

Samuel Barber

Vanessa*

op. 32

An opera in three acts

Libretto
by
Gian Carlo Menotti

Characters

Vanessa, a lady of great beauty in her late thirties

Erika, her niece, a young girl of twenty

The Old Baroness, Vanessa's mother and Erika's grandmother

Anatol, a handsome young man in his early twenties

The Old Doctor

Nicholas, the Major-Domo

Footman

The Young Pastor, Servants, Guests, Peasants, their Children, Musicians

The action takes place at Vanessa's country house in a northern country.

** Il presente libretto è stato esemplato - a cura di **Olimpio Cescatti** - sullo spartito originale dell'opera.
(O. C.)*

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ACT I

Scene 1

A night in early winter in Vanessa's luxurious drawing room. A small table is laid for supper, stage right. All the mirrors in the room and one large painting over the mantelpiece are covered with cloth. There is a large French window at the back which leads into a darkened 'jardin d'hiver'. Vanessa is sitting by the fire, stage left, her face shadowed by a veil. The Baroness is sitting in front of her and remains immobile throughout the scene until her exit. In the middle of the room a group of servants, headed by Nicholas, the Major-domo, is standing in front of Erika; she is giving them orders, a notebook in her hand. There is a snowstorm outside.

[Introduction]

Erika

'Potage crème aux perles.'

Major-domo

(repeats order to servants)

'Potage crème aux perles.'

(A butler enters with a lighted candelabre, places it on the dinner-table and leaves.)

Erika

'Écrevisses à la bordelaise.'

Major-domo

'Écrevisses à la bordelaise.'

Vanessa

(without moving)

Find something better than that!

Erika

‘Alors... langoustines grillés sauce aux huîtres.’

Major-domo

‘Langoustines grillés sauce aux huîtres.’

Erika

‘Faisan braisé au porto.’

Vanessa

Sick of pheasant... ‘Canard!’

Erika

‘Canard farci sauce Savoie.’

Vanessa

Too many sauces.

Erika

‘Palombes rôties nature?’

Vanessa

Better.

(Erika nods to the Major-domo to put it down. He does so, murmuring «‘Palombes rôties, etc.’».)

Erika

‘Gâteau d'amandes au miel.’

Major-domo

‘Gâteau d'amandes au miel.’

Erika

One bottle of Montrachet; two bottles of Romanée-Conti. That is all.

Vanessa

Don't forget the camelias.

Erika

(to servants)

Oh yes, from the greenhouse, one fresh camelia for his dressing table ev'ry morning.

Major-domo

'Oui, Ma'moisel(le).'

Erika

A centerpiece of Christmas roses for lunch; of green orchids for dinner.

Major-domo

'Oui, Ma'moisel(le).'

Vanessa

Don't forget the bell.

Erika

Oh yes, have the gatekeeper ring the bell all night should the sleigh be lost in the storm.
Thank you. You all may go.

(Servants exeunt.)

Vanessa

(rising and tearing off her veil; almost anguished in her intensity)

No, I cannot understand why he has not arrived yet. Has no message come?

Erika

(imperturbed, picks up Vanessa's veil and puts it on a chair)

They left the village at dawn; perhaps they stopped on their way to let the storm die down.

Vanessa

My guest is not one to let a storm stand in his way and Karl should know the road blindfolded. I shall have him dismissed if they are lost.

(She goes to the window. - Erika has picked up her needlework and sits on the couch, calmly sewing.)

Erika

The snow is so deep, it is hard on the horses.

Vanessa

(with increasing irritation turns from the window and starts to go back to the sofa)

Oh, I shall die if anything happens to him!
(clasping her breast)
My heart, my heart, I can wait no longer.

(Erika goes to her.)

Erika
You have not eaten today.

Vanessa
I shall not until he comes.

(She returns to fireplace.)

My heart, my heart, I can wait no longer.

Erika
(goes to get a book)
Shall I read to you?

Vanessa
(sinks exhausted on the sofa)
Yes, Erika, read to me.

(Outside the tower bell begins to ring.)

Erika
(sits by the fire)
Here it is:

(She reads.)

Oedipus:
“Woe, woe is me,
Sorrowful that I am!
Where am I, where am I going?
Where am I cast away?”

(Vanessa snatches the book away from Erika.)

Vanessa

You do not know how to read. You have never known what love is!

(reading, as she paces up and down the room)

“Woe, woe is me,

Sorrowful, sorrowful that I am!

Where am I? Where am I going?

Where am I cast away?”

Why does he not come?

(The book falls from her hands. - The Baroness slowly gets up, as does Erika.)

Erika

(kissing her)

Good night.

Vanessa

(turns toward her mother)

Even now you will not speak to me!

(For a few seconds they look at each other in silence.)

Go, go; good night.

(Then Vanessa sits despondently on a chair near the table. Erika, in the meantime, has pulled a bell-cord, then slowly leads the Baroness to the door; as they reach it a maid comes in and accompanies the Baroness out of the room. Erika goes and stands by the French window which looks out on the park. Vanessa rises and returns to her chair by the fire.)

Vanessa

Is it still snowing?

Erika

Yes, Vanessa.

Vanessa

Look, look well, deep into the woods; don't you see the light of lanterns?

Erika

No, Vanessa.

Vanessa

Go to bed. I shall wait alone.

(Erika has slowly turned from the window and stands by the table.)

Erika

Must the winter come so soon? Night after night I hear the hungry deer wander weeping in the woods, and from his house of brittle bark hoots the frozen owl. Must the winter come so soon? Here in this forest neither dawn nor sunset marks the passing of the days.

(She puts out the candles and sits by the table.)

It is a long winter here. Must the winter come so soon?

(Sleighbells in the distance, gradually increasing.)

Listen! They are here.

(Erika rises and goes to the window.)

I can see the lights.

(Vanessa rises and runs across to the window, then enters the 'jardin d'hiver', peering out. - The tower bell begins to ring faster and louder. Lights from the sleigh are seen in the garden. - Erika runs across the room and pulls the bell-chord. - Sleighbells are by now 'f'. - They cease.)

Vanessa

(returning, almost hysterically)

He has come, he has come! Go and call all the servants. Light up the courtyard. I shall wait here.

(Erika starts to run out of the room.)

And, Erika,

(grasping her)

let me be alone with him when he comes in.

