coming here! Truly, a knight comes here!

The last of the Chorus members have gone Upstage. Remaining Downstage are the King, Elsa, Friedrich, Ortrud and the Women.

And there's a golden chain around the swan! Look! They come closer, ever closer to the shore! Look there! He comes!

Everyone returns Downstage, astonished.

From his raised chair, the King can see all of the action. Friedrich and Ortrud are frozen in horror; Elsa, who with increasing joy has been listening to the Men, stays Center facing Down, not trusting herself to turn around.

A miracle, a miracle, a miracle has happened, a most astounding miracle, a most astounding and confounding miracle!

ELSA:

Ah! (Elsa has turned and seen Lohengrin--this is her scream of recognition)

WOMEN: *(kneeling)*

Thank you, Lord our God, who protects the defenseless!

Act I, Scene 3

The raft pulled by the Swan has arrived Upstage Center on the bank. Lohengrin, in shining silver armor, helmet on his head and shield at his back, a golden horn at his side, stands inside the raft, leaning on his sword. Friedrich looks at him in speechless astonishment. Ortrud, who'd had a cold, proud demeanor during the denunciation, receives a deadly shock at the sight of the Swan.



Lohengrin, in shining silver armor...stands inside the raft

CHORUS:

A hero who's been sent by God! Welcome here, God has sent you! Welcome to Brabant!

As soon as Lohengrin begins to step off the boat, everyone falls into a tense silence.

LOHENGRIN:

Depart with thanks, beloved swan!
Float on the waiting waves of the tide;
Float back there to our happy home.
When I return, you'll bring us joy!
Well and true, your duty's done.

Swan swims back in the direction it came. Lohengrin looks mournfully after him.

Farewell, farewell, beloved Swan!

CHORUS:

We're seized with holy fear--
What wondrous power leaves us dazed?

Lohengrin leaves the riverbank and steps solemnly Downstage

What handsome, noble man comes here?
His miraculous entrance leaves us amazed!

LOHENGRIN: *(bows to the King)*

Hail, King Heinrich!
Evermore may God keep you victorious!
May God our Lord keep your good name on Earth forever glorious!

KING:

Praise be, and welcome to this land,
To which you must have been dispatched
By God our Lord Omnipotent.

LOHENGRIN:

To champion a defenseless maid
Who's charged with murder of her kin,
I have been sent. Now she must say
If I do right to fight and win:

turns to Elsa

So tell me, Elsa of Brabant--
If I defend you before God,
Will you trust without fear or fright
In my protection and my might?

ELSA: *(who has been motionless, as if enchanted, since Lohengrin's arrival, awakes and sinks to his feet, overcome with joy)*

My rescuing hero! All I am
I will entrust into your hand.

LOHENGRIN:

If I should win this battle for you
Is it your will to marry me?

ELSA:

Just as I kneel here and adore you,
Body and soul, I pledge you free.

LOHENGRIN:

Elsa, if I'm to be your bridegroom,
Shield of your land and people be,
And ne'er be separated from you,
There's one thing you must promise me:
That you will never doubt me
And never ask about me
From where and how I came,
And never ask my name!

ELSA:

Oh sir! I'll never ask the question!

LOHENGRIN:

Elsa! Did you pay close attention?
Promise you'll never doubt me
And never ask about me
From where and how I came
And never ask my name!

ELSA:

My shield, my angel, my salvation
Who knows my innocence is true,
Who'd suffer greater condemnation
Than one who breaks her faith with you?

Just as you shield me with your hand,
I pledge to honor your command!

LOHENGRIN: *(bring Elsa into an embrace)*

Elsa! My one true love!

CHORUS:

What kind of marvel do I see?
What magic spell is cast on me?
My heart begins to palpitate
When it beholds this hero great.

LOHENGRIN: *(places Elsa in the King's charge and steps solemnly into the center of the Judgement Circle)*

Now hear, all you assembled. I'll be blunt:
Free of all guilt is Elsa of Brabant.
You've falsely charged her, Count of Telramund.
Through God's own verdict, you'll see what I meant.

BRABANTIAN NOBLES: *(to Friedrich)*

Give up! Go home! If you should dare
To face him it will bring despair!
If he's protected from on high
What good will it do you to fight?
Give up, we loyally suggest!
Avoid defeat and bitterest regret!

FRIEDRICH: *(who has watched Lohengrin like a hawk since his arrival and has been in a state of terrible indecision, makes up his mind)*

I'd rather die than quit!
Whatever magic brought you here,
Stranger with your special powers,
Your threats are meaningless, it's clear.
I'm not a liar or a coward.
I'll fight you for my honor's cause

And hope for victory by our laws!

LOHENGRIN:

So, Sire, let the battle start!

KING:

I call three men to stand for each combatant and mark the boundaries of the battle ground.

Three Saxon nobles come forward for Lohengrin; three Brabantians for Friedrich. They measure off the battle space by paces and mark it off by planting their spears in the ground.

HERALD:

I'll make the rules of combat clear:
Let no one try to interfere!
The battle space is out of bounds!
Who disrespects the battle ground
Shall have his strong right hand cut off,
Or, if a serf, his head will be lost!

CHORUS:

He'll have his s strong right hand cut off
Or, if a serf, his head will be lost!

HERALD:

Now listen, you who are to fight:
Respect the law and do what's right!
Let no black magic or deceit
Influence victory or defeat!
God judges rightfully and well
So trust in him and not yourselves!

LOHENGRIN AND FRIEDRICH: *(standing on either side of the battle space)*

God judges rightfully and well.
I'll trust in him, not in myself!

KING: *(moving solemnly to Center)*

Oh Lord my God, I call you here.

(all bow their heads in reverence)

Come send your presence to this fight.
By victory make your verdict clear,
That falsehood may be known from right.
Give power to the hero's arm
But let the liar's strength be gone!
Oh help us, God,
Wise judgement send,
For we are only
Foolish men.

ELSA AND LOHENGRIN:

Now Heaven's justice You'll allot.
I trust You, Lord, and falter not.

FRIEDRICH:

I trust that justice You'll allot.
Lord God, forsake my honor not.

ORTRUD:

I trust his sword to be my shield.
He'll win the fight; he'll never yield.

MEN:

Give power to the hero's arm
But let the liar's strength be gone.
Your justice, Lord, You'll now allot.
Oh hear us, Lord, and falter not!

