

Richard Wagner

THE
RING
OF THE
NIBELUNG

(ILLUSTRATED EDITION)

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The Ring of the Nibelung (Illustrated Edition)

Siegfried and the Twilight of the Gods

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Conquering sword!"**

SIEGFRIED

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THE FIRST ACT

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A rocky cavern in a wood, in which stands a naturally formed smith's forge, with big bellows. Mime sits in front of the anvil, busily hammering at a sword.

MIME

[Who has been hammering with a small hammer, stops working.]

Slavery! worry!
Labour all lost!
The strongest sword
That ever I forged,
That the hands of giants
Fitly might wield,
This insolent urchin
For whom it is fashioned
Can snap in two at one stroke,
As if the thing were a toy!

[Mime throws the sword on the anvil ill-humouredly, and with his arms akimbo gazes thoughtfully on the ground.]

There is one sword
That he could not shatter:
Nothung's splinters
Would baffle his strength,
Could I but forge
Those doughty fragments
That all my skill
Cannot weld anew.
Could I but forge the weapon,
Shame and toil would win their reward!

[He sinks further back his head bowed in thought.]

Fafner, the dragon grim,
Dwells in the gloomy wood;
With his gruesome and grisly bulk
The Nibelung hoard
Yonder he guards.
Siegfried, lusty and young,
Would slay him without ado;
The Nibelung's ring
Would then become mine.
The only sword for the deed
Were Nothung, if it were swung
By Siegfried's conquering arm;
And I cannot fashion
Nothung, the sword!

[He lays the sword in position again, and goes on hammering in deep dejection.]

Slavery! worry!
Labour all lost!
The strongest sword

That ever I forged
Will never serve
For that difficult deed.
I beat and I hammer
Only to humour the boy;
He snaps in two what I make,
And scolds if I cease from work.

[He drops his hammer.]

SIEGFRIED

[In rough forester's dress, with a silver horn hung by a chain, bursts in boisterously from the wood. He is leading a big bear by a rope of bast, and urges him towards Mime in wanton fun.]

Hoiho! Hoiho!

[Entering.]

Come on! Come on!
Tear him! Tear him!
The silly smith!

[Mime drops the sword in terror, and takes refuge behind the forge; while Siegfried, shouting with laughter, keeps driving the bear after him.]



Mime at the anvil.

MIME

Hence with the beast!
I want not the bear!

SIEGFRIED

I come thus paired
The better to pinch thee;
Bruin, ask for the sword!

MIME

Hey! Let him go!
There lies the weapon;
It was finished to-day.

SIEGFRIED

Then thou art safe for to-day!

[He lets the bear loose and strikes him on the back with the rope.]

Off, Bruin!
I need thee no more.

[The bear runs back into the wood.]

MIME *[Comes trembling from behind the forge.]*

Slay all the bears
Thou canst, and welcome;
But why thus bring the beasts
Home alive?

SIEGFRIED

[Sits down to recover from his laughter.]

For better companions seeking
Than the one who sits at home,
I blew my horn in the wood,
Till the forest glades resounded.

What I asked with the note
Was if some good friend
My glad companion would be.
From the covert came a bear
Who listened to me with growls,
And I liked him better than thee,
Though better friends I shall find.
With a trusty rope
I bridled the beast,
To ask thee, rogue, for the weapon.

[He jumps up and goes towards the anvil.]

MIME

[Takes up the sword to hand it to Siegfried.]

I made the sword keen-edged;
In its sharpness thou wilt rejoice.

[He holds the sword anxiously in his hand; Siegfried snatches it from him.]

What matters an edge keen sharpened,
Unless hard and true the steel?

[Testing the sword.]

Hei! What an idle,
Foolish toy!
Wouldst have this pin
Pass for a sword?

[He strikes it on the anvil, so that the splinters fly about. Mime shrinks back in terror.]

There, take back the pieces,
Pitiful bungler!
'Tis on thy skull
It should have been broken!
Shall such a braggart
Still go on boasting,
Telling of giants
And prowess in battle,
Of deeds of valour,
And dauntless defence?—
A sword true and trusty
Try to forge me,
Praising the skill
He does not possess?
When I take hold
Of what he has hammered,
The rubbish crumbles
At a mere touch!
Were not the wretch
Too mean for my wrath,
I would break him in bits
As well as his work—
The dotting fool of a gnome!—
And end the annoyance at once!

