

# Synopsis

## Act I

1. Ball at the palace<sup>1</sup>
2. Valse
3. Entry of the Prince's mother
4. *Pas de trois* (except for part II)
5. No. 5 passes into Act III for the Black Swan's *pas de deux*
6. *Pas d'action* (here, the tutor and the Prince)
7. and 8. *Dances de coupes* (Dance and Polonaise, danced solely by the male *corps de ballet*; a variation for Siegfried has been added: part II of no. 4)
9. *Finale* (the Prince, who in the traditional version goes hunting, here remains alone in his palace)

Prince Siegfried's twentieth birthday is being celebrated. Wolfgang, the Prince's tutor, introduces the guests. The Queen, Siegfried's mother, enters accompanied by knights, and exhorts the guests to rejoice with her, for the Prince is soon to be married and shall choose his betrothed from the girls whom she herself has invited to the ball. Pensively, the Prince dreams of an ideal love, and for this reason his tutor tries to bring him down to earth and to remind him of the duties that await him. Siegfried however seems deaf to reason. His spirit seeks to escape the reality that surrounds him and to take refuge in dreams.

## Act II (joined with Act I)

10. *Overture*
11. *Hunt. Entry of Odette*
12. *Entry of the Swans*
13. *Danse of the Swans* (sequence from I to VII in the following order:  
I. *Valse* – V. *Adage* – IV. *Petits Cygnes* – VI. *Grands Cygnes* – The Prince's variation normally cut –  
II. *Variation d'Odette* – VII. *Coda*;  
part III has been abolished)
14. *Finale*

The Prince, absorbed in thought, sees a white swan-woman appear, her head adorned with a crown. Bewitched, Siegfried approaches her. The swan confides to him that she is a princess named Odette, and that she has been turned into a swan, with other maidens who, like her, are the victims of a spell cast by the wicked Rothbart. The spell can only be broken if a man will swear eternal love to her. Struck by this confession, Siegfried promises to rescue Odette. Despite the intervention of an enormous bird of prey (Rothbart) which disturbs their sweet encounter, Odette and Siegfried exchange a pledge of love. Odette's swan-girls shield the two lovers with their bodies against attack from Rothbart. Siegfried invites Odette to the ball which his mother, the Queen, is giving the following day and during which he must choose his bride. He insists that Odette attend the ball because he wishes to ask her hand in marriage. Odette replies that this will be impossible, due to her condition as a swan. Siegfried then declares that he will not marry, and swears eternal love to Odette. As dawn rises the apparitions fade away. The Prince is perturbed.

## Act III

15. *Entry of the guests*
16. *Dance of the dwarfs* (entry of the Queen)
20. *Hungarian czárdás*
21. *Spanish dance*
22. *Neapolitan dance*
23. *Mazurka*
17. *Valse* (presentation of marriageable girls)
18. *Allegro* (entry of Rothbart and Odile)
19. (no. 19 has been eliminated, leaving room for the *pas de deux* by the Black Swan to the music corresponding to no. 5 of Act I, with the addition of a variation for Rothbart, taken from Act I)
24. *Finale*

At the palace the master of ceremonies opens the celebrations. The Queen accompanies Prince Siegfried, who seems however to care about nothing, as if estranged from the world around him. After the *divertissement* of folk dances from different countries, the young girls aspiring to marry the Prince are presented to him. He however rejects them all, until a mysterious creature who looks incredibly like Odette enters the palace. As if rapt and subdued by this image, Siegfried has eyes only for her, for this creature whom he believes to be his beloved Odette. But the swan that resembles her so closely is but Odile, daughter of Baron von Rothbart, whom her father has transformed by magic into Odette's double. And the Prince, blinded by love, asks her hand in marriage. Rothbart triumphs. Siegfried is about to perjure himself. Odette can no longer be saved.



**Act IV (joined with Act III)**

- 25. *Overture*
- 26. *Entry of the Swans*
- 27. *Dance of the Swans*
- 28. *Entry of Odette*
- 29. *Final scene* (Entry of Prince. Adagio to the music of sequence III of no. 19 of Act III. Storm)

Siegfried, now increasingly aware of his error, is in deep despair. The vision of the lake returns. Surrounded by the swans, Odette weeps over her lost love. All hope is extinguished, even though Siegfried's betrayal has been involuntary. Consumed with remorse, the Prince beseeches Odette to forgive him, but it is too late. Rothbart takes Odette away from Siegfried forever. His dream ends.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The numbers and titles in italics are those of Tchaikovsky's original score and of the first version of the ballet performed in Moscow in 1877. The indications in brackets refer to the present version by Rudolf Nureyev.

<sup>2</sup> In the 1877 version, a violent storm swallowed up Odette and Siegfried. In that of 1895, Odette, desperate after Siegfried's betrayal, threw herself into the lake and Siegfried killed himself in grief. They both found one another again in the realm of waves for a life together. After the 1917 Revolution, even the protagonists of ballet somehow had to be assimilated to the concept of "positive heroes". And precisely in order to comply with this new philosophy, the finale of the ballet was altered. After a long fight

between Rothbart and Siegfried, in the 1953 version by Vladimir Bourmeister, Odette resumed her original human shape and went off with the Prince towards happiness.