

DER FLIEGENDE HOLLÄNDER

Richard Wagner (1813 – 1883)

A legend tells of a Dutch sea captain who once swore to Satan that he would sail around the Cape of Good Hope in a storm, even if the journey took him to the Last Judgement. The Devil took him at his word and doomed him to roam the seas eternally as the captain of a ghost ship. Every seven years, the Dutchman is allowed to leave his ship to go looking for a woman who can break the spell by granting him faithful and unconditional love. However, the Dutchman has long since given up hope. He seeks only death and curses the seas and oceans that will not allow him to die.

A heavy storm has thrown the ship of the sea captain Daland off course. Together with his crew, Daland seeks shelter in a bay on the coast of Norway. They are joined by a second ship. Everything about the ship remains dark and mysterious. Daland meets the captain, who turns out to be the Dutchman. The Dutchman tells Daland of his accursed lot and offers him gold and jewels in exchange for one night's hospitality. When it turns out that Daland has a daughter of marriageable age, the two men strike a deal. Daland accepts the Dutchman's request to marry his daughter Senta and is rewarded with his considerable fortune.

A group of village girls await the return of their sweethearts, passing the time at their spinning wheels. Senta does not take part and daydreams about the portrait of the Flying Dutchman. She voices her passionate desire to be the one to save the captain from his fate. The hunter Erik is in love with Senta but believes he would not stand a chance as a suitor in the eyes of Daland. He tests the girl's feelings for him by telling of a dream in which the Dutchman and Senta declare their love for each other and run away to sea.

The dream becomes reality. When a little later Daland arrives with the Dutchman and introduces him to his daughter, the two feel an instant mutual attraction. Senta is deeply moved by the suffering of the Dutchman, while the captain believes he has finally found his saviour. Still, the Dutchman warns Senta of the terrible sacrifices she will have to make once she pledges herself eternally to him.

Erik is beside himself that Senta has agreed to marry the Dutchman. He tries to change her mind by evoking tender childhood memories. The Dutchman overhears them and hears Erik argue that Senta had once sworn her love to him.

Convinced that Senta is deceiving him and that he will never find salvation, the Dutchman makes plans to depart. Senta begs him to let her explain, but the Dutchman boards the ship and instructs the crew to set sail.

Senta throws herself into the waves as the ultimate proof of her eternal love, for which she is willing to die.