[Siegfried throws himself on to a stone seat in a rage. Mime all the time has been cautiously keeping out of his way.]

MIME

Again thou ravest like mad,
Ungrateful and perverse.
If what for him I forge

Is not perfect on the spot,
Too soon the boy forgets
The good things I have made!
Wilt never learn the lesson
Of gratitude, I wonder?
Thou shouldst be glad to obey him
Who always treated thee well.

[Siegfried turns his back on Mime in a bad temper, and sits with his face to the wall.]

Thou dost not like to be told that!

[He stands perplexed, then goes to the hearth in the kitchen.]

But thou wouldst fain be fed.
Wilt eat the meat I have roasted,
Or wouldst thou prefer the broth?
'Twas boiled solely for thee.

[He brings food to Siegfried, who, without turning round, knocks both bowl and meat out of his hand.]

SIEGFRIED

Meat I roast for myself;
Sup thy filthy broth alone!

MIME *[In a wailing voice, as if hurt.]*

This is the reward
Of all my love!
All my care
Is paid for with scorn.
When thou wert a babe

I was thy nurse,
Made the mite clothing
To keep him warm,
Brought thee thy food,
Gave thee to drink,
Kept thee as safe
As I keep my skin;
And when thou wert grown
I waited on thee,
And made a bed
For thy slumber soft.
I fashioned thee toys
And a sounding horn,
Grudging no pains,
Wert thou but pleased.
With counsel wise
I guided thee well,
With mellow wisdom
Training thy mind.
Sitting at home,
I toil and moil;
To heart's desire
Wander thy feet.
Through thee alone worried,
And working for thee,
I wear myself out,
A poor old dwarf!

[Sobbing.]

And for my trouble
The sole reward is
By a hot-tempered boy

[Sobbing.

To be hated and plagued!



Mime and the infant Siegfried.

SIEGFRIED

[Has turned round again and has quietly watched Mime's face, while the latter, meeting the look, tries timidly to hide his own.

Thou hast taught me much, Mime,
And many things I have learned;
But what thou most gladly hadst taught me
A lesson too hard has proved—
How to endure thy sight.
When with my food
Or drink thou dost come,
I sup off loathing alone;
When thou dost softly
Make me a bed,
My sleep is broken and bad;
When thou wouldst teach me
How to be wise,
Fain were I deaf and dumb.
If my eyes happen
To fall on thee,
I find all thou doest
Amiss and ill-done;
When thou dost stand,
Waddle and walk,
Shamble and shuffle,
With thine eyelids blinking,
By the neck I want
To take the nodder,
And choke the life
From the hateful twitcher.
So much, O Mime, I love thee!
Hast thou such wisdom,
Explain, I pray thee,
A thing I have wondered at:
Though I go roaming
Just to avoid thee,
Why do I always return?

Though I love the beasts
All better than thee—
Tree and bird
And the fish in the brook,
One and all
They are dearer than thou—
How is it I always return?
Of thy wisdom tell me that.

MIME

[Tries to approach him affectionately.]

My child, that ought to show thee
That Mime is dear to thy heart.

SIEGFRIED

I said I could not bear thee;
Forget not that so soon.

MIME

[Recoils, and sits down again apart, opposite Siegfried.]

The wildness that thou shouldst tame
Is the cause, bad boy, of that.
Young ones are always longing
After their parents' nest;
What we love we all long for,
And so thou dost yearn for me;
'Tis plain thou lovest thy Mime,
And always must love him.
What the old bird is to the young one,
Feeding it in its nest