WOMEN:

Oh Lord my God, favor him!

Everyone watches with rapt attention. The six witnesses remain at the outer edge of the battle space, by their spears. Elsa, the Women and the King Downstage by the Oak. At the Herald's signal, the trumpeters sound the battle call. The King draws his sword and strikes it on his shield, still hanging from the Oak, three times. The battle begins. Lohengrin strikes Friedrich down with a single, mighty blow. Friedrich tries to stand again, stumbles a few steps and falls back down.

King removes his shield from the Oak. All Men take their swords from the ground and raise them in celebration. Elsa hurries to Lohengrin.



Lohengrin strikes Friedrich down with a single, mighty blow

LOHENGRIN: *(his sword at Friedrich's throat)*

By God's decree, your life is in my hands --

(sheaths sword)

So live, and take this chance to make amends!

KING, WOMEN AND MEN: *(King and Men sheath their swords; a crowd of Men joyfully enters the battle space)*

Praise! Victory! Praise!

ELSA AND WOMEN:

If I could find the hymn that's
Worthy of your deed
I'd joyfully sing it
On humbly bended knee.

ELSA:

I melt under your gaze,
Dissolve and disappear,
So make me happy always;
Take all that I hold dear.

LOHENGRIN:

My victory was won through
Your purest innocence.
May all you have gone through
Bring joyful recompense.

FRIEDRICH:

Oh, this is God's damnation --
I'm crushed and in defeat,
Despairing of salvation,
Disgraced, dishonored, beat.

ORTRUD: *(furious at Friedrich's defeat; keeps her sinister eyes fixed on Lohengrin)*

Who brought him down? Damnation!
Who caused my man's defeat?
Immune to my machination,
Does this man have us beat?

KING AND MEN:

Oh sing with jubilation,
Sing songs of praise and celebration.
Great be your fame,
Praise be, you won here!
Great be your name!
Praise be, you've come here!

KING, MEN AND WOMEN:

Shield of the blameless,
You did appear
And save the blameless.
Praise be, you won here!
Great be your name!

Only to you do we
Sing our songs and give our praises!
Such great heroic deeds
We will remember always!

Young men carry Lohengrin on his shield and Elsa on the King's shield, which they lined for her with several cloaks, and carry them Off, rejoicing. Friedrich collapses unconscious at Ortrud's feet.

ACT I CURTAIN

ACT II

Act II, Scene 1

The Castle. Upstage, the Knights' chambers. To the left, the ladies' chambers. To the right, the steps of the church. Night. The Castle's windows are lit brightly from within and joyful music streams from them. Friedrich and Ortrud are on the Church steps, dressed in dark, humble clothing. Ortrud sits with her arms on her knees, glaring at the bright windows. Friedrich looks darkly at the ground. A long, sullen silence.



The Castle's windows are lit brightly from within

FRIEDRICH: (*rises quickly*)

Collect yourself, accomplice to my shame. The break of dawn must find us far away.

ORTRUD: (*without moving*)

I cannot go. I stand dazzled and dazed
By our enemy's glorious celebration.
I'll conjure up a deadly poisonous plan
To end their joy and our humiliation.

FRIEDRICH: (*darkly, approaches Ortrud*)

You horrifying hag! Why can't I cut your ties that bind me? Why not go and leave you behind? And run away somewhere, somewhere my wounded conscience mends itself again!

Because of you I've lost both my honor and my fame!
No more shall praise adorn me--
Shame is my hero's wage!
I'm looked at with suspicion,
My sword is broke in twain,
In spite of my contrition,
I've marred my father's name!

Where I may wander now
I'm lost and gone astray.
I can't look myself in the eye now--
Even the robbers look away!

Because of you I've lost, I've lost
My honor and my fame!
No more shall praise adorn me--
Shame is my hero's wage!
I'm looked at with suspicion,
My sword is broke in twain,
In spite of my contrition,
I've marred my father's name!

(*nearly in tears*)

Oh, if I'd died that hour
I would be spared this pain!

My fame, my good name and my honor
Are gone because of you!
Because of you! Because of you!

He collapses, overcome with pain. Music is heard from within.

ORTRUD: *(still not moving, as Friedrich picks himself up)*
What makes you hurl these accusations and complaints?

FRIEDRICH: *(violent gesture towards Ortrud)*
Even my sword is lost to me or I would strike you dead!

ORTRUD:
Peaceable Count of Telramund, why don't you trust me more?

FRIEDRICH:
Trust you? Wasn't it your witness, your narration that wove the web of lies against the pure one? You said you saw her in the woods--it was a lie!--and from your savage castle there, you witnessed her commit the awful crime? With your own eyes, how Elsa grabbed her brother and drowned him in the pond? You pulled the strings of my proud heart with your visions and lies of how from Radbod's ancient kingly line a new awakening would flourish in Brabant? And so persuaded me that Elsa was not worthy of my hand, and you instead to marry, since you're the last of Radbod's heirs?

ORTRUD:
Ha! Such insults and such spite! I saw it all, just as I testified!

FRIEDRICH:
And what of me, my honorable name, the thing that I have worked for all my life, made through your shameful lying, an accomplice?

ORTRUD:
Who lied?

FRIEDRICH:
You lied, and through his courts of law, God heard and caused my downfall!

ORTRUD:
God?

FRIEDRICH:

Appalling! The way you say that word with terrible timbre!

ORTRUD:

Ha! Do you call your cowardice God?

FRIEDRICH:

Ortrud!

ORTRUD:

Was that a threat? Threaten a woman? You? Oh, coward!
Had you threatened him so forcefully, he who caused your unjust disgrace,
You could have traded triumph for your shame.

Ha! Who knows how to face this foe sees that he's weaker than a babe.

FRIEDRICH:

The weaker he, that only proves he got from God his strength!

ORTRUD:

God his strength? Ha ha! Fight him with force and I will show you well what weakling
of a god defends your foe!

FRIEDRICH:

You savage sorceress! What subtle new enchantment do you work upon my spirit?

ORTRUD: *(points to the Castle where the lights have gone out)*

The revelers tuck themselves in downy beds.
Come here and sit by me,
The time has come for me to shine the light of prophecy.

During the following, Friedrich comes closer and closer to Ortrud, as if drawn by an unholy power, and listens to her with close attention.

