

HER HUSBAND FOR HAVING PROMISED HER SISTER FREIA TO THE GIANTS FAFNER AND FASOLT AS PAYMENT FOR CONSTRUCTING THE CASTLE. WOTAN REPLIES THAT HE NEVER MEANT TO KEEP THE BARGAIN. AS THE TERRIFIED FREIA RUNS IN, PURSUED BY FAFNER AND FASOLT, WOTAN SAYS LOGE (FIRE) WILL HELP THE GODS OUT OF THEIR DILEMMA. THE GIANTS ADVANCE TO CLAIM THEIR REWARD. WHEN WOTAN PROTESTS HE MADE THE PACT IN JEST, THAT THEY MUST SETTLE FOR ANOTHER FEE, FASOLT, SMITTEN WITH FREIA, BALKS. FAFNER, INTRIGUED THAT THE LOSS OF FREIA'S GOLDEN APPLES WOULD COST THE GODS THEIR ETERNAL YOUTH AND THEREFORE THEIR POWER, DECIDES THE GODDESS MUST BE ABDUCTED. AS THE GIANTS DRAG HER AWAY, FROH (SPRING) AND DONNER (THUNDER) BAR THEIR PATH, DONNER BRANDISHING HIS HAMMER. WOTAN INTERVENES, SAYING ALL TREATIES ARE GUARANTEED ON HIS SPEAR. DENIED FREIA'S GOLDEN APPLES, THE GODS BEGIN TO AGE. LOGE, WHO ORIGINATED THE CONTRACT WITH THE GIANTS, AND WHO AT WOTAN'S COMMAND HAS BEEN TRYING TO FIND A SUITABLE PAYMENT IN LIEU OF FREIA, MATERIALIZES IN A PUFF OF SMOKE. THE CRAFTY GOD SUGGESTS THAT PERHAPS THE RHINEGOLD MIGHT BE AN ACCEPTABLE SUBSTITUTE. HE THEN RELATES HOW ALBERICH STOLE THE HOARD, FORGING IT INTO A RING THROUGH WHICH HE CAN GAIN WORLD DOMINANCE. WOTAN IS ENTHRALLED BY THE ABSOLUTE POWER THE RING IMPARTS, AND WHEN FRICKA LEARNS A WIFE COULD USE THE RING TO KEEP A PHILANDERING HUSBAND FAITHFUL, SHE URGES WOTAN TO OBTAIN IT. SINCE THE RHINEMAIDENS WANT WOTAN TO RESTORE THE GOLD TO THEM, PROPOSES LOGE, WHY NOT STEAL IT, AS ALBERICH DID? FAFNER, WHO WANTS THE GOLD, ADVISES WOTAN TO USE HIS WITS TO GAIN THE TREASURE. THEN, TAKING FREIA HOSTAGE UNTIL EVENING, WHEN THE NIBELUNG'S HOARD MUST BE DELIVERED AS RANSOM, THE GIANTS LEAVE. NO SOONER DOES FREIA DISAPPEAR THAN THE GODS BEGIN TO WEAKEN AND AGE. WOTAN, FORCED TO MAKE A DECISION, BIDS LOGE ACCOMPANY HIM TO THE NETHER WORLD TO SEEK ALBERICH'S TREASURE.

ACT III

THE CLANG OF ANVILS PERVADES THE DARK CAVERNS OF NIBELHEIM,

ALBERICH'S DOMAIN, WHERE HE DRIVES HIS SLAVES TO MINE GOLD TO SWELL HIS HOARD. WEARING THE ALL-POWERFUL RING, THE GNOME TORMENTS MIME FOR THE TARNHELM HE IS FASHIONING. MIME, WHO COVETS THIS LATEST MARVEL FOR HIMSELF, MUST SUBMIT, AND ALBERICH TRIES ON THE HELMET, WHICH TRANSFORMS THE WEARER INTO ANY SIZE OR SHAPE. THE TARNHELM ALSO ENABLES ALBERICH TO BECOME INVISIBLE, AND HE THRASHES HIS DEFENSELESS BROTHER, THEN VANISHES TO TERRORIZE OTHERS. SOON WOTAN AND LOGE DESCEND THROUGH A SHAFT BEFORE THE COWERING MIME, WHO COMPLAINS OF ALBERICH'S TYRANNY, SAYING HE HAD HOPED TO OUTWIT HIS BROTHER BY MEANS OF THE TARNHELM, REGAINING THE RING HE FORGED. UNRECOGNIZED AND AMUSED BY THE COMPLAINING GNOME, THE GODS OFFER TO HELP THE NIBELUNGS FREE THEMSELVES. NOW ALBERICH RETURNS, DRIVING SLAVES WHO BEAR MOUNDS OF GOLD. HE KNOWS WOTAN AND LOGE AND SUSPICIOUSLY QUESTIONS THEIR TRIP TO NIBELHEIM, ARROGANTLY WARNING OF HIS PLAN TO OVERTHROW THE GODS AND RULE THE WORLD. LOGE ASKS THE NIBELUNG WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF SOMEONE STOLE THE RING WHILE HE SLEPT. HOW COULD THEY, THE GNOME ASKS, EXTOLLING THE POWERS OF THE TARNHELM. WHEN LOGE, FEIGNING DISBELIEF, ASKS FOR A DEMONSTRATION, ALBERICH TRANSFORMS HIMSELF INTO A LARGE SERPENT, THEN BACK AGAIN. LOGE ASKS WHETHER THE TARNHELM CAN TURN HIM INTO SOMETHING SMALL – A TOAD, FOR INSTANCE – SO HE CAN HIDE. OBLIGINGLY, ALBERICH BECOMES A TOAD, WHEREUPON WOTAN TRAPS HIM UNDER HIS FOOT AND LOGE SEIZES THE TARNHELM. AS ALBERICH RESUMES HIS ACCUSTOMED SHAPE, HE IS TIED AND DRAGGED BY HIS CAPTORS TO THE SURFACE OF THE EARTH.

ACT IV

ONCE MORE ON THE PLATEAU, LOGE AND WOTAN INFORM THEIR PRISONER HE CANNOT GO FREE WITHOUT FORFEITING HIS HOARD AS RANSOM. THOUGH OUTRAGED, HE ACQUIESCES, CERTAIN THAT THROUGH THE RING HE CAN REPLENISH HIS FORTUNE. LOGE UNTIES HIS RIGHT HAND, ENABLING ALBERICH TO KISS THE RING TO SUMMON HIS SLAVES, WHO HAUL UP THE GOLD. THE GODS' COMMAND OBEYED, HE ASKS FOR THE RETURN OF THE