BACKGROUND

Three years earlier, Figaro—the Barber of Seville—aided Count Almaviva in marrying the beautiful Rosina. Figaro also borrowed 10,000 francs from the housekeeper, Marcellina, promising to repay her or else marry her. Now he is preparing to marry Susanna, the Countess’s chambermaid. However, the Count himself is enamored of Susanna. He has promised her a dowry in the hope that she will secretly grant him his droit du seigneur, a feudal right to sexual favors he had renounced when he got married. The story begins on the morning of the wedding day.

ACTS I / II

Figaro is busy measuring the apartment the Count has assigned to him and his bride. But Susanna is furious when she learns that this is the room in which they will be living: Hasn’t he noticed how close it is to the Count’s bedroom? She tells Figaro about the nobleman’s unwelcome advances; Figaro vows to thwart his master and teach him a lesson.

Marcellina arrives with Dr. Bartolo, whom she has engaged to represent her before the Count in the matter of Figaro’s debt. Bartolo looks forward to exacting revenge on Figaro, who had prevented him from marrying his ward, the present Countess.

When old couple leaves, the teenage page Cherubino dashes in looking for a place to hide. The Count has caught him alone with Barbarina, the gardener’s daughter. Cherubino hides and witnesses the Count’s arrival and attempt to seduce Susanna. When Don Basilio, the music teacher, arrives, the Count also goes into hiding. Basilio gossips to Susanna that Cherubino is much too attentive to the Countess. This infuriates the Count, who not only reveals himself but accidentally uncovers the hiding Cherubino.

The Count orders Cherubino to enlist in the army, and Figaro attempts to prepare the young lad for military life. The Countess Almaviva laments the loss of her husband’s affections. Susanna reports on the Count’s latest machinations, and Figaro stops by to reveal his plot: lure the Count to a rendezvous with Cherubino, disguised as Susanna, so that the Countess may ‘discover’ her husband’s indiscretion.

Cherubino arrives to try on his disguise, and the ladies listen to his newly composed love song. While Susanna is briefly out of the room, the Count appears and is deeply suspicious because his wife’s closet door is locked. (It is, of course, Cherubino, once again in hiding.) Cherubino manages to knock over something and the noise from within the closet further infuriates the jealous husband. The Countess explains that Susanna is working in the closet, while Susanna quietly returns and hides. At the height of the argument the Countess refuses to open the door, so the Count locks all the other doors and drags his wife off with him to search for a crowbar.

Cherubino, now released from the closet, looks desperately with Susanna for an escape route. Susanna takes his place in the closet just as her master and mistress return. Since the door is about to be forced, the Countess reluctantly admits that it is Cherubino in the closet, and is then (happily) dumbfounded when it is Susanna who emerges.

As things seem to be resolving, the drunken gardener Antonio comes looking for the Count. His complaint: A man has just jumped from the second floor window and ruined the carnations. The Count’s suspicions flare up anew, and Figaro and the two women are just squeaking by when a new challenge arrives: Marcellina, Bartolo and Basilio arrive to demand payment on the old woman’s claim.

ACTS III / IV

Still hoping to entrap the Count, Susanna accepts his offer of a rendezvous. When he hears Susanna telling Figaro that they have as good as won the court decision in the case of Figaro’s debt to Marcellina, the Count is furious and decides to force Figaro to marry the old woman. The Countess, meanwhile, has not given up hope of winning back her errant husband. She decides that she herself will substitute for Susanna at the rendezvous.

At the trial, the Count’s verdict against Figaro is overridden when it is revealed that Marcellina and Bartolo are, in fact, Figaro’s long-lost parents. Her wedding now assured, Susanna is reluctant to go ahead with the intrigue, but the Countess insists. They compose a letter to the Count, confirming the rendezvous for that night. They seal it with a pin, to be returned to Susanna as the Count’s confirmation. During the wedding festivities, Susanna slips the note to the Count.

In the garden that night, Figaro finds Barbarina searching for the pin which she was to return to Susanna. Figaro now believes that he has been deceived and plans to confront Susanna during her assignation with the Count. When he discovers that Susanna and the Countess have exchanged places, he is reassured and joins in the game. The Count makes love to ‘Susanna’ only to find that she is really his own wife. Convicted of infidelity, he humbly begs his wife’s pardon. The Countess lovingly forgives him. Figaro and Susanna are happily married, and everyone joins in the celebration.