What's the name of this knight,
The one a swan delivered to our land?
What would you give me if I told you,
This man at arms,
If he is forced to reveal just who and what he is
All of his power vanishes?

FRIEDRICH:

Ha! Now I understand his game!

ORTRUD:

Now think! No one here has the power to wrest his little secret from him except the one whom he forbade ever to ask him for the same.

FRIEDRICH:

So we'll bring Elsa to a state where she cannot let the question go?

ORTRUD:

Ha! You catch on quickly and well!

FRIEDRICH:

But how are we to do it?

ORTRUD:

How? By choosing not to run away from here. So sharpen up your wits. Justly awaken her suspicion. Speak up, charge him with sorcery! He used it to mislead the law!

FRIEDRICH:

Ha! Lies and magic tricks!

ORTRUD:

If not, we'll take him down by use of force!

FRIEDRICH:

Use force?!

ORTRUD:

It's not for nothing I'm well practiced in the darkest art forms. Now listen well to what I tell you: He gained his strength through magic arts. If you should cut the smallest limb clean off of him, he must reveal to all assembled who he is!

FRIEDRICH:

Another lie!

ORTRUD:

Oh, if you'd had the sense to chop his finger off, just one tip of one little finger, you could have had him in your power!

FRIEDRICH:

Appalling! Ha! What new lies do you tell me? Through God I got my punishment. Now through your tricks, should I betray the law, when sorcery took my good name from me?

But could I really beat the guy who licked me?
Get back my honor and my name?
Destroy the boy whose magic tricked me
And win my honor back again?

Oh wife, who stands in darkness at my side,
If you speak false to me then woe betide you!

ORTRUD:

Ha, now you're raving.
Quiet and discretely,
We'll taste the fruit
Of vengeance served up sweetly.

Friedrich slowly returns to Ortrud's side and sits next to her on the steps.

ORTRUD AND FRIEDRICH:

The dreadful dark spirit of vengeance
Be conjured from my wild breast!
You who are lost in sweetest slumber,
Know, the unholy knows no rest!
You who are lost in sweetest slumber,
Know, the unholy knows no rest!

Act II, Scene 2

Elsa appears on the balcony in a white gown. She rests against the rail with her head on her hand. Friedrich and Ortrud are across from her, seated on the church steps.

ELSA:

You, gentle breeze of evening,
Bore witness to my pain,
See how I've ceased my grieving,
How I've found joy again.

'Twas you guided him to me
You set him on his path
And bore him safely through the
Dark ocean's watery wrath.

So long I bid you whisper
To dry my tears of woe.
This eve, I bid you hither
To cool my love-hot glow.
I love him.

ORTRUD:

It's Elsa!

FRIEDRICH:

Elsa!

ORTRUD:

She'll curse the evil hour when she crossed my treacherous path!

Get back! She mustn't find you in this place.
Leave her to me. The hero's yours to take.

Friedrich disappears, Up. Ortrud, still sitting in the same position, calls out plaintively.

Elsa!

ELSA:

Who's there?

ORTRUD:

Elsa! Are you pretending not to know?
Pretending not to hear the suffering
Of one whom you have brought so low?

ELSA:

Ortrud! It's you! What keeps you here, unhappy wife?

ORTRUD:

Unhappy wife--how apt the insult that you hurl me!

I lived in peaceful isolation, a quiet castle in the woods.
What have I ever done to you?
Friendless, engulfed in lamentations,
The last of Radbod's ancient line,
What have I ever done to you?

ELSA:

Am I the source of your complaint?
Am I the one who caused you pain?

ORTRUD:

Are you so envious of my womanly joy
At being married to the man
Whose hand you turned away?

ELSA:

Almighty God, what can she mean?

ORTRUD:

He must have lost his mind, poor darling,
To charge you with that monstrous crime.
Now he is dressed in ash and sackcloth,
He's damned to penitence and shame.

ELSA:

Almighty God!

ORTRUD:

Ah, but you're happy!

This small unpleasantness is done now
And life has blessed you with a loving mate.
You must continue having fun now
And send me to my deadly fate
So that my deep, distressing pleas
Won't dampen your festivities.

ELSA:

I'd not be worthy You to worship,
Oh Lord, who's blessed me bounteously,
If I ignore my neighbor's hardship
When she is begging at my feet!
Oh, never! Ortrud, friend and kin,
I'll get the door and let you in!

Elsa hurries back inside the ladies' chambers. Ortrud springs up from the steps with wild enthusiasm.

ORTRUD:

Ye broken idols, help me take reprisals
Against the wretches here who scorn your names!
Grant strength and power to your own disciple!
Destroy those who blaspheme and cause you shame!
Wodan, almighty, answer me!
Freia, most gracious, hear my plea!
Favor my every dirty ploy
And grant me, in my vengeance, joy!

ELSA: *(from Off)*

Ortrud, where are you?

Elsa enters and two maids appear at the entrance to the ladies' chamber carrying lights.

ORTRUD: *(humbly throws herself at Elsa's feet)*

Groveling here before you!

ELSA: *(jumps back in alarm at the sight of Ortrud)*

Dear God! Oh, how it hurts to now see
The pride of Radbod's ancient race--
To see you cower here before me

Broken with shame and in disgrace!

Rise up and stop your piteous pleading.
I see the pain I've brought to you.
If you despise me, I forgive you
And hope that you forgive me, too.

ORTRUD:

Oh thanks and praise for such compassion!

ELSA:

Tomorrow when I'm wed and shriven
I'll ask the groom to grant grace and pardon,
That Friedrich, too, might be forgiven!

ORTRUD:

You smother me with too much kindness.

ELSA:

Tomorrow morning let me see
You dressed and jeweled in your finest!
To church you will accompany me.
There we will find the man who saved my life
And I'll become his wedded wife.

ORTRUD:

So you have granted me permission
To join you on your wedding day.
I'll only go on one condition:
That I not go as a beggar maid.

Ortrud draws ever closer to Elsa.

The only power I can wield now
Is one that no law can restrain.
With it, I'll endeavor to shield you,
Protect you from regret and pain.

ELSA:

What do you--?

ORTRUD:

Heed my urgent warning!
Don't blindly trust in any man!
To save regret tomorrow morning,
I'll read the future in your hand!

ELSA:

The future?