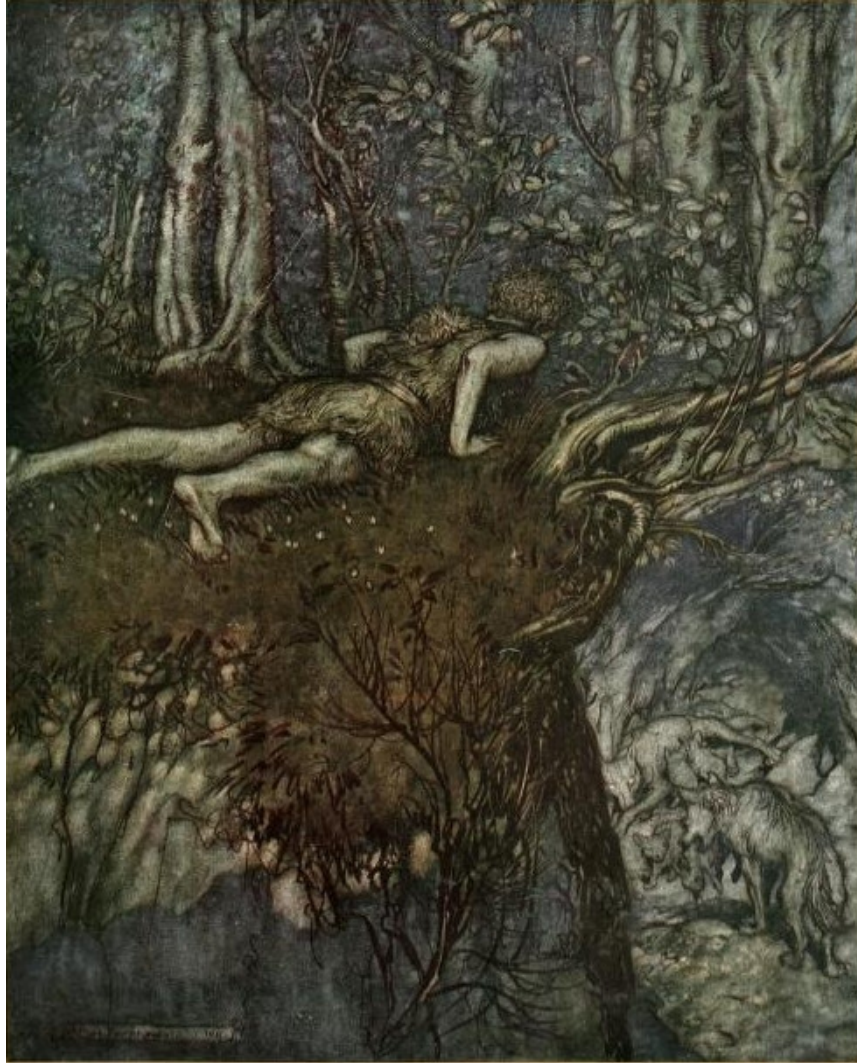
Ere the fledgling can flutter,
That is what careful, clever Mime
To thy young life is,
And always must be.

SIEGFRIED

Well, Mime, being so clever,
This one thing more also tell me:

[Simply.

The birds sang together
So gaily in spring,



**"And there I learned
What love was like"**

[*Tenderly.*

The one alluring the other;
And thou didst say,
When I asked thee why,
That they were wives with their husbands.
They chattered so sweetly,
Were never apart;

They builded a nest
In which they might brood;
The fluttering young ones
Came flying out,
And both took care of the young.
The roes in the woods, too,
Rested in pairs,
The wild wolves even, and foxes.
Food was found them and brought
By the father,
The mother suckled the young ones.
And there I learned
What love was like;
A whelp from its mother
I never took.
But where hast thou, Mime,
A wife dear and loving,
That I may call her mother?

MIME [*Angrily.*

What dost thou mean?
Fool, thou art mad!
Art thou then a bird or a fox?

SIEGFRIED

When I was a babe
Thou wert my nurse,
Made the mite clothing
To keep him warm;
But tell me, whence
Did the tiny mite come?
Could babe without mother
Be born to thee?

MIME [*Greatly embarrassed.*]

Thou must always
Trust what I tell thee.
I am thy father
And mother in one.

SIEGFRIED

Thou liest, filthy old fright!
The resemblance 'twixt child and parent
I often have seen for myself.
I came to the limpid brook,
And the beasts and the trees
I saw reflected;
Sun and clouds too,
Just as they are,
Were mirrored quite plain in the stream.
I also could spy
This face of mine,
And quite unlike thine
Seemed it to me;
As little alike
As a fish to a toad:
And when had fish toad for its father?

MIME [*Very angrily.*]

How canst thou talk
Such terrible stuff?