(Erika exits. In great agitation Vanessa paces up and down the room. - She goes to the mirror, as if to uncover it, but hesitates and turns away. - Outside are heard the bustle and turmoil of arrival, servants rushing to and fro. - Vanessa sits down by the fire with

her back to the door. - Suddenly, the door is thrown open. In the semi-darkness, the figure of Anatol is seen standing silhouetted in the lighted doorway.)

Vanessa

(with restrained emotion, and without looking or moving toward him)

Do not utter a word, Anatol, do not move; you may not wish to stay. For over twenty years in stillness, in silence, I have waited for you. I have always been sure, I have always known you would come back to me, Anatol; I have scarcely breathed so that Life should not leave its trace and nothing might change in me that you loved; alone, apart, unseen, I have waited for you.

(Anatol slowly approaches her and takes her hand. She rises suddenly, always with her back to him.)

Oh, how dark, how desperate, how blind, to let the days go by unmarked, unheeded! How endless, how lonely, how wrong to rob a beating heart of time and space! Beauty is the hardest gift to shelter, harder than Death to stay. All this I have done for you.

(Anatol approaches her from behind, grasping her outstretched hand. - She releases her hand.)

Now listen, listen well:

(very tenderly)

Unless you still love me I do not want you to see me, Anatol. Without love do not dare look in my eyes / look into eyes because all change, all change begins when Love has died, when Love had died. Tell me, Anatol, do you love me? Do you still love me as once you did? For if you do not, I shall ask you to leave my house this very night!

(Vanessa does not move.)

Anatol

(simply)

Yes, I believe I shall love you.

(For the first time Vanessa turns around and looks at him. She is momentarily frozen in horror, then staggers back.)

Vanessa

Ah no, ah no, ah no! My God, who are you? Impostor, cheat! Help me, someone help me!

(Erika runs in.)

It is not he, it is not he! I do not know him. I have never seen him. Have him put out of the house! Help me, help me upstairs; I think I shall faint.

(Erika supports her as they exit. - Left alone, Anatol, who has scarcely moved during the previous scene, casually walks to the middle of the room and looks curiously about him. - Noticing Vanessa's handkerchief which she has dropped, he picks it up and puts it on a chair. He lifts the cover of the mirror. - He approaches the supper-table, appraises the wine and table setting and is not displeased. - Erika hurriedly enters. - Anatol turns to her with an ironic bow.)

Erika

Who are you? Why did you come here? You must leave at once.

Anatol

But I did not lie. I am Anatol. When my father died...

Erika

When your father died... Oh no! Poor Vanessa! After so many dreams, after so long a waiting! Oh, how unfair a game Life can be when Death can tally the score at will. Why did you not let her know? Why did you not write her?

(Anatol pensively picks up Vanessa's handkerchief.)

Anatol

All through my youth I heard that name, "Vanessa". Like a burning flame it used to scorch my mother's lips and light my father's eyes with longing. Now that I am alone I am driven here to meet at last the woman who haunted so my house: Vanessa! But who are you?

Erika

Sometimes I am her niece but mostly her shadow. Now you must leave; you heard what she said.

Anatol

You are not going to send me out into the storm again! Tell her who I am and she will let me stay the night.

(He approaches one of the covered mirrors.)

Erika

Do not touch it; she cannot bear the sight of mirrors.

(Anatol approaches the table laid for supper.)

Anatol

Was the supper laid for him?

(picking up a bottle of wine)

Ah, Romanée-Conti! My father loved this wine.

(nonchalantly)

May I light the candles?

(While lighting them, he reflects.)

I, too, love good food and wine, but my father lost his fortune dreaming, while my mother bought subtle poisons to destroy his dreams. Now I can only drink the wine of others. Will you join me for supper?

Erika

(with spirit)

That place was not set for me. Besides it is not with me that you come from so far to drink your wines.

Anatol

(insinuating)

Nor was I the one who was expected.

(laughing lightly)

I am the false Dimitri, the Pretender;

(He kneels with comic exaggeration and offers her the flower from his lapel.)

be my Marina!

(throwing over his shoulder the flower she has not taken)

You never smile.

(He rises and takes her hand, leading her slowly to the table. She follows, fascinated and reluctant.)

Sit down.

(Erika sits down. - He turns down the lamp.)

This is a wild and solitary place to pass one's youth in. It is as if we had been always alone!

(He pours two glasses of wine, offering one to her; lifting his glass)

What is your name?

Erika

Erika.

(They touch glasses, looking at each other.)

Scene 2

The same. A month later on a sunny Sunday morning.

A breakfast table is laid in the 'jardin d'hiver' where, through the gleaming panes of glass, one sees the distant park covered with snow. The Baroness and Erika are sitting in the main room.

Baroness

... and then?

Erika

(standing by the Baroness, but looking away from her)

He made me drink too much wine. I showed him to his room. I stayed with him all night.

Baroness

The very night you met him?

Erika

The only night.

Baroness

Erika, Erika, you so proud, so pure!

Erika

I was neither proud nor pure that night: once he kissed me it seemed so natural to obey.

Baroness

What could you have seen in such a man? When I was young a man came into the house like a conqueror carrying his love with pride; but this Anatol, oh this cautious knight, who entered our house like a thief, what kind of man is he?

Erika

If I only knew I would also know why I both hate and love him.

(Erika runs to the Baroness, kneels at her feet and puts her head in this opera.)

Baroness

... and now will he do the honorable thing?

Erika

Yes, he will marry me if I so wish; but I do not want his honor so that mine be saved. I want his love so that my love stay aflame!

Baroness

Does he not love you?

Erika

He says he does, but I feel he is incapable of love His words are as easy as his kisses.

Baroness

It is too late to measure or to weigh; you must do what must be done.

Erika

Must I? Has not each woman the right to wait for her true love to come? The first and last, the only love?

(passionately)

Ah, if I were sure of him, I should fly to him and leave behind the world to burn. But no, he does not tremble as I do when our eyes meet; nor has the mem'ry of that night erased the mocking laughter from his lips.

Baroness

You do not love him, then?

Erika

(rising, suddenly transported)

Oh yes, oh yes: I love someone like him!

(She runs again to the Baroness and, sobbing, puts her head in her grandmother's lap.)

