

BEDŘICH SMETANA
(1824–1884)

The Two Widows
A comic opera in two acts from 1874

Act One

On a beautiful morning, rural people come to invite their landowner Karolina to a harvest festival. The widowed and energetic Karolina spends her summer on her farm in the company of her cousin Anežka, who is also a widow. Karolina is confident, independent and takes care of her perfect farm. The broody Anežka tends to be apathetic and, contrary to Karolina's belief, she thinks that as a widow she must live in seclusion. Mumlal, the woodman, complains about a poacher who constantly disturbs the wildlife in his woods. Luckily, he cannot shoot and never hits his target. Anežka becomes alert as she probably knows who this disturber could be. Karolina is very amused by the woodman's lamentations, so she orders Mumlal to arrest a young man in civilian clothing and bring him to her. This is exactly what happens and Mr Ladislav Podhajský is very happy about it. On his walks in the woods, he had always hoped to meet Anežka, a woman he has secretly adored for many years now. That is why he willingly lets Mumlal "arrest" him.

When Ladislav enters, Karolina quick-wittedly realizes that Anežka is embarrassed. She feels the interesting connection between her cousin and the "poacher". Without hesitation, she decides to reveal the secret, especially as Ladislav explains his wandering through the woods by comparing himself to a hunter who longs for the incarnated vision of an undine. Anežka, though moved by his ballad-like storytelling, is determined to remain calm and unbothered. Karolina tells Ladislav to sit in the dock and starts interrogating him. Ladislav reveals his identity and is "sentenced" to spend half a day on the local farm. Mumlal is unhappy about the kind treatment this offender is receiving. What gets Mumlal even more is Lidunka and Toník, an engaged couple, who are intrigued by this unfamiliar gentleman. Finally, everyone unanimously agrees that "love is truly the gift of God!"

Act Two

Ladislav is singing about spring, love and the poetry of life. Both women listen to him closely and Karolina implies to her cousin that one of them is lucky because Ladislav is interested in her. Anežka does not show her true feelings and refuses to acknowledge that she could be the one Ladislav wants. However, Karolina knows it and teases Anežka to make her jealous. That is why she lies and tells her cousin that she will try to get Ladislav to fall in love with her. Anežka does not allow herself to be happy again after her husband's passing, but she does not want Ladislav to be with Karolina either. She ironically reminds her that not that long ago, she boasted about

her independence and wanted no one to have control over her! When she is alone, Anežka reads a love poem written by Ladislav. When Ladislav approaches her, although surprised, she manages to hide the love note. Their conversation ends with Anežka telling Ladislav that she is awaiting the departure of an unwelcomed visitor on the farm. Ladislav interrupts Anežka's coldness by sharing that he has been in love with her for years, but he had no hope as she was married, so he only treasured the memories. Anežka is moved by his lyrical speech, yet tells Ladislav about her devotedness to her deceased husband. Her rejection pushes Ladislav away again and he is not satisfied with her proposal of friendship. While Ladislav is leaving, Karolina takes him to see the dancing at the harvest festival. Anežka is left feeling doubtful about her situation and experiences unhappy thoughts.

Mumlal tells Anežka about how Karolina and Ladislav are enjoying the harvest festival and that she even kissed him! So now Anežka is the only role model for widows. But Mumlal's chattiness suddenly feels both ridiculous and infuriating to her.

In the meantime, Karolina asks Ladislav to a feast and he accepts her invitation. Ladislav opens up to Karolina and shares that it was his love for Anežka that brought him to their beautiful woods. He says that he is the type of person that is used to living in a city despite owning a farm in the Bohemian Forest. Karolina fakes being offended and Ladislav gets on his knees and begs her for forgiveness for his invasion of the privacy of both ladies. At that exact moment, Anežka, who has been driven to jealousy, unexpectedly enters in her ball dress. She sees Ladislav at her cousin's feet and assumes that he is proposing to her. The misunderstanding must quickly be resolved. Anežka is caught off guard and now explains to Karolina why she has been hiding her feelings towards Ladislav.

An engagement party must be planned for the happy couple. And it happens despite Mumlal's unfavourable trials with every single widow on Earth.

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