SIEGFRIED [*With increasing animation.*]

Listen! At last
I understand
What in vain I pondered so long:
Why I roam the woods

And run to escape thee,
Yet return home in the end.

[He springs up.]

I cannot go till thou tell me
What father and mother were mine.

MIME

What father? What mother?
Meaningless questions!

SIEGFRIED

[Springs upon Mime, and seizes him by the throat.]

To answer a question
Thou must be caught first;
Willingly
Thou never wilt speak;
Thou givest nothing
Unless forced to.
How to talk
I hardly had learned
Had it not by force
Been wrung from the wretch.
Come, out with it,
Mangy old scamp!
Who are my father and mother?



Siegfried sees himself in the stream.

MIME

[After making signs with his head and hands, is released by Siegfried.]

Dost want to kill me outright!
Hands off, and the facts thou shalt hear,
As far as known to myself.
O ungrateful
And graceless child,
Now learn the cause of thy hatred!
Neither thy father
Nor kinsman I,
And yet thou dost owe me thy life!
To me, thy one friend,
A stranger wert thou;
It was pity alone

Sheltered thee here;
And this is all my reward.
And I hoped for thanks like a fool!

A woman once I found
Who wept in the forest wild;
I helped her here to the cave,
That by the fire I might warm her.
The woman bore a child here;
Sadly she gave it birth.
She writhed about in pain;
I helped her as I could.
Bitter her plight; she died.
But Siegfried lived and throve.

SIEGFRIED [*Slowly*.

My poor mother died, then, through me?

MIME

To my care she commended thee;
'Twas willingly bestowed.
The trouble Mime would take!
The worry kind Mime endured!
"When thou wert a babe
I was thy nurse...."

SIEGFRIED

That story I often have heard.
Now say, whence came the name
Siegfried?

MIME

'Twas thus that thy mother
Told me to name thee,
That thou mightst grow
To be strong and fair.
"I made the mite clothing
To keep it warm...."

SIEGFRIED

Now tell me, what name was my mother's?

MIME

In truth I hardly know.
"Brought thee thy food,
Gave thee to drink...."

SIEGFRIED

My mother's name thou must tell me.

MIME

Her name I forget. Yet wait!
Sieglinde, that was the name borne
By her who gave thee to me.
"I kept thee as safe
As I keep my skin...."

SIEGFRIED

[With increasing urgency.]

Next tell me, who was my father?

MIME *[Roughly.]*

Him I have never seen.



Mime finds the mother of Siegfried in the forest.

SIEGFRIED

But my mother told it thee, surely.

MIME

He fell in combat
Was all that she said.
She left the fatherless
Babe to my care.
"And when thou wert grown
I waited on thee,
And made a bed
For thy slumber soft"...

SIEGFRIED

Still, with thy tiresome
Starling song!
That I may trust thy story,

Convinced thou art not lying,
Thou must produce some proof.

MIME

But what proof will convince thee?

SIEGFRIED

I trust thee not with my ears,
I trust thee but with mine eyes:
What witness speaks for thee?

MIME

*[After some thought takes from the place where they
are concealed the two pieces of a broken sword.]*

I got this from thy mother:
For trouble, food, and service
This was my sole reward.
Behold, 'tis a splintered sword!
She said 'twas borne by thy father
In the fatal fight when he fell.

SIEGFRIED *[Enthusiastically.]*

And thou shalt forge
These fragments together,
And furnish my rightful sword!
Up! Tarry not, Mime;
Quick to thy task!
If thou hast skill,
Thy cunning display.
Cheat me no more
With worthless trash;
These fragments alone

Henceforth I trust.
Lounge o'er thy work,
Weld it not true,
Trickily patching
The goodly steel,
And thou shalt learn on thy limbs
How metal best should be beat!
I swear that this day
The sword shall be mine;
My weapon to-day I shall win!

MIME [*Alarmed.*

What wouldst thou to-day with the sword?

SIEGFRIED

Leave the forest
For the wide world,
Never more to return.
Ah, how fair
A thing is freedom!
Nothing holds me or binds!
No father have I here,
And afar shall be my home;
Thy hearth is not my house,
Nor my covering thy roof.
Like the fish
Glad in the water,
Like the finch
Free in the heavens,
Off I will float,
Forth I will fly,
Like the wind o'er the wood