ORTRUD:

If you only knew what
Powerful magic brought him here,
You'd start to wonder when he'll use that
Same magic power to disappear.

ELSA: *(horrificed, turns away from Ortrud, then full of pity and compassion, turns back)*

You've led a life of deprivation.
A trusting heart, you've never known.
Pure love has naught to do with noble station.
We come to that through faith alone.

Come stay with me.
Come and you'll learn to
Accept the gift of faithful love.
Learn of a faith that you can turn to.
Accept this gift from God above.

ORTRUD: *(to herself)*

Ha! This preaching pride, I'll turn it into
A sword to smite her faithful love!
And then the prideful one will learn who
Is stronger than her god above.

*Accompanied by Elsa, Ortrud, with feigned hesitation, enters the ladies' chambers.
The maids follow them in and shut the doors.*

FRIEDRICH: *(steps downstage)*

See unholy doubt creep into that house!
Fulfill, oh wife, the plan your mind fomented.
I lack the will to try to hold you back.

This evil that left me dishonored and tormented,
Fall now on him who started the attack!
There's just one thing that keeps me here today:
The thief who stole my honor, I'll make him pay!

Act II, Scene 3

Friedrich looks for a hiding place and finds it under one of the church buttresses.

Dawn slowly breaks. The morning fanfare is heard. Castle servants go about their business. As they disperse, Brabantian soldiers enter and assemble.

MEN:

We heard the herald's morning call
And wait for him to appear.
Perhaps the knight who stunned us all
Will work another wonder here.

The Herald emerges from the palace onto a balcony, accompanied by four trumpeters who play a fanfare. Men face Up expectantly.

HERALD:

To royal proclamations be attuned:
There's one among you who's been proved a fraud.
Henceforth be banished, Friedrich Telramund,
For false denunciations before God.
Who lends him aid, whoever comforts him,
The law decrees, will share his punishment.

MEN:

Our God justly destroyed him.
The King has had him banned.
Good men must all avoid him.
May he be ever damned.

The trumpet call redirects their attention back to the Herald.

HERALD:

In further news, the King declares it right
That he invest the good and wondrous knight,
Whom Elsa as her wedded husband takes,
With lands and titles to Brabant's estates.
But do not call him "Duke." Instead he wants
The title of "Protector of Brabant."

MEN:

Praise be our Lady's love,
God sent him to our land.
We're faithful vassals of
The Protector of Brabant!
God sent him to our land,
Praise him, Protector of Brabant!

HERALD:

Attend the words our hero bid me say:
This morning, join him on his wedding day.
Tomorrow, though, bring battle armaments
And join your liege lord's royal regiments.
Your lord himself will cut his honeymoon short
To lead you to the battle that will soon start.

Herald and trumpeters exit into Palace.

MEN:

Don't hesitate to fight --
Our liege lord leads us on.
Who battles at his side,
Will Glory smile upon.
God sent him to our land
To glorify Brabant!
God sent, God sent him to Brabant!

As the crowd moves Upstage with excitement, four of Friedrich's former liegemen step Down.

FIRST NOBLE:

What's this? He means to take our land and riches!

SECOND NOBLE:

To fight a foe who never laid us siege?

THIRD NOBLE:

A clever ploy, and what a scandal this is!

FOURTH NOBLE:

Who'll fight him, now that he's our lord and liege?

FRIEDRICH: *(has appeared among them, unnoticed)*

I!

FOUR NOBLES:

Ha! Who are you?

Friedrich removes his hood. They recognize him and jump back in horror.

Friedrich? Can this be? You dare show your face for all to see?

FRIEDRICH:

Quite soon I will do something far more daring.

Before your eyes, expose a treason glaring!

The man who wrongfully ordered you to war,

I charge him with deceiving God our Lord!

FOUR NOBLES:

What madness! How deranged!

What do you plan?

You'll lose your life--you'll lose--

If you accuse that man!

They push Friedrich out of view to hide him once again in the shadows of the Church.

Four Pages enter onto the ladies' chamber balcony, come down the stairs and stand in front of the palace. The crowd notices them and presses forward towards them.

FOUR PAGES:

Make way! Make way! Our Lady Elsa comes before our God in Church to wed.

Act II, Scene 4

As the chorus sings a procession of beautifully dressed ladies makes its way from the ladies' chambers to the church steps, awaiting Elsa.

CHORUS:

Her every step be blessed
This sweet, long-suffering bride.
Her anguish be redressed
May God be at her side.

The crowd has pushed together but make a clear path again as Elsa appears, beautifully gowned and jeweled, and she processes slowly towards the church.

She glows with angel brightness!
May God his blessing grant!
God save her virtuous rightness!
Praise Elsa of Brabant!

Ortrud, who had been hidden behind the last of the women in the procession behind Elsa, rushes forward and places herself on the same step as Elsa, forcing Elsa to move one step down.

ORTRUD:

Step back, Elsa! Not one more second longer
I'll trail behind you like some lowly thing!
Instead, I should take precedence before you
And you should bow before me, groveling.

ELSA:

My God, is this not strange? There's no accounting for the sudden change!

Pages push Ortrud Center.

CHORUS:

What does she want? Get back!

ORTRUD:

Because I once crumpled in pain and anguish,
Ever after, must I scrape and bow to you?
In silence will my rage no longer languish!

I'll take revenge! I'll take what I am due!

ELSA:

How did I let myself e'er be deceived so?
You sought my help but set me up to fall!
How can you now claim precedence when we know
Your man stands condemned by God before us all?

ORTRUD: (*with apparent deep pain and wounded pride*)

Until Deceit falsely condemned my Friedrich,
He'd been an honored man whose name was great.
A paragon of men, a hero by any metric,
He was adored and feared throughout the state.
Your nameless knight could put us all in danger!
What kind of reputation has this stranger?

CHORUS:

What does she propose?
She gossips! Clap her mouth closed!

ORTRUD:

Who is this man and is his lineage drawn back
Far enough so we know his noble race?
What kind of guy comes riding in on swan-back?
How long until he leaves you in disgrace?
His name you did not even dare to ask.
The clever man forbade you from the task!

CHORUS:

What? Is it true? Such accusations!
She slanders by insinuations!

ELSA:

You treacherous, gossiping shrew,
See if I answer well and true!
My hero is so pure and virtuous,
So clean of heart, so noble his ways
That she who doubts his name and purpose
Shall be accursed all her days!