Baroness

(comforting her)

My poor child, love never bears the image that we dream of; when it seems to, beware of the disguise!

(Distant calls and laughter of Vanessa and Anatol, off-stage.)

Erika

But then, Grandmother, to hold what I feel is of small worth, have I the right to break another woman's heart?

Baroness

Whose heart?

(One hears the laughter of Vanessa in the 'jardin d'hiver'.)

Erika

(rises)

Hers, of course. Have you not noticed? She loves him more than I do because she loves him blindly.

Baroness

The fool!

(Vanessa and Anatol, in skating togs, appear in the 'jardin d'hiver' carrying their skates and still laughing.)

Vanessa

(ringing a bell-chord for the servants)

No, you are not as good a skater as your father was!

Anatol

But I'm a luckier man, perhaps.

(They come into the main room. During the following dialogue they will be taking off their scarves boots etc., which will then be collected by the Major-domo.)

Anatol

(to Erika)

Good morning, Erika, why didn't you join us?

Erika

Because you forgot to ask me.

Anatol

Did I?

(going up to the Baroness)

Ah, good morning, Baroness.

Vanessa

Save your breath: she has become so old that she only understands the language of the young.

(The Doctor enters, greeting Erika.)

Anatol

Are we not young?

Vanessa

(teasingly)

We lost our innocence long ago, my dear.

Doctor

Good morning, good morning.

Vanessa

Good morning, Doctor.

Doctor

What a pretty pair you made skating on the lake!

(with a twinkle)

I saw you, I saw you.

(In the meantime, two butlers have appeared in the 'jardin d'hiver' bringing in breakfast and coffee.)

Vanessa

You must breakfast in a hurry or we shall be late for chapel.

(Anatol stands by the fireplace, leaning on the mantel. - A butler had entered with a bunch of flowers which Erika places in various vases. - The Doctor stands, holding his pipe and reminiscing. Vanessa returns from the 'jardin d'hiver' with a cup of coffee.)

Doctor

(in a leisurely manner)

Ah, how good it is to see this house alive again!

Vanessa

Yes, dear Doctor.

(reflecting)

Perhaps the day is near when I shall unveil the mirrors and the portraits.

Doctor

(to Anatol)

Ah, sir, this used to be

/a gay house once.

/

/Vanessa

/The day

may be near to open all the rooms and give the greatest ball this county has ever seen.

Doctor

Do you still remember, as a young girl, the garden parties and the games?

(Erika stands behind the sofa. Anatol kneels on the sofa, gently caressing her.)

Vanessa

(lingering)

Oh yes, oh yes,

(with mounting enthusiasm)

I shall light the lake with Chinese lanterns; ...

Doctor

(rising)

... and the hills with bonfires; ...

Vanessa

I shall call the peasants with their accordions and fiddles.

Doctor

Do you still remember our country dances, Milady?

Vanessa

(rising)

Are you too old to dance them, dear Doctor?

Doctor

What impertinence!

(trying out a few steps)

“Under the willow tree...”

(turning to Vanessa and putting his pipe down on the table)

Come, come, let us show them who is the best dancer here!

(He begins to dance with Vanessa.)

“Under the willow tree

two doves cry, two doves cry.

Under the willow tree

two doves cry, two doves cry,

ah oh!

Where shall we sleep, my love,

whither shall we fly?

Where shall we sleep, my love,

whither shall we fly?

The wood has swallowed the moon,

the fog has swallowed the shore,

the green toad has swallowed

the key to my door.”

Anatol

Ah, charming, charming; I wish I could compete with you, Doctor.

Doctor

Nonsense, young man; give me your hand and I’ll show you the steps!

(Erika goes over the table and stands behind Vanessa, who is seated.)

Doctor

(showing him)

Right foot first

back, then left,
forward, slide.
One, two, three, reverse,
two, three,
/one.

/

/(Anatol dances with the Doctor.)

/

/Vanessa and Erika

/"Under the willow tree etc."

/

/Doctor

/Two, three, right,

/two, three, left,

/left foot, right foot.

/Two, three, forward,

/two, three, backward.

/Ah, charming, charming ...

(They all laugh as they see Anatol completely confused.)

Doctor

No, no! No, no! What do they teach you in school today?

Vanessa

Stop this nonsense and hurry to your breakfast! I must go up and change.

(Vanessa takes her muff and starts to go to her room. - The Doctor takes Anatol by the arm and they start to the 'jardin d'hiver'.)

Doctor

(on the way out)

Do you play a good game of chess, sir?

Anatol

I'm afraid I don't play at all.

Doctor

How the world has changed! I can't imagine what young people do in the evenings nowadays.

(They go out and are seen outside by the breakfast table, serving themselves.)

Vanessa

(returning)

Erika, I am so happy. I know now... it was *he* I was waiting for. I kept my youth for him;

(tenderly)

he sent me his younger self. Anatol, Anatol!

Erika

(suddenly agitated)

Aunt Vanessa, don't be fooled by a name. It is another man who has come.

Vanessa

No, Erika. He carries his father's destiny with him and he knows it, he knows it!

Erika

What makes you say that?

Vanessa

I must tell you what happened out skating.

Erika

What happened?

Vanessa

He stopped me... and looked in my eyes;

(sitting)

and then he said: "Christmas is near and the winter will pass. It is time for me to leave now but I cannot find the strength to go".

Erika

Did he say that?

Vanessa

Yes, those very words.

Erika

And then?

Vanessa

Then I asked: “What makes you so weak?”.

Erika

What did he say?

Vanessa

He took my hand ...

Erika

He took your hand?!

Vanessa

... and he answered:

(with increasing intensity)

“I came as a guest; I am foolish enough to want to leave as the master”.

Erika

(rising)

Did he say

/that?

/

/Vanessa

/Ah, yes,

Erika!

Erika

Then? ...

Vanessa

There was a long silence.

Erika

(coming very close to Vanessa)

And then?...

Vanessa

Ha, ha, ha,

(facetiously)

what a curious niece I have!

(She goes toward the 'jardin d'hiver' where the young Pastor has just arrived and is seen conversing with the Doctor and Anatol.)

Dear me, here is the Pastor; I must hurry. Good morning, Pastor, we shall soon be ready. Have some coffee with us.

(She re-enters the room.)

Oh, how happy I feel this morning, how happy!

