

# RUSALKA

Music by Antonín Dvořák  
Libretto by Jaroslav Kvapil

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## SYNOPSIS

### ACT I

*A lake.*

Three wood nymphs are teasing old Vodník, the spirit of the lake. His daughter Rusalka confesses that she has fallen in love with a prince who swims in the lake. She wants to become human so that he will be able to feel her embrace. Vodník is horrified, and warns her that loving a human could lead to her doom. He advises her to speak to the witch Ježibaba.

Rusalka sings a song to the moon, asking it to shine on her love and tell him that she waits for him.

She asks Ježibaba for help. The witch warns her that becoming human will require sacrifices. She will become mute. And if she loses the prince's love, she will be cursed, and lure her love to his death. Rusalka agrees to the terms, and the witch prepares a potion.

Hunting a white doe, the prince sees Rusalka. He is enchanted by her beauty and bemused by her silence. As Rusalka's father and the water nymphs lament, the prince takes her back to his castle.

### Act II

*The castle.*

It is a week later. The gamekeeper and the kitchen boy prepare the wedding celebration. They wonder aloud about the bride who has no name and cannot speak. Has this creature somehow bewitched the prince?

But the prince is flirting with one of the wedding guests, a foreign princess who questions him about his silent bride to be. The foreign princess vows to have him.

Arriving for the ball, Rusalka sees the prince dancing with the foreign princess. She runs out heartbroken.

Her father Vodník appears. Regaining her speech, she pours out her heart to him. But he reminds his daughter that when she returns home, she will bring the curse with her.

The prince flatters the foreign princess with words of love, but she is irritated by how confused he seems. When Rusalka rushes into his arms, he rejects her, and her father drags her away. Now the foreign princess scorns the Prince, goading him to follow his bride into the abyss.

### **Act III**

*The lake.*

Rusalka is cursed. Because of her lover's infidelity, she must wander as a will-o'-the-wisp, luring humans to their death.

Rusalka asks Ježibaba for help. The witch tells her that only human blood will wash away the curse. She hands Rusalka a dagger and tells her to kill the prince. Recoiling, she throws the knife into the water.

The gamekeeper and the kitchen boy have come to ask the witch for help, their knees knocking with fright. They tell her the prince has fallen under the spell of the strange wood-girl he was to marry, and ask her help to break the spell.

Vodník has overheard them and is enraged. He announces that it was the prince who betrayed Rusalka. Vodník curses the human race, and the terrified men flee.

The prince emerges from the woods, half-crazed with remorse. When Rusalka appears from the lake, he begs her to bring him peace. She tells him that a kiss from her now would kill him, but he begs for a kiss anyway. So she draws him into her arms and kisses him one last time.

The prince dies. Rusalka prays for mercy for his soul, and slips back into the lake.