CHORUS:

That's right! That's right!

ELSA:

Was it not God who made victorious
My future husband over yours?
I ask the crowd that's here before us,
Which of the two is right and pure?

CHORUS:

Just him! Just him! Your man alone!

ORTRUD:

Ha! How your knight in shining armor
Would turn to tarnished lumps of coal
If you knew how this nameless foreigner
Used magic power to achieve his goal!
If you won't ask him if he's so pure
Then we must all of us believe
That you yourself cannot be so sure
That he's as noble as he seems!

WOMEN:

Help! Save her from this villainy!
Four trumpeters appear and announce the King's arrival.

MEN:

Make way! Make way! The King draws near!

Act II, Scene 5

King, Lohengrin and Nobles enter from the palace with great ceremony but notice the fight and step Down.

CHORUS:

Hail, hail King Heinrich! Hail, Protector of Brabant!

KING:

What is this fight?

ELSA: *(agitatedly throws herself on Lohengrin's breast)*

My lord! Oh my protector!

LOHENGRIN:

What's wrong?

KING:

Who dares come to a wedding to disturb it?

KING AND ATTENDANTS:

What's this fight that we heard tell of?

LOHENGRIN: *(looks at Ortrud)*

What is this? The unholy woman's here?

ELSA:

My hero, rescue me from evil hands! Chide me if I have disobeyed your word!
Aggrieved, she came to me and begged for mercy. I took her in, delivered her from
shame. Now see how cruelly she repays my kindness. She chides me, says I trust in you
too much.

LOHENGRIN: *(stares witheringly at Ortrud, who finds herself unable to move)*

You fiendish, foul hag, get out of here! You'll never win the day.

Elsa, my dear, could she have tainted your poor heart with poison?

*Elsa, weeping, hides her face against his chest. He lifts her face up and gestures
towards the church.*

Come to the church and there, let your tears be joyful.



You fiendish, foul hag, get out of here!

The procession resumes but is stopped by Friedrich, who appears on the church steps and steps Down. The ladies and pages in the procession recognize him and step back in horror.

FRIEDRICH:

Oh Sire, victims of deception, stop this farce!

KING AND MEN:

What does he want? The outcast! Leave--you're banished!

FRIEDRICH:

Oh, hear me out!

KING:

Get out! Leave, you are banished!

MEN:

Get out! Behold, a dead man walks!

FRIEDRICH:

Listen! You've judged me dreadfully and wrong!

KING:

Get out!

MEN:

Leave! You're banished!

FRIEDRICH:

God's holy Court has been betrayed, believe me! Through cunning sorcery you've been deceived!

MEN:

Guards! Seize the villain! Hear! He blasphemes God!

Men rush him from all sides.

KING:

Guards! Seize the villain!

FRIEDRICH: *(tries desperately to be heard; eyes fixed on Lohengrin)*

Against this man standing before me
I bring a charge of sorcery!

This gets the crowd's attention.

May all the glory he has won here
Be scattered to the winds by God!
How wrongfully you made the judgement
That took my honor and my name.
If you'd but asked one question of him
Our trial would not have been the same.

The question will not be denied me
So I will ask him here and now
His name and noble title
To come announce before the crowd!

Crowd looks shocked.

Who is he, who came swimming out here,
His boat pulled in by a wild swan?
His magic beast alone makes too clear,
This knight is nothing but a con!
He must address the charge I've laid...
But can he? If so, then strike me dead!
If not, you'll see there's no mistake--
He's not as noble as he said!

Crowd looks expectantly at Lohengrin.

KING AND CHORUS:

What weighty charges! How will he contest them?

LOHENGRIK:

You rid yourself of fame and honor
Yet say we must believe your tales?
With evil doubters, I don't bother.
Against them, innocence prevails.

FRIEDRICH:

If he considers me unworthy,

I ask Your Royal Majesty,
Are you so lowly that this person
To answer you would not agree?

LOHENGRIN:

Even the king, I'd not reply to,
Nor all his princes and his chiefs.
They wouldn't doubt; they can't be lied to
Because they witnessed my good deed.
There's only one I owe an explanation.

Elsa!

Lohengrin stops, worried, when he notices Elsa fighting an inner battle with herself.

Elsa--she looks so pale and shaken!

In wild speculation she indulges!
Is her heart twisted by a lying snake?
Oh Heaven, send protection to engulf her.
Evil must not corrupt her pure estate.

ORTRUD AND FRIEDRICH:

May she indulge in wildest suspicion,
Be plagued with doubt, her heart's resolve be weak.
He who accuses me will learn contrition.
She'll show her doubt; she'll cause his just defeat.

KING AND MEN:

What kind of secret must he guard so closely?
If it's revealed, what damage would it do?
We'll shield him from the dangerous and lowly
For by his deeds, his noble worth he's proved.

ELSA: *(to herself, oblivious of her surroundings)*
That which he hides might cause him great disaster.
Each one of us heard the words from his mouth.
I'd be ungrateful to my lord and master
Betraying him with questions here and now....
I'll keep his secret safe forever after
But doubt and fear will plague me till I find out!

KING:

My hero, face the false deceiver boldly.
To let him off would be unjust, unholy.

MEN: (*gathering around Lohengrin*)

We stand with you and have no qualms about it.
We saw the deed you did and that's enough.
Give us your hand! Your honor stands undoubted.
What's in a name when you have the right stuff?

LOHENGRIN:

You heroes won't regret the faith you've shown here
Even though my name and title can't be known here.

While Lohengrin, Up in a circle of Men, shakes each Man's hand in turn, Friedrich has come Down unnoticed and positioned himself next to Elsa, who is still lost in worried thought.

FRIEDRICH:

Believe me, I've got a proven method to put your doubt to rest.

ELSA:

Away from me!

FRIEDRICH:

Give me a chance to cut from him a finger--cut just the tip off--and I swear to you,
All he concealed, you'll see with your own eyes.
He'll pledge his love and never leave your side.

ELSA:

I never would!

FRIEDRICH:

Tonight I'll be nearby.
Just call! I'll do the deed. It's cut and dried.

LOHENGRIN: (*steps Down*)

Elsa! What are you doing there?

(to Ortrud and Friedrich)

Away from her, you wretches!

Now flee this place and never bother her again!