(Vanessa exits. - Erika silently observes Vanessa's departure and then runs and embraces her grandmother, who has watched the preceding without visible emotion.)

Erika

Did you hear her?

Baroness

You must speak out or you will lose him.

Erika

It is his love I want and not his capture.

Baroness

Even for love one must fight.

Erika

Should he not fight for mine? Vanessa or I, it is the same to him.

Baroness

He saw your money before he met your eyes.

Erika

And still, and still...

(passionately)

the way he kissed that night how can I forget those kisses!

Baroness

He is the man of today; he only sees what is offered him;

(with scorn)

he will choose what is easier.

Erika

(desperately)

Why waste my time on him, then, when I am dying of love?

(Anatol, a coffee cup in his hand, runs into the room from the 'jardin d'hiver' where the Doctor and the Pastor are seen in a heated discussion.)

Anatol

(laughingly)

Help, help! Save me from their talk!

(lightly)

Between a doctor and a minister a man will lose both body and soul!

Erika

Anatol, I must speak to

/you.

/

/Anatol

/What

is it, then?

Erika

Is it true what you said to Vanessa this morning?

Anatol

I? This morning?

Erika

For God's sake, stop lying!

Anatol

Aha, the little sphinx begins to clamor for her answers.

Erika

I have the right to claim them!

Anatol

Have you not told me I am free?

/Baroness

/Listen to him, Erika; be patient with him!

/

/Erika

/Of course, of course. I shall not bind you if you are not bound by
/mem'ries.

Anatol

(rises and goes to Erika)

How could I forget that night?

Baroness

That night!

Anatol

The night that made you since so dark and bitter?

Erika

What has become of *you* since then?

/Baroness

/Careful, Erika, or he will leave you!

/

/Anatol

/I have not been silent. I asked you before
and now, with your grandmother

(Decided, he takes her by the arm and leads her to the Baroness.)

as witness, I ask you again: "Will you marry me?"

Erika

And what will you do if I should answer,

(turning away)

no?

Anatol

What do you want me to say: that I should slash my throat like this? Or spend my days
as a monk chanting

(mocking)

"Te Deum laudamus"?

Erika

(agitated)

I hate your laughter!

Anatol

What a sentimental child you are! You belong to another age.

Erika

Has then the human heart so changed?

(She sits on a chair.)

Anatol

Outside this house the world has changed. Life is swifter than before; there is no time for idle gestures. I cannot offer you eternal love for we have learned today such words are lies.

(more seriously)

But the brief pleasure of passion,

(going to her)

yes, and sweet, long friendship.

(with feeling)

Who can resist your gentle beauty, Erika?

(caressing her from behind the chair)

Oh, how happy we could be together! Erika!

(Erika abandons herself to him.)

Do you know Paris and Rome, Budapest and Vienna?

(Erika rises and moves away from him, as if to escape him.)

The velvet rooms for jeweled suppers,

(following her)

the coast of Spain for solitude, the gilded Grand Hotels for dancing, the glass and marble stations for goodbyes?

(embracing her)

This we could share together if you accept my love

(releasing her)

and, who knows, my love might last forever, Erika.

(with unexpected irony)

Life is so brief.

(Erika is suddenly wounded by his last phrase.)

Erika

Ah, what a meagre offer yours is! I wish I could be blinded by your love; instead, I see you only too well, too well.

(Vanessa comes into the room dressed for chapel.)

Anatol

What is your answer, then?

Vanessa

Hurry now! Let us not keep the dear Pastor waiting.

(She pulls a bell-cord; approaching the Baroness)

Here is your shawl, mother, and your prayer book. Doctor, will you give her your arm?

Doctor

Yes, Baroness.

(Major-domo comes in.)

Vanessa

Call the servants for chapel. Erika, aren't you ready yet?

Erika

Do not wait for me, Aunt Vanessa; I shall join you later.

(Meanwhile the Baroness slowly puts on her shawl as a maid enters with a shawl for Erika.)

Vanessa

Are you ready? Come!

(Bell off-stage. - The Baroness has gotten from her chair, and one by one the servants follow the Major-domo. They each kiss her hand. - The Baroness gives her arms to the Doctor.)

Doctor

(as they stop at the door of the 'jardin d'hiver')

Even to your old Doctor you will no longer speak. How will you call him when the time comes?

(The Baroness and Doctor exeunt.)

Anatol

(offering his arm to Vanessa)

May I take your arm, Baroness?

Vanessa

(with elegance)

You must call me Vanessa.

(They also walk out into the 'jardin d'hiver' and disappear in the direction of the chapel. The servants follow. - Erika, left alone, walks around the room in hysterical anguish. - As if to follow the others, she goes toward the 'jardin d'hiver' but returns to the middle of the room and begins to pace nervously back and forth. - She moves toward a covered mirror. - She approaches it fearfully. - She uncovers the mirror. - She goes over to the fireplace, pondering. - She climbs up on a chair before the picture which hangs over the mantelpiece. - With a quick motion, she uncovers a portrait of Vanessa in a ball dress, in all the pride of her youth. - From outside one hears the strains of the first hymn coming from the chapel. - Organ off-stage.)

Chorus

“In morning light let us rejoice,
Thy love is our salvation;
in praise of Thee we raise our voice.

(Erika descends from the chair and backs away, her eyes still fixed on the portrait.)

Now let us sing in the Light,
our smiles trembling in the heart:
our fears lost in the night,
joyously this day we start.
For joy created from Thy tears,
fills hearts with adoration.

(Erika runs quickly over to the mirror and looks at her reflection, first with morbid fascination as she compares it with the figure in the portrait, then turns with sudden pride and defiance, as she unbuttons her blouse to imitate the extreme 'décolletage' of Vanessa's dress in the portrait.)

And in Thy Light we shed all fears.
Amen.“

(Erika puts on her shawl and starts out to chapel, then stops and turns as if suddenly struck by a cry of inner indignation.)

Erika

(passionately)

No, Anatol, my answer is no.

(ablaze with scorn)

Let Vanessa have you, she who for so little had to wait so long!

(Sobbing hysterically, she throws herself on the sofa.)

ACT II

New Year's Eve. Entrance hall to the castle.

