

TCHAIKOVSKY

THE QUEEN OF SPADES

English Version by Donald Pippin

CAST OF CHARACTERS

HERMANN, a passionate young officer, in love with Lisa

LISA

COUNTESS, her grandmother

COUNT TOMSKY, Hermann's friend

PRINCE VALETSKY, soon to become engaged to Lisa

PAULINE, Lisa's close friend

SOURIN, TCHEKALENSKY, NABOUMOV, fellow officers

TCHAPLITSKY, proprietor of a gambling house

MASHA, Lisa's maid

GOVERNESS

MASTER OF CEREMONIES

CHARACTERS IN THE INTERLUDE

CHLOE, a pretty shepherdess

DAPHNIS (PAULINE), her bashful suitor

PLUTUS (TOMSKY), his rich rival

Scene: St. Petersburg around 1820

ACT I, SCENE I

A rare warm, clear, sunny day in the summer garden of St. Petersburg has brought out what looks like the entire population of the city to enjoy this brief patch of fine weather, including the five major players in tonight's (our) story:

Hermann, intense, brooding, introspective, a subordinate officer in the army, who has recently fallen passionately, obsessively in love with Lisa, a lady obviously far above his station, to whom he has not yet spoken so much as a word, and whose name he does not yet even know.

Count Tomsy, his sensible and supportive friend and confidant.

Prince Yeletsky, handsome, good natured, intelligent, rich, well-connected, and -- much to the point -- just this very day engaged to Lisa. A challenge to Ghermann, to say the least.

And finally the Countess, Lisa's grandmother, a frail but indomitable and irascible old lady, who keeps Lisa firmly in tow and watches her every move, known to some as the Queen of Spades because of a long ago incident. In her youth a ravishing beauty, a disastrous run of bad luck at the card table left her in dire straits. A would-be suitor, well versed in the art of black magic, came to her rescue by divulging an invaluable secret, a formula, a sequence of three cards guaranteed to win back the fortune she had lost at the table. All of this for the price of a single brief rendezvous. The fantastical story of her spectacular comeback and the ominous prophecy that accompanied it has become the stuff of legend, and is soon to attract the attention of our love-sick hero, desperately in need of a miracle. Three cards . . . three cards . . . three cards . . .

A quadrangle in the St. Petersburg Summer Garden on a bright spring day. Nurses, governesses and wet nurses sit on benches or stroll about. Children are playing, with much laughter and excitement.

LITTLE GIRLS: Eenie, meenie, minie, moe.
Catch a tiger by the toe.
Run! Run! Run!

NURSES: Children, what a day!
Nature on display.
See the passing show,
Rich, poor, high and low,
Strolling to and fro.

Springtime in the air,
Rosebuds everywhere.

Warm sun shining bright,
No dark cloud in sight.
Hear the playful breeze
Rustling in the trees,
And the chirping birds,
Never short of words.
Nature on display.
Children, what a day!
Warm sun shining bright,
No dark cloud in sight.

GOVERNESSES: Every day is toil and trouble
Whether rain or shine.
Children bicker, scream and squabble
Through no fault of mine.

How they seem to take delight
In getting on my nerves!
Ah, but that's the sorry plight
Of one who merely serves.

NURSES: Merry, lighthearted,
Your life barely started,
Enjoy every moment while you may.

WET NURSES: Lulla, lullaby.
Darling, don't you cry.
Sleep, my angel, close your eyes,
Wafted off by lullabies.

WOMEN: Forward the gallant soldiers come
To marching drum.
With fanfare,
Bring on the soldiers!
Marching, marching, one, two, one, two.
Right, left, right, left,

(The boys enter marching.)

BOYS: Right, left, right, left.
Steady, steady, steady, steady.
Watch it, men. Stay in step.

LEADER: *(spoken)* Company, halt! Attention! Eyes left! Shoulders back!
Present arms! At ease!

BOYS: **Brave, fearless soldiers, we
Will join the fighting forces,
Charge toward the enemy
On proudly prancing horses.
The troop is on the way!
Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!**

**Serving the fatherland,
To leave the foe defeated,
Boldly we take a stand
Until the job's completed.
The troop is on the way!
Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!**

**God save our noble Queen,
To each and all a mother.
And this could only mean
We all are brother-brother.
The troop is on the way!
Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!**

LEADER: (*spoken*) : Ready, men?

BOY: At your orders, Captain.

LEADER: Shoulder arms! Right wheel! March!

WOMEN: **Clear is the message that you send us,
That we can count on you to keep us strong.
Well done, you soldiers . . . Tremendous!
Now run along!**

(They all disperse. Chekalinsky and Surin enter, deep in conversation.)

