

Synopsis

Prologue

Between dream and reality.

Diana, the Goddess of the Hunt, sees a double image of herself in Sylvia, who is bound to the goddess through her love of hunting and by a vow of chastity. However, the goddess is in turmoil. Suddenly it is no longer Sylvia that she sees before her, but Endymion, the obsessive lover, whom she has caused to sleep for ever so that she can gaze on his youth and beauty without ever breaking her vow. Diana tries to regain control of herself, but Endymion stands before her, full of passion... The goddess surrenders! But soon the sound of horns mercilessly drags her back into reality. Thanks be to the gods, it is Sylvia that now stands before her! Diana seizes her bow. Let the hunt begin.

Act I

Night-time in the sacred wood, a statue of Eros, the God of Love.

The place is inhabited by the spirits of the forest, seeking each other and calling out as they cavort in the soft moonlight. When they suddenly sense the approach of a human being, they go into hiding and keep watch. The shepherd Aminta returns to the place where he caught a glimpse of a huntress of unforgettable beauty in the bright light of a full moon. He is coming to pray to Eros to grant him the favour of seeing her once again. Aminta is roused from his reverie by the sound of horns announcing the arrival of the huntresses, led by Sylvia. He conceals himself. Sylvia and her companions celebrate the joys of hunting. As disciples of Diana they have foresworn love, and they take a mischievous pleasure in mocking the statue of Eros. When Diana returns, she sees Aminta's cloak. She hastens to show this to Sylvia, who immediately orders her companions to take up their bows and seek out the intruder. Aminta is soon discovered and handed over to Diana, who angrily throws him at Sylvia's feet. In his anxiety over his fate, Aminta finds the courage to declare his love to Sylvia. She turns her anger against Eros and shoots an arrow at him. Aminta tries to protect the god by placing himself between Sylvia and the statue. The arrow hits him and he falls to the ground.

The statue of Eros comes to life: the god of love, fully aware of his power, shoots an arrow in Sylvia's direction. Sylvia clasps her hand to her heart, which is now open to love! Diana impatiently gives the order to leave, and the huntresses obey. Sylvia follows them, reluctantly leaving Aminta behind. Before going to work, the peasants call upon Eros, their favourite god. At that moment Orion appears, surrounded by his creatures: he approaches Aminta as if he wants to make sure that his rival is really dead, and then disappears. Sylvia comes back to Aminta in distress, begging him to forgive her and

pressing the arrow to her heart. Orion uses this moment to abduct Sylvia. When the peasants return, they find the lifeless form of Aminta. They weep over their friend and in despair they implore Eros to come to their aid. A sorcerer appears. The peasants urge him to take action. The sorcerer takes a laurel branch and gently touches Aminta with it, thus bringing him back to life. The shepherd is immediately concerned as to what has happened to Sylvia. The villagers tell him that she has been abducted by Orion and point to the sorcerer as his saviour. Aminta hastens to thank him and, in the light of such powers, begs him to help him find Sylvia. Visibly moved, the sorcerer reveals his true identity: he is Eros himself. He warns Aminta of the dangers he is about to encounter, and shows him the path by which Orion has fled.

Act II

A cave, the hiding place of Orion.

Orion returns to his hideout carrying Sylvia, whose lifeless body he lays down on his bed. He gazes at her, expressing his joy that she is at last in his power. Sylvia regains her senses and is terrified to find herself in this unknown place, surrounded by strange creatures and faced with Orion. She realises that she is the powerless captive of the Black Hunter! Sylvia rejects his advances and tries to escape, but Orion blocks her path. The Black Hunter will not be beaten: by way of a seduction strategy, he calls upon his companions to provide entertainment for Sylvia. They all obey his command and begin to dance and drink. An idea comes to the mind of the captive Sylvia: she decides to pander to them and pretends to take part in the celebration, in order to get Orion drunk and then make her escape. Orion, who is extremely intoxicated, gradually lowers his guard. To achieve her aim, Sylvia uses all her charms and hands Orion one last cup, which he empties in a single draft. He collapses, sending everyone into a frenzy. Sylvia is filled with new hope. She takes her bow and prays to Eros, begging him to forgive her for scorning him and imploring him to come to her aid. The God of Love appears, riding Pegasus. He forgives Sylvia and tells her to follow him, promising to take her to Aminta.

Act III

At the temple of Diana.

The feast in honour of Bacchus is in full swing, bringing peasants and the minor deities of nature together in the same joyful exuberance. In despair over his failed rescue attempt, Aminta calls upon the peasants to witness his unhappiness. Hope returns before long, however, when Eros makes his entrance surrounded by the huntresses. To test Aminta he has decided to conceal

Sylvia and to disguise his companions with veils. While the nymphs dance, Aminta tries to identify his beloved. Eros finally gives in to the shepherd's desire, and allows the lovely Sylvia to be revealed. The pair are finally united. However, the feast is suddenly interrupted by the arrival of Orion, who has firmly resolved to get Sylvia back. Terrified, Sylvia takes refuge in the temple of Diana. Aminta tries to confront Orion, who forces his way into the holy place. At this point Diana appears. Before he can enter the temple, the goddess draws her bow and shoots: the hunter falls to the ground. Diana now turns her wrath on her faithful companion Sylvia. Aminta throws himself at the goddess's feet and declares that he is solely to blame for all the confusion. The huntress remains unmoved: this human must face punishment. Alerted to the danger, Eros intervenes. He turns to Diana, whose amorous torments he is aware of. The goddess is firmly resolved and shows no weakness. At this point Eros causes Endymion to appear. Deeply affected in her inmost being, Diana softens and grants Sylvia her permission to love her shepherd. Accepting her fate, Diana now takes the form in which we still admire her to-day. She becomes the Lady of the Moon, who each night sheds her light on the beautiful form of the sleeping Endymion.

Sylvia di Manuel Legris.
la scena dell'Atto III.
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