At the right, a stairway leading to the rooms upstairs. At the back, a very large archway through which one sees part of the ballroom. At the left, the main entrance to the castle. When the curtain goes up, the entrance hall is almost empty except for a few guests, who are greeting each other on their way into the ballroom, Nicholas, the Major-domo, who is arranging all the fur coats, cloaks, hats, etc., on the racks by the door, and a footman, who is standing at the entrance to the ballroom. In the ballroom, from which is heard the hum of conversation, one sees couples dancing to an off-stage orchestra. More guests descend the stairway and are greeted as they enter the ballroom. Nicholas opens the door and helps a couple of latecomers to dispose of their wraps.

Footman

(ushering the couple into the ballroom)

The Count and the Countess d'Albany.

Nicholas

(to a footman and maid at the door)

Almost ev'ryone is here now. Go and help inside. I'll watch the door.

(As the footman and maid disappear inside, Nicholas approaches the rack where the women's fur coats are hanging.)

Ah, these lovely furs ...

(He rubs his cheek against one of them with a deep sigh. - The Doctor, a little tipsy, comes in from the ballroom holding two glasses of champagne. He looks at Nicholas in great astonishment.)

... so soft, so sweetly scented. This is all I shall ever know of such women.

Doctor

You rascal, you! I never knew you had a soul. What an evening! What women, what champagne! But what am I doing with *two* glasses? I must have been carrying one to some charming lady:

(A lackey enters, carrying a tray of empty glasses.)

Who was she? Oh well...

(He drinks both glasses himself, then follows the lackey and attempts to put the glasses on the tray. He misses it and the glasses crash on the floor; a lackey picks up the pieces disapprovingly and exits.)

Sorry!

(He sighs.)

I should never have been a doctor, Nicholas; a gentleman, a poet, that's what I am. A naked body, what is it to a doctor? We see them ev'ry day. But under a chandelier, with the right music, the right perfume, a naked arm, a shoulder... Oh God, I lose my mind!

(Two maids are seen on the stairway, giggling at the Doctor.)

Doctor

(confidentially to Nicholas)

Did you see me dance with Ma'moiselle Doriat? She's not so young, I know that, a bit too plump, perhaps, a bit too tall small for me.

(with delight)

But, oh, so light on her feet, so soft, so blonde. Tra la la la...

(imitating her)

"Doctor, dear Doctor, not quite so fast, dear Doctor!" Her blue scarf floating over my head... ("Doctor, dear Doctor, not quite so fast, dear Doctor!") Her bosom heaving under my chin... ("Doctor, dear Doctor, not quite so fast, dear Doctor!")

(losing his balance)

Oh la, la.

(He hiccups.)

I must stop drinking, I still have to announce the engagement. Yes, Nicholas, yes,

(affectionately)

they chose the old family doctor to make the announcement. A sweet idea... very touching, very touching.

(feeling in his coat pockets)

Good heavens, where is my speech?

(Without noticing, he has dropped the text of his speech on the floor: the Major-domo picks it up.)

I should not have drunk so much; I shall muddle up ev'rything.

(with aplomb)

Will you lend me your comb, Nicholas?

(He starts to comb his hair, peering into a pocket-mirror.)

Very touching,

(to himself)

very touching,

(combing his hair)

touching...

(Vanessa comes in, resplendent in a balldress, looking very nervous and agitated. - The two maids leave hurriedly. Major-domo gives the Doctor his speech and exits.)

Vanessa

(to Doctor)

Here you are.

(She looks toward the rooms upstairs.)

Doctor

Yes, yes, I am ready. Don't worry, I know it all by heart.

(beginning to declaim)

“Ladies and Gentlemen!...”

Vanessa

(interrupting him)

Oh, be quiet, Doctor. Can't you see how upset I am?

(significantly)

They will not come down.

Doctor

'Zut alors.' We shall announce the engagement without them.

Vanessa

I quite expected it of Mother, but Erika... Why, why? What will people think... my own niece...

Doctor

A little shy, a little shy, that's all.

Vanessa

Please, please, Doctor, you go up. She will not open the door for me, she will not answer.

Doctor

I will see what I can do.

(going upstairs and talking to himself as he runs out of breath)

("Doctor, dear Doctor, not quite so fast, dear Doctor!")

(He exits.)

Anatol

(enters from the ballroom)

At last I've found you.

(tenderly)

What is wrong, Vanessa?

(Vanessa sits on the steps and covers her face with her hands as if she were about to cry.)

Vanessa

I feel so weak, Anatol, so afraid.

Anatol

Afraid of what, my darling?

Vanessa

(with sudden rage)

Why will not those two come down? They sit up there like brooding harpies, ready to feed on carrion.

Anatol

Do not be afraid. Erika will come, I know. She promised me she would.

Vanessa

Why, then, have they built this wall of silence all around my happiness?

Anatol

Forget, forget. I like you most when you forget and smile.

Vanessa

What is there I do not know? Could I have been wrong for twenty years? Is there something you have not told me, Anatol?

(She buries her head on his shoulder.)

Anatol

Love has a bitter core, Vanessa. Do not taste too deep, Vanessa. Do not search into the past. He who hungers for the past will be fed on lies. Let your love be new as were we born today, Vanessa. My love has only begun.

Vanessa

Love has a bitter core, Anatol, but let me taste this bitterness with you. I shall never take too much if you will offer all,
/if you will offer all.

/

/Anatol

/Do not search into the past for you will feed on lies.

Vanessa and Anatol

My love cannot begin nor grow nor die for it has always been.

Anatol

For ev'ry question let my kiss be the answer.

Vanessa

Ah, but is a kiss an answer?

Anatol

I did not ask for whom you were waiting that night when first we met.

Vanessa

For you, Anatol, for you, my dearest.

Anatol

No, Vanessa, for I was only born that night.

Vanessa

For you, Anatol, for you. Like the burning phoenix you soared out of the ashes of my shattered dreams.

/Anatol

/Then scatter the ashes to the wind, Vanessa. Follow my flight,

/Vanessa!

/

/Vanessa

/I follow, I follow!

(Vanessa impulsively kisses his hand; he embraces her. - The Doctor comes down the stairs. - They turn to him. Guests begin to fill the ballroom which during the duet was almost empty.)

Doctor

Nothing to worry about; a little frightened, perhaps.

(The Major-domo enters.)

She will come down, she says, but later.

