

The Student Prince

The Story of the Play

In Spring, 1860, Prince Karl Franz, twenty-year-old heir to the throne of Karlsberg, gets his first experience of freedom from Court restrictions and etiquette when he enters the University of Heidelberg. Despite the protests of his pompous valet, Lutz, he decides to take up residence at the Inn of the "Three Golden Apples". He is encouraged in this decision by his tutor, Dr. Engel, who wishes him to enjoy the golden days of his youth.

The garden of the Inn, on the banks of the Neckar, is the meeting place of the university students; they sing the praises of student life and also of Kathie, the attractive niece of the landlord. The Prince enters light-heartedly into university life; his shyness is overcome by the charms of Kathie and they fall in love.

After four happy months his care-free existence is disturbed by Court visitors. The Grand Duchess and her daughter, Princess Margaret (who is meeting Karl Franz for the first time) have been summoned to Karlsberg by the dying King to fulfil his wish that a betrothal ceremony between Karl Franz and the Princess should take place without delay. The Prime Minister, Von Mark, calls upon the Prince to urge his immediate return to Karlsberg; after a struggle between inclination and the call to duty he leaves with a promise to return to Heidelberg.

Two years later, on the eve of his marriage to Margaret, Karl Franz, now King, is reminded of his promise. His nostalgic memories conjure up a vision of his comrades and his beloved Kathie and he resolves to keep his promise and return to Heidelberg.

Everything has changed at the Inn and a meeting between Princess Margaret and Kathie convinces the latter that Karl Franz's future happiness lies in the fulfilment of his destiny as King and the reciprocation of Margaret's love for him. When Karl Franz arrives, Kathie announces her engagement to her cousin Rudolph and he turns to Margaret with the realisation that his memories of Heidelberg and Kathie will always be with him as a dream.