

# Das Rheingold Synopsis

## SCENE 1

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The Rhinemaidens frolic in the river and are surprised when Alberich, a Nibelung dwarf, intrudes. They reject his aggressive flirting which turns to mockery and insults. The Rhinemaidens' father ordered them to guard the Rhinegold, which catches Alberich's eye; they explain that a ring fashioned from it could give its possessor the power to rule the world if they renounce love. Angry and humiliated, Alberich steals the gold.

## SCENE 2

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Wotan, ruler of the gods, is asleep on a mountaintop. Fricka, his wife, wakes him and reminds him that he promised her sister Freia in marriage to Fasolt and Fafner, the giants who built their castle. Freia begs Wotan for protection from the giants, and he hopes that Loge, the cunning demigod of fire, will find a way out for her. Loge disappoints them by explaining that he has wandered the earth searching for a possible ransom for Freia and found nothing to equal her beauty and love.

Loge tells Wotan that Alberich has stolen the Rhinegold, and that the Rhinemaidens are pleading for Wotan to restore it to them. The thought of possessing Alberich's all-powerful ring intrigues Wotan. Loge declares that he can help steal it if Alberich can be subdued. The giants offer to accept the ring in lieu of Freia if Wotan can obtain it. In the meantime, Freia remains their hostage, but without her golden apples to safeguard the gods' immortality, they begin to age. Wotan and Loge descend to Nibelheim, Alberich's lair.

## INTERMISSION

## SCENE 3

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Loge and Wotan encounter Mime—Alberich's brother—who tells them of Alberich's tyrannical rule. Alberich returns, boasting of the magic helmet called Tarnhelm, crafted by Mime, and of his plans to rule the world. But Loge tricks Alberich, goading him to demonstrate the helmet's powers by transforming himself—first into a snake and then into a toad—which Wotan and Loge seize and bring back to their mountaintop against his will.

## SCENE 4

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Wotan and Loge pressure Alberich to barter his stash of treasure for his freedom. He hopes to regain Tarnhelm and the magic ring, but when Wotan refuses, Alberich curses the ring so that it will bring only misfortune and death to its owner. When the giants return with Freia, Fasolt refuses to release her, insisting that the gold be piled high enough to hide her. Tarnhelm and the ring are both needed to fully obscure Freia from view, but Wotan demands to keep the ring. Erda, the earth goddess, arrives and warns Wotan that the ring is cursed and that his refusal could doom them. He reconsiders, but Fafner kills his brother for the ring—a realization of Alberich's curse—and takes all of the treasure. As the opera ends, Freia's brother Froh, the god of spring, summons a rainbow, which the gods cross in a triumphant procession to their castle, which Wotan has named Valhalla. Voices of the Rhinemaidens are heard, lamenting the loss of their gold.