Vanessa

(to the Major-domo)

Ah, well, let us proceed then; we can wait no longer. Call our people in; have them stand by the door. They should begin their dances right after the announcement.

(She goes inside the ballroom. Major-domo exits by a small side door. - Orchestra off-stage. - Guests are dancing in the ballroom.)

Anatol

(to the Doctor, while following Vanessa)

What did she really say?

Doctor

She would not speak to me.

(They go inside the ballroom. - A group of peasants, including a violinist, an accordionist and a group of children, is ushered in by the Major-domo. They cross the hall and stand by the door leading into the ballroom, making a solid wall with their backs to the audience. The violinist may be a child. - Suddenly Erika, in a white ball dress, appears at the top of the staircase; she seems weak and pale, desperately battling

to master herself. - After a little hesitation she begins to descend the stairs – As the music inside fades, only the hum of conversation is heard.)

Doctor

(inside ballroom)

Silence, ev'rybody, silence, please.

(At the sound of the Doctor's voice, Erika stops short, halfway down the stairway, as if suddenly taken very ill. She clutches her stomach.)

Ladies and gentlemen, I have the great honor, as an old friend of this noble and distinguished family, which for many years has been a shining example to all of us of what is finest in the traditions of our country, to announce the engagement of our dear Baroness Vanessa von...

(The orchestra drowns out the last words of the Doctor. Erika suddenly faints on the steps. Applause is heard inside.)

Now let us all drink to the happy couple.

(Vanessa and Anatol appear from the ballroom; Vanessa is carrying a tray of sweets for the peasant children.)

Chorus

(inside)

Now to your health!

(as the peasant children dance and the violinist and accordionist play upstairs right, so that in watching them, everyone is facing away from the steps where Erika is lying)

Prosit, prosit, prosit!

(The peasants, musicians, guests, Vanessa and Anatol drift back into the ballroom. - On seeing Erika, Nicholas rushes up the stairs.)

/“Under the willow tree etc.”

/

/(While the dances take place, the Major-domo enters the ballroom.)

/

/Major-domo

/Ma'moiselle, Ma'moiselle Erika!

/

/(He shakes her gently)

/

/Answer me! What can it be?

/

/Erika
/(returning to consciousness)
/It is nothing, nothing, really.

/

/Major-domo
/Shall I fetch the Doctor?

/

/Erika
/No, please, do not tell anyone. I shall come down at once.

/

/Major-domo
/(helping her to her feet)
/May I bring you something?

/

/Erika
/No, thank you. Leave me now, I wish to be alone.

/

/(The Major-domo leaves her reluctantly.)

/

/Erika
/(always clutching her stomach)
/His child! His child!

(She makes her way to the entrance door, opens it and goes out into the night. - Orchestra off-stage. - The door is left open. - Inside the ballroom, the dances go on, an occasional couple of guests dancing briefly in and out of the hall. - Major-domo enters with a glass of water for Erika. Not seeing her, he exits into the ballroom. - The Baroness, dishevelled and clad in an old dressing gown, appears at the top of the stairway.)

Baroness
Erika! Erika! Where are you going, Erika? I saw her running to the lake!

(She begins to descend the stairway.)

Please, someone, stop her!

(A chain of dancers, laughing loudly and wildly, runs in from the ballroom and invades the hall. After encircling the Baroness, they quickly exit, always laughing. - The dances in the ballroom continue.)

Oh, if only I could call someone, someone, someone... Erika!

Vanessa

(suddenly entering)

What are you doing here?

Baroness

Erika... Erika!

Vanessa

Are you out of your mind?

(The dancing and laughter inside have stopped and a few groups of dancers come into the hall in amazement. - Anatol has followed Vanessa into the hall.)

Anatol

Erika! What of Erika?

Baroness

She must be saved...

(imploring)

Someone go after her... toward the lake... Hurry, please hurry!

(Anatol quickly snatches a cape from the rack, throws it over his shoulders and rushes out the open door, followed by several men from among the guests.)

Vanessa

What has happened? Anatol! Anatol!

ACT III

Scene 1

Erika's bedroom. A few hours later.

At one side of the room, a small alcove in which part of the bed is seen. It is dawn. The Baroness is sitting by a small fireplace with her back to the audience. The Doctor is standing by a window, peering out anxiously through the panes. Vanessa, in a dressing gown, is pacing nervously up and down the room. Cries and calls and barking of dogs are heard outside.

Vanessa

Why did no-one warn me? Could ev'ryone be as blind as I was not to see the sorrow in her face?

(She listens to the howling of dogs in the distance.)

It is almost dawn and they have not found her yet. Erika, Erika, what made you do this?
(to the Doctor)

You are her doctor and her lifelong friend. Is it possible you suspected nothing?

Doctor

I have always known I am a bad doctor: now I know I am a bad poet as well, for I have never learned to read the human heart.

(The Doctor sits dejectedly, head in hands.)

Vanessa

(suddenly turning to the Baroness)

And you, you must surely know something. But, oh no, you will not speak. Whatever have I done to you to have to bear your awful silence? Oh, I would hate you if you were not my mother.

Doctor

Do not talk like that.

(Vanessa goes to the window.)

Vanessa

Why can they not find her? The whole village is looking for her.

Doctor

She cannot have wandered very far in this cutting cold.

Vanessa

What if they do find her! She will not be alive.

(She sinks on to a chair and bursts into tears.)

Doctor

(soothing)

Come, come, you must not despair nor jump to conclusions. It may all be very innocent. They found no trace of her steps near the lake and the ice was unbroken.

Vanessa

Why must the greatest sorrows come from those we most love? Erika, Erika, my sweet Erika, why have you done this, why? You who are only as wild as the wild dove and no prouder than the rose?

(with great tenderness)

I love you, Erika, I have always loved you as if you were my own child, my own daughter. Why break my heart just now as it started to beat again? Come back, come back, Erika!

(She goes to Erika's bed and sits down weeping. - She turns slowly, then runs to the window. - Doctor opens the window.)

Doctor

(excitedly)

There, look! A group of men is coming towards the house.

Vanessa

Do you suppose...

Doctor

Yes, they are carrying her; they have found her!

Vanessa

(opening the window and crying outside)

Anatol, Anatol, is she alive?

(She listens for an answer and then closes the window slowly, leaning against it in order not to faint. The Baroness, who has gotten up from her chair, stares at her imploringly.)