Elsa, arise, my love. Our happiness lies in your hands, and all our wedded bliss.
Will fear and doubt not let you be
Until you ask these things of me?

ELSA: *(deeply confused, agitated and ashamed)*

My hero, all my life is yours!
My knight, in whom I melt away,
No doubt will plague me anymore.
Faithful my love will stay.

She sinks against his breast.

LOHENGRIN:

Praise you, Elsa! Now before God, we'll wed.

Lohengrin leads Elsa to the King, and behind him, they process into the Church.

MEN:

See he's sent by God to us!
Praise you, Elsa of Brabant!
Your every step be blessed,
Your pain, God has redressed!
Praise your virtuous rightness!
Praise Elsa of Brabant!

As the King, Lohengrin and Elsa reach the top step, Elsa turns to Lohengrin, who takes her in his arms. Still in his embrace, Elsa looks worriedly Down Right and sees Ortrud, her arm raised as if proclaiming victory. Frightened, Elsa turns her face away and processes with Lohengrin and the King into the Church.

ACT III

Act III, Scene 1

Elsa's bridal chamber. Richly decorated with a bridal bed Center and a window overlooking a garden. Singing is distant at first and grows closer. Women enter Right with Elsa; Lohengrin the King and Men enter Left. Pages with lights are positioned throughout.

CHORUS:

May every step lead you to take
Refuge where blessings of love are enshrined.
In you are joined courage and faith.
May they be happily always entwined.

Champion of youth, step forward with joy!
Flower of youth, step forward with joy!
Go, leave the noisy festival behind you
So that your heart's desire may find you!

Doors open; processions meet Center. Lohengrin and Elsa embrace. Women remove an outer garment from Elsa and men remove Lohengrin's cloak and sword. A group of eight women walk slowly in circles around Lohengrin and Elsa.

EIGHT WOMEN:

As God has blessed your union
We bless you all your days.
This hour of your communion,
Remember it always.

Fragrant and soft, we've made up the bed.
Flee from the crowd and stay here instead.

King blesses Elsa and Lohengrin. Page gives the crowd the signal to leave and everyone but Elsa and Lohengrin files out of the room, singing.

CHORUS:

May every step lead you to stay
Here where the blessings of love are enshrined.
In you are joined courage and faith.
May they be happily always entwined.

Act III, Scene 2



Alone for the first time since I saw you

LOHENGRIN:

The sweet song lingers on. Alone, we'll stay
Alone for the first time since I saw you.
Here in our cozy, happy hideaway,
No listening ear can hear our hearts beat true.
Elsa, my wife! My sweetest, purest bride!
Confide in me, are you as content as I?

ELSA:

Contentment is too poor a word to name it.
I feel that I am filled with heaven's bliss!
My heart sings out for you to come and claim it,
Glowing in wonder at God's gracious gift.

LOHENGRIN:

My dear, contentment is just the word to name it,
For you fill me as well with heaven's bliss!

LOHENGRIN AND ELSA:

My heart sings out for you to come and claim it,
Glowing in wonder at God's gracious gift.

LOHENGRIN:

We love each other with sublime emotion!
Before we met, we'd sensed each other's hearts.
I sallied forth as champion, but devotion
And love for you called me to play that part.
Your eyes proclaimed your innocent distress;
It was your gaze belied your tenderness.

ELSA:

But in my vision you'd already met me.
In joyful dreams, I saw you take my hand.
When I awoke and you'd come to protect me,
I knew you'd been sent at God's command.

There in the sunlight of your eyes, I melted,
Turned into water flowing at your feet.
Into a flower blooming in the meadow,
Waiting for you to trample underneath.
But did I love you?

What else could overcome me?
This so unutterably joyful word, like - ah!- your name, dear,
That you keep secret from me,
That from my lips, my dear, you've never heard.

LOHENGRIN:

Elsa!

ELSA:

How sweet my name sounds on your lips, my lover!
Would you deny yourself the same sweet sound
Just when we're snuggled underneath the covers,
Just when we know there's no one else around?

LOHENGRIN:

My darling wife!

ELSA:

Whisper your name, my dear.
There's not a soul around to overhear.

Lohengrin gives Elsa a friendly hug and points through the open window to the flower garden.

LOHENGRIN:

Let's stop, my love, and smell the blooming flowers.
How they enchant and charm us with their scent.
I fall, unquestioning, to their magic powers,
Trust and delighting in their innocence.

Thus, is the magic of the tie that binds us
Vital to our love and to our own good.
When we met, I didn't ask your title.
I saw your eyes and my heart understood.

Just as the flowers here enchant and charm me
On this night mysterious and sublime
Your innocence and purity disarm me
Though you once stood accused of dreadful crime.

Elsa hides her shame and humbly nuzzles against him.

ELSA:

If only I could be your equal
Instead of melting at your gaze!
Instead of being such a meek girl
I want to suffer for your sake!
You saved me from disaster certain --
If only I could rescue you!
I'd bravely bear your heavy burden
If what that was, I only knew.

What secret spell was cast upon you?
What can't you tell a single soul?
What evil pact have you been sworn to?
And what would happen if you told?

If that's so, and if you tell me,
I'll keep your secret locked away.
No threat of violence could compel me --
I'd die before your trust betray!

LOHENGRIN:

My darling!

ELSA:

Oh make me proud and show you trust me,
That I'm not some unworthy maid!
So share your dark secret with just me,
That I might know and lend you aid!

LOHENGRIN:

Enough, Elsa!

ELSA:

Give your faithful one the glory of your noble name!
Without remorse, say where you come from!
I'll keep my silence to the grave!

LOHENGRIN: (*forcefully, seriously, moves back a few steps*)

You've had my trust since I began my mission.
The oath you swore, I took it to be true.

If you can keep my only prohibition,
A treasure among wives I will call you.

Come to my arms and feel my heartbeat,
Feel how it burns with loving fire.
Shine your bright eyes soft upon me
For they reflect my heart's desire.

Oh let me breathe the air that you breathe
As one our breath may rise and fall.
Press, darling, press yourself unto me
For you're my everything and all!

Because your love is treasure beyond worth
I gave up all I had before.
No destiny in all God's green Earth
Was nobler than what I foreswore.
Offer me kingdoms as my prizes,
I'll rightfully reject them all.
The one thing worth my sacrifice is
To hear you answer my love's call.

