

synopsis

ACT ONE:

Wood nymphs are dancing by the lake in the moonlight and teasing the old Water Sprite. The only one not to join in the fun is Rusalka. She longs to become human and have a human soul so that she can awaken feelings of love in an unknown man who comes to swim in the lake while out hunting. Rusalka ignores the Water Sprite's words of caution and seeks out the Witch. The latter casts a spell to give Rusalka a human soul and a human form, but at great cost: Rusalka has to sacrifice her translucent watery robes and her voice. And there is another condition: if mute Rusalka cannot keep the love of a human, she will be damned and will have to return to the depths of the lake, and her beloved will become a victim of her curse. Rusalka is not discouraged and, when she meets the Prince, he is enchanted by her beauty and falls in love with her. The Prince takes her to his castle.

ACT TWO:

A wedding feast is being prepared at the castle, but it seems that Rusalka is not welcomed by everyone: the Turnspit and the Gamekeeper sense that she isn't an ordinary human being like them. A beautiful Foreign Princess has also been invited as a wedding guest, whose obvious sensuality is in direct contrast to Rusalka's quiet fragility. The Princess does not love the Prince, but her ambition drives her to fight for his favour. The fickle Prince, intoxicated by her beauty, forgets about his bride. The Water Sprite who, fearful of what might happen to Rusalka, moves to the castle lake and observes her grief with forlorn eyes. During the ceremonial ball, the Prince selfishly casts Rusalka aside and completely surrenders to the Princess's charms. The Water Sprite takes Rusalka back to his lake and casts a curse over the Prince. Terrified, the Prince seeks refuge with the Princess, but she rejects him out of hand.

ACT THREE:

Alone, Rusalka mourns her fate by the lake. She seeks out the Witch once again, since she wants to return to the other sprites. The Witch could arrange this, but the price is high: Rusalka, who still loves the Prince, can only lift the curse of the elements by taking his life. Yet she would rather suffer a wretched destiny so long as the Prince finds happiness. She doesn't realise that her sacrifice is futile. The Prince, cursed by the Water Sprite, has fallen ill. The Turnspit and the Gamekeeper, who have come to the Witch in search of a healing potion, are driven away by the Water Sprite. The Prince, a ghost of his former self, returns to the forest where he first set eyes on Rusalka. He desperately calls out to her and begs her to forgive him, seeking death from her fatal kiss. The opera ends with Rusalka's great song of forgiveness.