Yes, oh yes, she is alive; thank God, oh thank you, God!

(The Doctor goes over to the Baroness to reassure her, then quickly exits. Vanessa rings for the servants and begins to prepare the bed in the alcove. - The door of the bedroom is thrown open and Erika is carried in by Anatol, a group of peasants and ball guests, followed by the Doctor. They place her, still wearing her ball dress, on the bed in the alcove.)

Doctor

There, there, gently.

Vanessa

Doctor, how is she?

Doctor

She seems to be all-right.

(to Anatol)

Send them all out.

Anatol

(to the peasants)

You had better go now.

(The Baroness slowly approaches the bed.)

Thank you all. You will find wine downstairs and a blazing fire in the kitchen.

(The peasants tiptoe out of the room followed a little later by the guests. The Doctor remains in the alcove with Vanessa. The maids enter hurriedly and go to the alcove to help undress Erika and put her to bed. Care should be taken, that Erika, sheltered by the figures of the maids and the Doctor, remains unseen by the audience.)

Vanessa

(coming out of the alcove and leaning against Anatol, who embraces her tenderly)
Oh, in what terror I have been! Anatol, Anatol...

(She bursts into tears.)

Anatol

Poor Vanessa, what an endless night! Come into my arms, my dearest. Yes, weep, weep in my arms.

Vanessa

Where did you find her?

Anatol

(with great tenderness)

On the path to the lake; she was hidden in a small ravine like a wounded bird. She must have fallen for her frost-white dress was torn and damp with blood. There she lay in the snow like a Christmas rose; the bitter cold had glazed her lovely face into deep and opaque sleep. The faint beat of her heart was like an undeciphered signal from another world. I lifted her into my arms, warmed her against my breast. I called her name and kissed her eyelids; only then she sighed a little.

(The Doctor comes out of the alcove.)

Vanessa

How is she?

Doctor

Leave me alone with her; she is not ready to see you yet.

(As the Doctor goes back into the alcove, Vanessa and Anatol move to the opposite side of the stage and stand by the fireplace.)

Vanessa

(with a tormented expression)

Anatol...

Anatol

Yes, Vanessa.

Vanessa

(taking his hand)

Anatol, tell me the truth!

Anatol

Yes, Vanessa.

Vanessa

Do *you* know why she did this strange thing?

Anatol

Why should I?

(He turns away from her.)

Vanessa

Anatol, you must not lie to me!

(She takes his arm and stares into his eyes.)

Look me in the eyes. Does she love you?

Anatol

This much I know; she does not love me.

Vanessa

Swear!

Anatol

I swear.

Vanessa

How do you know?

Anatol

Did I not know that *you* loved me long before you spoke? But Erika, she chose to judge me before she learned to love.

Vanessa

(turning away from him)

Can I believe you?

Anatol

Ask her yourself, she never lies.

/Vanessa

/(falls into his arms, pleadingly)

/Take me, take me away from this house, Anatol; we must quickly
/leave! For the sorrows of others raise dark walls between our hearts.
/Oh, help me tear these bonds!... Ah, help me take flight!

/

/Anatol

/Yes, Vanessa, ev'ry day of waiting roots you deeper in the past.
/Hide, hide in my love! Brief is the day for blindness, and brief the
/day for madness. Hide in my love; only the mad, only the blind can
/fly!

Doctor

(coming out of the alcove)

Nothing to worry over; she will be all-right.

(stopping Vanessa and Anatol, who had started to walk over to the alcove)

No, no, not yet. She wants to be alone with her grandmother.

Vanessa

But why?

Doctor

Come, come, we must not upset her now.

(He gently accompanies them outside, closing the door softly behind them. There is a long silence in the room. The Baroness, seated by Erika, still has not moved.)

Erika

(from inside the alcove)

Grandmother!

Baroness

Yes, Erika.

Erika

Do they know?

Baroness

How can I tell? Why did you wish to die?

Erika

I was with child ...

Baroness

... with child!

Erika

I never reached the lake; by the ravine I fainted; ...

Baroness

And your child? ...

Erika

... it will not be born.

(With one violent rap of her cane on the floor, the Baroness suddenly gets up from her chair and slowly walks towards the door. She stops at the sound of Erika's voice, then continues.)

Erika

(always from the alcove)

Grandmother, why are you leaving me? Grandmother, grandmother! Answer me!

(Without answering, the Baroness leaves the room.)

[Intermezzo]

Scene 2

The drawing room as in Act 1, two weeks later.

The Baroness is sitting in her usual place; Anatol, in travelling clothes, enters upstage and goes down to speak to the Doctor who is standing by the table. A maid is in the

'jardin d'hiver', picking a small suitcase. The main door at the back of the room is open. Through it one sees servants carrying trunks and other luggage across the hall.

Anatol

By the time we arrive in Paris the new house should be ready.

Doctor

Think of it, to live in Paris! How I shall miss you both!

(Doctor sits down.)

Anatol

We shall miss you, too, dear friend.

Doctor

I know you will make a happy couple.

Anatol

Yes, we shall have the most beautiful house in Paris.

(Vanessa, in traveling costume, with hat and veil, comes into the room.)

Vanessa

I am almost ready.

Anatol

(kissing her)

How lovely you look!

Vanessa

Be sure that they put everything in the sleigh and tell them to be careful with the hat boxes.

(She goes out into the 'jardin d'hiver' to help the maid pack a small suitcase. Anatol exits.)

Doctor

(sitting and musing with his pipe)

For ev'ry love there is a last farewell; for each remembered day an empty room. Many are the children I bring into the world but no one takes the place of those who are lost.

(affectionately)

You, too, were once a child, Vanessa...

(with gentle amusement)

Do you remember? The mumps, the chicken pox, the scarlatina? How many times I kissed your burning cheek and fought the grinning dwarfs leering at the foot of your bed!

(Vanessa gives the maid a small present. Maid exits tearfully, carrying the suitcase.)

Will you ever think of your old doctor now, now that the pulse of your heart takes you so far away from him?

(Vanessa enters from the 'jardin d'hiver', followed shortly after by Erika from the hall; the latter is simply dressed and looks very pale and tense.)

Vanessa

(to Doctor)

And you, my friend, what are you mumbling about?