TCHEKALINSKY: Last night what happened when I left?

SOURIN: **As usual, complete disaster.
I lost my shirt.**

TCHEKALINSKY: Yet I suppose you played till morning?

SOURIN: **Yes, despite my fury and frustration,
Hoping that for once my luck would turn.**

TCHEKALINSKY: Did Hermann stay?

SOURIN: Yes, to stare in fascination
As the cards were dealt.
As if transfixed,
A frozen statuette,
He watches while the others play.

TCHEKALINSKY: Just watchintg . . .

SOURIN: A silent game goes on inside.

TCHEKALINSKY: The strangest man I ever met.

SOURIN: Like someone with a guilty conscience,
He has a hunted, haunted look.

TCHEKALINSKY: I'm told he's short of cash and credit.

SOURIN: Thrift is the word.

TCHEKALINSKY: He's coming . . . Let's go!

SOURIN: A person to avoid . . . Too gloomy!

(They leave hastily as Ghermann and Tomsky enter.)

TOMSKY: So grimly silent . . . What's the trouble?

HERMANN: No trouble . . . none at all.

TOMSKY: You're worried.

HERMANN: Not in the least.

TOMSKY: You seem a different person.
What on earth has happened?
Though somewhat private and reserved,
You once were lively and amusing,
A good companion.
What a change! A turnabout beyond belief;
The cards, I am told, have cast a spell.
Night after night
You hover round the gambling table
As though obsessed.

HERMANN: True! Lately I've lost my way;

I walk in circles, this way and that,
And plunge from heaven into hell.
No more my own master, I'm possessed by a demon
That has captured me and taken over.
I am in love . . . in love!

TOMSKY: What! Tell me all! Her name?

HERMANN: I only know she's far above me,
 A lady I dare not touch.
An angel, yet so warm and tender --
 So out of reach.

 From paradise she has descended --
 An angel needs no name.
With but a glance, her eyes enkindled
 A fiercely burning flame.

 If I should find she loves another,
 The blow I could not stand --
To know for sure my gorgeous castle
 Is made of mist and built on sand.

 I wage an unrelenting battle
 Between desire and despair.
I must believe she will be mine,
 However strange it may seem.
 Until that time,
I live in deadly fear of waking from my dream.

 I only know that she is far above me,
 Nameless, yet some day mine.

TOMSKY: You lovers all are slightly crazy;
 High time for me to lend a hand.
Go seek her out, then pop the question
 And find out where you stand.

HERMANN: But she is rich, of noble blood.
 A gaping chasm lies between us.
 I've nothing in return to offer.

TOMSKY: Then find another,
 Some less lofty Venus.

HERMANN: Friend, you claim to know me!

Yet still fail to realize
I cannot love another woman.
But I, too, was taken by surprise.
Secure and safe, immune to passion,
The heart I thought was made of stone
Has turned into a raging furnace
That glows and throbs for her alone,
A source of pain and rapture,
Tears and bitter laughter,
An inner fire till now unknown.

TOMSKY: Who would believe it?
Over night you have become a live volcano.
Beware the seed that love has sewn . . .

(Ghermann and Tomsky walk on as strollers fill the garden.)

STROLLERS: Spring has brought a day of wonder!
Not a sign of rain.
After weeks of growling thunder
Nature smiles again.

Here we stroll about at leisure,
Breathe the fragrant air,
Revel in the simple pleasure
All can freely share.
Here we revel in the simple pleasure
All can freely share.

(Ghermann and Tomsky return)

TOMSKY: The way I see it,
All you have to do is ask the lady.
For all you know,
She may be madly in love with you already.

HERMANN: As long as I remain uncertain,
Hope is not dead;
A ray of light relieves the burden
Of fear and dread.
While in the dark, although I suffer,
I can ignore the clouds that hover.
On learning she is lost beyond a doubt,
I'm left with only one way out.

TOMSKY:

How?

HERMANN:

Time will tell.

TCHEKALINSKY: *(to Prince)* **My friend, congratulations!**

SOURIN:

We hear that you're engaged.

PRINCE YELETSKY:

**Yes, finally accepted.
After long, drawn out days of agony,
I'm now the luckiest man on the earth.**

TCHEKALINSKY:

Best to you both.

SOURIN:

**To years of sweet fulfillment
And happiness!**

TOMSKY:

My blessings, Prince Yeletsky.

PRINCE YELETSKY:

To all my friends I'm grateful.

