

RUSLAN AND LYUDMILA

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Act I: Svyetozar is hosting a wedding celebration for his daughter, Lyudmila, who is to marry the knight Ruslan. Guests praise Svyetozar and the young couple. The only sad guests are Farlaf and Ratmir, Lyudmila's rejected suitors. The celebrants ask the bard Bayan to sing, but his song foretells ill fortune for the newlyweds. He adds, however, that after all the suffering, true love and happiness will prevail.

Lyudmila, saddened by the thoughts of leaving her father and her city, consoles Farlaf and Ratmir, then declares her love for Ruslan. Svyetozar blesses the couple as the guests call upon Lel, the god of love, to protect them. A thunderclap followed by sudden darkness interrupts the festivities. Light returns, revealing that Lyudmila has mysteriously disappeared. Svyetozar, afraid that she has fallen under an evil spell, promises his daughter and half his kingdom to the man who rescues her. Farlaf, Ratmir, and Ruslan promise never to rest until she is found.

Act II: Ruslan encounters the wise magician Finn, who tells him that Lyudmila was abducted by the evil dwarf Chernomor, whom Ruslan has to defeat. Finn then recounts his sad history with Naina, once a proud beauty who continually rejected his advances, and how he learned the art of sorcery in order to win her over. But fate laughed at him, for when Naina finally appeared before him, she was an ugly old hag. Finn ran away from her, and now Naina seeks vengeance for his rejection. Finn warns Ruslan about the magic charms of the evil sorceress.

The cowardly Farlaf is about to abandon his search for Lyudmila when he encounters the gnarled, old Naina. She offers to help him find Lyudmila, telling him she will destroy all his enemies and deliver the girl to him. The conceited Farlaf rejoices -- his hour of triumph is at hand, and Lyudmila will finally belong to him.

In his search for Chernomor, Ruslan comes across a battlefield strewn with the bones and weapons of fallen warriors. He has lost his own weapons in battle. Ruslan dwells on his sorry lot, and foresees his own tombstone here. Picking up a spear and a shield from the battlefield, his gloomy thoughts give way to hope as he calls on the god Perun to grant him a sword. As the fog lifts, he suddenly discovers the enormous head of a sleeping giant which awakens and stirs up a tremendous storm, attempting to blow Ruslan down. With his spear, Ruslan angrily strikes at the head, which has been guarding a magic sword. Surrendering the sword to Ruslan, the head reveals its story: the giant's brother is none other than the evil dwarf Chernomor, whose strength is in his beard. The sword Ruslan now holds is Chernomor's own, and is the only weapon that can defeat him. Ruslan vows to avenge the giant and to put an end to Chernomor's evil.

Act III: To help Farlaf, Naina attempts to divert Ratmir by having her attendants seduce him. Gorislava, Ratmir's rejected lover, who has been trying to find him ever since he went in search of Lyudmila, approaches and laments her fate. Ratmir enters, but under Naina's spell, he hardly notices Gorislava and only pays attention to Naina's beautiful maidens. Ruslan, also lured to this garden by Naina, enters and is about to fall under the same spell and forget Lyudmila when Finn appears and saves him by magically banishing Naina and her maidens. Ratmir finds his true love in Gorislava and becomes Ruslan's ally.

Act IV: The imprisoned Lyudmila contemplates suicide, preferring death to the attentions of the evil dwarf. Refusing to be consoled by the distractions of Chernomor's attendants, she falls asleep, only to be awakened by the arrival of Chernomor and his followers. In order to seduce

Lyudmila, the dwarf has arranged a series of dances to entertain himself. Ruslan comes to save his beloved and challenges Chernomor to a duel. The dwarf casts a sleeping spell on Lyudmila and hurries off to meet Ruslan. Ruslan defeats Chernomor with his magic sword by cutting off his beard. Ruslan, accompanied by Ratmir and Gorislava, eagerly approaches Lyudmila, but finds her motionless, still under the magic sleeping spell. Ruslan decides to take Lyudmila home, where, with the help of sorcerers, he will free her from the spell.

Act V: On the way back to Kiev, Lyudmila is abducted again, this time by Farlaf, who wants to claim her for himself. Finn comes to Ratmir's aid and gives him a magic ring that will awaken Lyudmila and tells him to follow Ruslan on his way to Svyetozar's palace in Kiev and to give him the ring.

Farlaf has brought the sleeping Lyudmila to her father's palace, but is unable to rouse her. Svyetozar and his court are mourning over her. Ruslan, Ratmir, and Gorislava arrive as Farlaf hides himself. Ruslan awakens Lyudmila with the ring. The hall resounds with rejoicing and the wedding feast is resumed. The people glorify Ruslan, Lyudmila, their gods and their motherland.