Doctor

(with tears in his voice)

Oh, my dear, I just wanted to tell you...

Vanessa

(interrupting him)

Yes, yes, dear Doctor. Come, you go and help Anatol.

(She leads the Doctor gently towards the door which she closes after him. - Vanessa sits on the sofa.)

Erika, sit down here next to me.

(Erika sits next to her, but all through the scene avoids looking at her. - Vanessa is trying desperately to keep her composure.)

Now that I am married and going to Paris, who knows when we shall see each other again! You can live here as long as you wish; as I have told you, I have willed the house to you; but do not tell Anatol, please.

Erika

No.

Vanessa

We may not come back for years. We may never come back.

Erika

I choose to stay. I am not afraid.

(She rises and steps away from the sofa.)

Vanessa

But you are too young to stay here alone.

Erika

You, too, were young when you came back here.

Vanessa

(impetuous)

Oh, but that was different.

Erika

(looking at the Baroness; slowing)

Someone must take your place now. She cannot be left alone.

Vanessa

I shall think of you always. Do take care of my azaleas and the parakeets, and don't forget...

Erika

Do not worry, Aunt Vanessa, it shall all be as if you were here.

Vanessa

(uncertainly)

Erika, before I leave, you must tell me the truth about that night.

Erika

I have told you the truth, Aunt Vanessa.

Vanessa

(rising and going to Erika)

No, no, you are hiding something from me and now I must know. I cannot live with that thorn in my heart.

Erika

There was no reason for it; it was a foolish thing to do; it was the end of my youth.

Vanessa

(suddenly approaching Erika, torn between mounting suspicion and the desire to avoid the truth)

Tell me, Erika, was it because of Anatol?

Erika

Anatol? Oh no, no!

Vanessa

(as above)

Swear!

Erika

I swear.

Vanessa

Then what was it?

(darkly)

Do not torment me, Erika.

Erika

(turning her around to face her)

You would laugh if I were to tell you as I myself have laughed since then.

Vanessa

Why then?

Erika

I thought I loved someone who did not love me.

Vanessa

But whom? The young Pastor, perhaps? The gamekeeper?

Erika

(hopelessly)

What does it matter? It was a foolish thing: it is all over now.

Vanessa

(gently)

Perhaps he was not the man for you!

Erika

Yes, I know now; he is not the man for me.

(Anatol enters with a lackey who removes two pieces of luggage left in the room.)

Anatol

You must hurry if we wish to reach the station before dark.

(Vanessa goes near the door where a group of servants has assembled to bid her good-bye.)

Vanessa

(to a maid)

Bring me down my things, Clara.

(embracing her)

Oh, do not cry, silly thing.

(She talks to each one of the servants who, in turn, kiss her hand.)

Anatol

(has remained downstage next to Erika)

There was a time, Erika, when I thought it would be with you that I should leave this house.

(Vanessa takes the Major-domo in her arms affectionately.)

Erika

(to Anatol)

Please, forget me. Make her happy, Anatol.

(The Doctor comes back into the room and stops by Vanessa's side.)

Remember that she loves you the way I never could.

(Vanessa comes back into the middle of the room, followed by the Doctor.)

Vanessa

Let me look around once more. Who knows when I shall see this house again!

(She looks around her. There is a long silence. - The Baroness has risen and they all stand quite motionless.)

To leave, to break, to find, to keep, to stay, to wait; to hope, to dream, to weep and remember.

/To love is all of this and none of it is love. The light is not the sun

/nor the tide the moon.

/

/Anatol, Erika and Baroness

/(dreaming)

/To leave, to break...

The Others

Ah, Anatol, how hard it will be, the backward road of regret!

Vanessa

(as above)

To find, to keep...

The Others

Ah, poor Vanessa, only to die empty-handed!

Erika

(as above)

To stay, to wait...

The Others

Erika, Erika, only to kiss the impostor!

Doctor and Baroness

(as above)

To weep, to hope...

The Others

And, you old people, may death release you before you too clearly remember or cease to dream!

Vanessa

Good-bye, Erika.

(She kisses him.)

Erika

Good-bye, be happy, Aunt Vanessa, please, be happy.

Vanessa

Goodbye, mother.

(She kisses the Baroness.)

Anatol

Goodbye, Erika. When I see you again, perhaps you will have learned to smile.

Erika

I hope you will still be smiling when I see you again.

(Anatol kisses Erika's hand.)

Good-bye, Anatol, good-by.

Doctor

(wiping his eyes)

Good-bye, good-bye, my dear ones.

Vanessa

(gently to Doctor)

Please, please, no tears! Come in the sleigh with us, my friend; we shall drop you in the village.

(Major-domo and a maid enter with coats and wraps.)

Erika

I shall wave good-bye from here.

(Vanessa turns back and embraces Erika, then, after a last look, quietly leaves the room with Anatol and the Doctor. The Major-domo closes the door and Erika is left alone with the Baroness. - She goes to the 'jardin d'hiver' and looks out into the snow. One can see that she is making desperate efforts to control her inner agony. At the sound of the departing sleigh she weakly raises her hand to wave good-bye.)

Erika

(turns from the window; with a cry)

Anatol, Anatol! No, I must never say that name again.

(She comes back into the room and leans against a chair, as if she were about to collapse; but quickly straightens herself and with great determination goes to the wall to pull a bell-chord. - The Baroness slowly moves to ward her usual chair.)

Lucky those people who are so anxious to believe!

(to the Baroness)

Do you really think she believes what I said?

(The Baroness pauses.)

Grandmother? Oh, I forgot that you will not speak to me either now.

(The Baroness sits by the fire.)

I am truly alone!

(The Major-domo comes in.)

Will you please cover all the mirrors in this house again.

Major-domo

(astounded)

What, Ma'moiselle?

Erika

Yes, just as before. Begin with these now.

(Major-domo bows and exits. - Erika fetches a veil similar to the one worn by Vanessa at the beginning of Act I. - The Major-domo enters from the hall, followed by a servant with a step-ladder and some drapes.)

From now on I shall receive no visitors. Tell the gate-keeper that the gate to the park must remain locked at all times. Thank you.

(Erika sits by the fire next to her grandmother.)

Ah, that is good.

(The Major-domo and lackey drape the mirror.)

Now it is my turn to wait.

(Erika slowly covers her head with the veil, hiding her face.)