

Gli stivaletti

The Plot

Act I

Solocha, a nice looking woman wishing to appear younger than she is, expresses to the moon her desire to enjoy herself on Christmas Eve. The village inhabitants consider her an unusual woman; a witch capable of every sort of witchcraft. Bes keeps an eye on Solocha. He wants to take revenge against her son, Vakula, the ironmonger, since he tried to make fun of him in church so that all the devils in hell would laugh at him. On Christmas Eve Vakula will meet his fiancée, whilst her father, Čub, the Cossack, has been invited by the village deacon. Bes decides to steal the moon and unchain a snowstorm in order to compel Čub to return home. The old man wishes to keep the disrespectful Vakula far from his attractive daughter and so by inflicting on him a hard punishment. During the night, because of the bad weather, Čub and his friend Panas have to shelter in a tavern. Later the weather improves a little and Čub, drunk, decides to return home. Meanwhile Oksana, all dressed up is waiting at home for her fiancé. She has prepared sweets and wine for the young brigade who pass by singing the traditional Ukraine songs, the koljadki. However she is uneasy; she feels neglected and thinks no one wants to marry her. When Vakula arrives, she is upset and taunts him about his mother being a witch and that Čub will soon marry her. Vakula is shocked by these words. Čub covered with snow and completely drunk reaches his house and knocks at the door. Vakula very angry does not recognise him; he prevents the old Cossack from entering and sends him away very roughly. Oksana is offended and to punish him she tells him that she is in love with another man. Vakula, mortified, leaves the house but Oksana regrets her impulsiveness; she is in love with Vakula and in no way is cheered up by the gay singing brigade.

Act II

Solocha and lies are dancing the gopak: suddenly someone knocks at the door. There is Fan Golova, the head of the village, who is in love with Solocha. Bes immediately gets into a sack before the newcomer enters the house and begins to talk. Someone else knocks at the door and Golova has to follow the example of Bes; the visitor is a clumsy suitor, a teacher, who tries to seduce Solocha. There remains for him the last sack in which to hide before Čub enters the house welcomed warmly by the good looking witch. Vakula arrives at his house and his mother makes the old Čub get into the same sack where the teacher was hidden. Solocha advises her son to go to sleep in his shop. The ironmonger tries to drag the sacks and only after a great effort he is able to take them out; the reason for this lack of strength, he believes, is due to the deception of love. In the street the brigade sings the koljadki; Oksana is among them and when she sees Vakula, very depressed, to humiliate him more she tells him about her father. Then she sings the praises of a pair of boots worn by a girl and she complains of the fact that nobody offers her beautiful presents. Vakula promises to offer her a pair of unique boots more precious than those of the tsarina. Oksana, gratified, promises to marry him. Vakula goes away leaving the heavy sacks. He takes one. The brigade thinks the sacks are full of goods collected because of the koljadki but instead Golova, Čub and the teacher appear from them.

Act III

In despair. Vakula decides to kill himself. Promptly Bes comes out from the sack and he sits on Vakula shoulder: he will have his girl friend back if he gives him his soul. The ironmonger is more cunning than Bes; he pretends to accept the agreement and suddenly he takes the Devil by the tail. Now he is asking Bes something very important: he wants the tsarina boots and to take them they have to fly to the magnificent palace at Petersburg. Finally they are in the palace and they join Zaporoz'e victorious Cossacks waiting to be introduced to the tsarina. It's their turn; Vakula declares his desire and the princess is very amused by the simplicity of his request. Vakula obtains the boots and returns home with the help of the Devil.

Act IV

The village is sunny. Solocha and Oksana are unhappy since they do not have news of Vakula. When he finally arrives there is great joy in the village. The young ironmonger has decided to mend his ways. He begs Čub's pardon who grants permission for Oksana to become his wife. She now obtains the precious boots but the young lady simply refuses them, happy to have got back her man. Now the village may happily celebrate the marriage of the couple.