**(I wake to birds in song
And scent of budding roses.
Because my love consented
I greet a radiant world of wonder.
To rapture I surrender
As fire ignites my withered soul.**

**See how the world glows and sparkles
When my beloved hovers near.
My winged heart when I behold her
Is lighter than a bird in flight.
And when my darling smiles,
I see an angel bathed in light.)**

HERMANN:

**(On hope and happiness the curtain closes.
By futile fantasies tormented,
My firm foundation torn asunder,
Through darkened corridors I wander
As terror takes its deadly toll.**

**Others see a world that glows and sparkles
Though all to me is dank and drear.
The sun is down, the wind blows colder,
The prowling wind blows ever colder
As I confront the dark of night.**

The prowling wind blows colder
To pierce the dark of night.)

TOMSKY: You haven't told us who she is.

TCHEKALINSKY: Prince, name the future princess.

(Lisa and the Countess approach.)

PRINCE YELETSKY: See for yourself!

HERMANN: *(thunder-struck)* My God! My God!
Can I be dreaming?
Lord, help me! Lost forever!

LISA & COUNTESS: (That man again!)

TOMSKY: And so the bitter truth is out,
Beyond a shred of doubt.

LISA: (I tremble when I see him standing near.
He stares at me, a pale and somber stranger,
Whose eyes reveal a soul on fire,
Whose mute reproach conveys impending danger,
Fuelled by thwarted passion and desire.
I try to ignore my silent persecutor
And turn away, yet cannot hide my fear.
I tremble . . . I tremble . . . He is near . . .)

COUNTESS: (I tremble when I see him standing near.
He frightens me, a fateful apparition,
A haunted soul on fire,
A man consumed by dark, covert ambition
Born out of thwarted passion and desire.
O why does he not go away?
What do those glaring eyes convey?
And why the sudden chill when he draws near?
I tremble . . . I tremble . . . and I fear . . .)

HERMANN: (I tremble when I see her standing near,
An evil witch whose eyes convey
A silent accusation,
Alerting me to danger.
I fear the pull of their magnetic glare.
Is this old harpy out to steal my happiness away?
No, no! For I refuse to be her slave,

Cave in and say goodbye to my only love!
I tremble . . . I tremble . . . and I fear . . .)

TOMSKY: (Deep within, I feel his pain.
The ray of hope that proved in vain,
The brutal blow too great to bear.
Ah, but what of her?
I search for an explanation.
She clearly looks appalled and terrified
On the verge of becoming a bride.
I tremble, but dare not interfere.)

PRINCE YELETSKY: (I tremble . . . I believe her love sincere,
But why the lowered eyes, the sudden agitation,
The warning signs of danger?
I fear the pull of his magnetic glare . . .
My darling lured and overpowered by the silent stranger!
What inner voice cries "Beware!?"
I mustn't get excited . . .
She is no doubt mortified by these attentions uninvited.
Yet I fear . . .)

TOMSKY: Ah, Countess! My warm congratulations!

COUNTESS: Do tell me, sir,
Who is that dreadful man?

TOMSKY: A soldier . . . a sergeant . . .
Also a friend of mine.

COUNTESS: No doubt, some foreigner,
Not one of ours!

PRINCE YELETSKY: (*offering his hand to Lisa*)

Eternal spring forever after!
Our halls will ring with sound of laughter.
Fair weather I foresee in days to come
Within our warm and happy home
Together.

(*He leaves with Lisa and the Countess.*)

HERMANN: (*bitterly*) Hear a dose of truth:
Though skies are clear today,
Prepare for storm tomorrow.

**You might remember;
Green April's followed
By gray December.**

SOURIN: That ancient Countess is a horror!

TCHEKALINSKY: An evil witch!

**TOMSKY: They used to call her Queen of Spades,
No wonder!
But one thing puzzles me:
Why does she not play?
Her luck would break the bank.**

SOURIN: That old bag of bones, a winner!

TCHEKALINSKY: A doddering old lady cleaning up?

TOMSKY: I gather you've not heard the story of her youth.

SOURIN: No, never. Not a word.

TCHEKALINSKI: Not a word.

**TOMSKY: Then high time you hear it now:
So beautiful back then,
She turned the heads of all young Parisian men.
Count St. Germain as well was sorely smitten,
At her side as she gambled off her fortune.
Hoping to gain the lady's love,
He shared with her a secret
That all would like to know.
Himself a master of the black art of magic,
He told her of three cards
Unfailing in time of need.
And in fact they made a song of it --
It goes like so**

BALLAD OF THREE CARDS



The Count-ess ar-rived at the court of Ver-sailles with trunks full of gold & a gleam in her eye,

**But soon at the table her losses were such
One had to conclude she was losing her touch.**

Germain heard a cry of dismay:
“God help me! I’m ruined!
My gold I’d regain, winding up in the black,
If only I had crucial knowledge I lack.
A sequence of three cards could save me!”