Rid yourself now of doubt insidious.
Your love's the only thing I need.
My secret is not dark and hideous
But bright and wonderful indeed!

ELSA:

Dear God, tell me this can't be!
How could you be so cruel?
You wanted to enchant me,
To play me for a fool!

The glory that you gave up,
Oh how can I compare?
From Wonderland you came up,
Now you're wishing you were there!
My womanly fidelity could never compensate!
One day you'll take it all away
And leave me desolate!
And leave me desolate!

LOHENGGRIN:

Stop torturing yourself so!

ELSA:

Why do you torture me?
Am I to count the hours till you decide to leave?
From fear that you'll abandon me
I grow pale and gray

Then, bored with me, you'll summon
Your swan and sail away!

LOHENGGRIN:

You'll keep your beauty always if you keep free from doubt!

ELSA:

Ah! How to find the subtle way to keep you in my power?
A magic swan brought just you
and miracles to me
How can I ever trust you
Without a guarantee?
(startled, as if listening to something)
Listen to that! Ah, can you hear him coming?

LOHENGGRIN:

Elsa!

ELSA:

Ah, no. He's there --the swan! The swan!
I see him on the water, swimming toward us.
You've summoned him and soon you'll both be gone!

LOHENGGRIN:

Elsa, calm down!
That's madness and it's wrong!

ELSA:

No words can stop my crying.
To madness I will cling!
Ev'n at the risk of dying,

I must know this one thing:

LOHENGRIN:

Elsa, you wouldn't dare to--

ELSA:

Ill-fated, noble man, you'll answer what I ask you:
Now say your name and whence you come afar
And what you are!

LOHENGRIN:

Stop now! Oh no! What have you done to us?

ELSA: *(sees Friedrich and his four nobles enter from a backdoor, Up, swords drawn.)*
Save yourself! Your sword! Your sword!

Elsa gives Lohengrin his sword, which had been lying on the couch. Friedrich rushes Lohengrin, sword raised, but Lohengrin kills him with a single blow. The Four Nobles, horrified, drop their swords and kneel before Lohengrin. Elsa, who had thrown herself at Lohengrin, falls fainting to the floor.

LOHENGRIN:

Woe betide us. All our joy is gone!

ELSA: *(dully closing her eyes)*

Almighty God, oh pity me!

The Four Nobles take Friedrich's body out through the door Right. Lohengrin rings a bell. Two ladies enter from Left.

LOHENGRIN:

Dress Elsa in her finest vestments.
Before the King she shall be led.
There I will answer all her questions
So she may know to whom she's wed.

He exists mournfully. The two ladies accompany Elsa, incapable of speech, off Left. Day has slowly begun to break. The candles are extinguished.



Friedrich and his four nobles enter from a backdoor

Act III, Scene 3

At the Riverbank, as in Act I. Dawn. The nobles assemble with their troops, bearing their standards, ready to march to battle. The King and his retinue enter Left.

MEN:

Hail to you, King Heinrich!
To King Heinrich, hail!

KING:

My thanks, good people of Brabant!
No nobler subjects could I want!
I'd wish for every German land
So strong and fierce a fighting band!

Now, should our enemy advance
We'll tell him to make other plans.
He'd best stay in the wild east
Or at our hands he'll know defeat!

Raise German swords o'er German lands!
Strong may our glorious empire stand!

MEN:

Raise German swords o'er German lands!
Strong may our glorious empire stand!

KING:

Where is the man whom God has sent
To glorify our dear Brabant?

Murmurs from the crowd. The Four Nobles enter bearing Friedrich's body, covered, on a bier. They set it down, Center.

ALL:

What do they bring?
We stand here stunned --
Those are the friends of Telramund!

KING:

Whom do they bring?

Which man is dead?
The sight of you fills me with dread!

FOUR NOBLES:

The Guardian of Brabant has said
That he'll make known which man is dead.

Elsa enters with several women. She walks unsteadily Down.

MEN:

Look! Elsa comes, so pure, unstained!
Why does she look so pale and pained?

KING:

My dear, you look so sad and wan!
Is it because he'll soon be gone?

Elsa tries to look up to answer him but cannot. Noises heard from Upstage, Off.

MEN:

Make way: the Hero of Brabant!
Hail the Hero of Brabant!

Lohengrin enters alone, dressed exactly as he was at his first appearance in Act I, steps sadly and solemnly Down.

KING: *(seated at the Oak, as at the start of Act I)*

Hail and welcome, noble knight!
These gallant men you've called to fight
Pledge to follow where you lead.
With you, their victory is guaranteed!

MEN:

We pledge to follow where you lead.
With you, our victory is guaranteed!

LOHENGGRIN:

My lord, oh Sire, I must inform you,
Those men I called, these bravest warriors,
To lead them forth is not my place!

MEN:

My God! What cruel words he says!

LOHENGRIN:

I did not come to lead these knights courageous.
Instead, I stand before you as a plaintiff!

Uncovers Friedrich's body and remains standing in front of it.

The first charge I'll pronounce before you knights brave
And ask you what the law has said:
By dark of night he ambushed me, the vile knave.
Did I do right to strike him dead?

KING AND MEN: *(solemnly pointing at the dead body)*

Your hand decreed his judgement earthly
But you rendered God's own verdict.

LOHENGRIN:

The next charge is against one who entrusted
Me with both her fortune and her life.
There was betrayal against her loyal husband
By her whom God gave me as wife!

KING:

Elsa! How could you do this awful thing?

MEN:

Elsa! Oh, what a charge he brings!
How could you do this awful thing?

WOMEN:

Woe betide you!

LOHENGRIN:

All of you heard it --how she made a promise
That she would never ask me who I am.
This woman was both faithless and dishonest.
She broke her oath! Now hear her reprimand:

The wages of her faithless, doubting question

Are in the answer I must give her now.
The threats of enemies made no impression;
To her alone was my answer vowed.

So hear and judge if I am meritorious.
Before you all, Your Majesty, you knights,
I joyfully divulge my secret glorious.
Now tell me if I'm honorable and right!

KING AND MEN:

Oh, what outrageous thing will come to pass now?
Why could he not refuse to give an answer?

LOHENGGRIN:

Off in a land your feet can never enter
Lies a castle known as Montsalvat.
A brilliant temple lies at its center.
On Earth there's none more sacred than this spot.
Inside, a vessel filled with blessed spirit
Is guarded as the most holy of sacred things.
It's kept only by men of purest merit.
It came from heaven, delivered on angel's wings.

Each year a dove descends to earth from heaven,
Replenishing the vessel's miraculous strength:
It is the Grail, and members of its company
Imbibe through it the purest, strongest faith.

Who heeds the Grail's call of holy service,
The vessel fills with supernatural breath.
Against him, every evil plot must fail.
His holy light defies the shadow of death.
Even when he's called to distant kingdoms
For Truth and Justice to fight as champion,
The Grail's holy power will be within him
As long as he remains a nameless man.

To keep the Holy Grail from doubt's peril,
Its ways are hidden from unenlightened eyes.
The knight must do his work unnamed, unheralded,
And must depart if he is recognized.

Now hear the fateful answer you insist on.
The Grail sent me to champion your claim.
My father Parsival rules o'er its kingdom.
Its knight I am and Lohengrin, my name!

KING AND MEN:

When I hear how you prove your noble calling
I weep with joyful tears of wonder falling.

ELSA:

The earth is spinning! Night descends! Oh, air! Give air to this doomed maiden!

Lohengrin catches her as she collapses.

LOHENGRIIN:

Oh, Elsa! How could you betray me so?
When I first saw you there, so pure, so alone,
The world brightened; with love for you I burned!
The meaning of true joy and bliss I learned.
The holy power, the wonder of the world,
Whose secret I protect and which I serve,
I could have used to serve you and adore,
If you had kept my secret as you swore.
Now must we--ah!--be parted evermore.

KING AND MEN:

Grief! Misery! Must you go and leave us,
You noble man whom God had sent?
Will heaven's blessing also flee us?
And who will hear our sad lament?

ELSA:

My husband! No! Your loss means ruination!
As witness to my penance, ah, remain!
You must not flee my bitter lamentation!
Stay and berate me! Treat me with disdain!

WOMEN:

Grief! Now he must go and leave you!

LOHENGRIN:

I must, I must, beloved bride.
The Grail demands my presence at its side.

ELSA:

If you're as holy as I heard you say,
The Grace of God you must not throw away.
As for her grievous sin she makes amends,
Stay with your wife, your gracious love extend.
Don't cast me out, however great my crime was!
Don't leave me, ah! Don't leave your wretched wife!

LOHENGRIN:

There's just one sanction for your grievous error.
Ah, yes, I also feel its bitterly:
That parted from you I'll remain fore'er,
This must your punishment and penance be!

Elsa screams and sinks to the ground.

KING AND NOBLES: *(surround Lohengrin)*

Oh stay and never leave our borders!
Oh lead us! We await your orders!

LOHENGRIN:

Oh, Sire, hear! I cannot lead your forces!
The Grail's champion, once he is recognized,
If he should disobey his holy orders,
With loss of all his strength he'll be chastised.
But, Royal Sire, I'll make one prediction:
Your Majesty will win a victory great!
In German lands, in German jurisdictions,
The Eastern hoards will meet a deadly fate!

CHORUS: *(excited, from Upstage)*

The swan! The swan!
See there how he returns!

ELSA: *(has awakened and noticed the Swan)*

Oh, horror! Ah, the swan!

She sits up and remains frozen in place.

LOHENGRIN:

Already it has sent for me, the Grail!

Everyone watches as Lohengrin goes to the riverbank.

Beloved Swan, I wish you had not had to make
This final journey we will take.

In just a year, when you complete your time in service to the Grail
Then through its power you will be freed.
Oh, how I wished to see that day!

Turns to Elsa, wracked with grief.

Oh, Elsa, if I could have seen your gladness!
Exactly one year after we were wed
You'd witness, traveling with the Grail's companions,
Your dearest brother, who you thought was dead.

General astonishment.

Lohengrin hands Elsa his horn, sword and ring.

When he returns and I am gone and distant,
This horn, this sword, this ring, keep them to give him.
The horn lends him aid when he's in danger.
In battle fierce, the sword grants victory.
But may this ring remind him of the stranger
Who freed you, too, from shame and misery.

Lohengrin kisses Elsa again and again but she is unable to respond.

Farewell, farewell, my dearest bride!
Farewell, the Grail calls me from your side.

*Elsa had been clinging to Lohengrin but loses her grip and sinks into the arms of the
Women. Lohengrin hurries to the riverbank.*

King and Chorus stretch their hands out to Lohengrin.



Beloved Swan, I wish you had not had to make this final journey

KING AND CHORUS:

Stay! Stay, you noble-hearted man!
It would be cruel to leave Brabant!

ORTRUD: (*appearing Downstage with exultant gestures*)

Ride home! Ride home, you prideful hero,
So to this fool I can reveal now
By whom your little boat was drawn!
The chain I wound around his throat
Tells me the swan who steers your boat
Is really Gottfried of Brabant!

ALL:

Ha!

ORTRUD: (*to Elsa*)

Now that you've chased away your savior
He'll sail off into the blue.
Too bad, for if he'd stayed much later
He would have freed your brother, too.

ALL:

Deceitful shrew! The criminal act of one depraved!

ORTRUD:

Observe how well the gods take vengeance
On those who spurn their ancient ways!

She stands in wild ecstasy, while Lohengrin, who has heard every word from the Riverbank, sinks to his knees in prayer. The white Grail-dove appears and hovers over the boat. Lohengrin sees it, jumps up and takes the gold chain from the swan's neck. The swan sinks underwater and rises again in the form of Gottfried, wearing silver armor. Gottfried steps ashore.

LOHENGRIN:

Behold! Duke Gottfried of Brabant returns to lead his people forth!

Ortrud sees Gottfried and falls to the ground. Lohengrin jumps on the boat, which is pulled away by the dove. Elsa, transfigured with joy, watches as Gottfried bows to the King and the Brabantian Nobles bow before Gottfried. Gottfried rushes to Elsa's arms

and after a joyful but brief embrace, Elsa looks at the riverbank and sees that Lohengrin has gone.

ELSA:

My husband! My husband!

Lohengrin, on the boat, becomes visible in the distance, standing mournfully with his head on his shield. Elsa sinks out of Gottfried's arms and falls dead on the ground. Lohengrin recedes into the distance.

FINAL CURTAIN