Observing her beauty, the Count, deeply stirred,
Was quick to respond to the cry overheard.
A master of magic and skilled in black art,
His tone was celestial as strains of Mozart.
“My dear, I can teach you to play.
O Countess! Dear Countess!
The cards you require I shall whisper to you
For merely the price of a brief rendezvous.
The sequence of cards that can save you . . .”

She shuddered, protested, “How dare you suggest? . . .”
But on second thought . . . you have now surely guessed . . .
On leaving his chamber next day, as implied,
The coveted knowledge she stored up inside.
“You gamblers, get out of my way!”
She promptly recovered the loot she had lost,
Now Queen of the table – we won’t mention the cost.
For three cards, the three cards, three only!

The sequence in time to her husband she told,
And then to a lover enamored of gold.
But soon came a warning as if from the dead,
A stern apparition that solemnly said,
“O Countess, take warning, beware!
You will die when a passionate stranger appears,
Demanding, beseeching in tears of despair,
You will die holding on to your secret:
Three cards!

TCHEKALINSKY: If not authentic, at least amusing.

SOURIN: A warning!
But the Countess has no cause to fret.
Unlikely that a lover will come pounding on her door.

TCHEKALINSKY: Attention, Hermann!
What are you waiting for?
To play without the risk of losing!
A message designed for you!
“O beware, when a passionate stranger appears,

**Demanding, beseeching in tears of despair –
For the sequence of three fatal cards.”**

CHORUS *(as the sound of thunder increases):*

**O run from this horrible weather!
(Away from this horrible weather!)
Now starting to pour,
It came without a warning,
Mid flashing of lightning,
Crashing of thunder.**

**Away from the storm!
And home to a house safe and warm,
A house safe and warm.
We head for home and then to bed.
Oh, hurry, do hurry!
I see more trouble ahead.
Away! Away! Away! Away!**

HERMANN: **“O Countess, take warning, beware!
You will die when a passionate stranger appears,
Demanding, beseeching in tears of despair,
For the sequence of cards, three only!”**

**But what’s the use?
What good are gold and priceless jewels?
I’ve lost my only love;
All else is grime and dust.**

**But no! I’ll not give in!
Let thunder shake its fist,
Howling tempest I defy!
The storm within that rages
Will overwhelm the force of nature.**

**No, Prince! While I have breath
You’ll not snatch her away from me.
I’ll make her mine, I care not how.
Come, thunder, lightning!
Your wrath I call upon
And hereby swear:
Though now engaged to another,
She will be mine, regardless.
My own, in life or in death!**

(He rushes off.)

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

In Lisa's room, she is joined by her good friend Pauline in a sweetly blended duet, while other friends murmur appreciative oohs and ahs. A pleasant glimpse into the placid, smooth-flowing if somewhat cloistered, uneventful life of a well brought up, privileged young lady. Yet beneath the surface, all is not so pretty. Pauline's song seems inappropriately dark - something about a soul in captivity, yearning to escape. And Lisa strikes one as strangely downcast for a girl who has just become engaged.

After her friends leave, she gives full vent to her unhappiness and misgivings. Instead of the grand romantic passion she has long dreamed of, it would appear that she is destined despite herself for a loveless marriage, partly because it seems to be expected of her, perhaps also to avoid what she calls "the strange and dark encounter that has overturned my sheltered life, the hypnotic eyes that have bored into my soul . . ."

At this very moment, suddenly the man appears whom she fears and dreads the most.

Lisa's room. Lisa is seated at the harpsichord. Pauline and her other friends are grouped around her.

DUET: Lisa and Pauline

Skies darken;
Migratory birds fly home to nest
And fading light has found repose on distant towers.
We watch a streak of cloud obscure the mountain crest
As playful ripples stir a meadow strewn with flowers.

In shadow
Pine and poplar groves retire till dawn;
A mountain stream runs babbling past a weeping willow.
We linger as it joins the river flowing on,
Our heads at rest upon a green and mossy pillow.

Remember
The sweetly scented coolness of the breeze,
The light caress that causes slender boughs to tremble,
The whispered murmurs from across the seven seas;
For two in love, the world was then a holy temple.

FRIENDS: How well their voices blend!

A shame it had to end.
Enchanting! Delightful!
So sweet and not too long.
A lovely song.
Encore, encore!
Oh, please! One more!

LISA: No, no! Let us hear Pauline.

PAULINE: Alone? I'm not so sure.

FRIENDS: No reason to be nervous.
With friends, why worry?
We're not hard to please.

PAULINE: There *is* a pretty song I used to know.
What was it? . . . wait a bit . . . well, just for you!

Dear sisters, mourn for me,
A bird inside a cage.
I, too, was young, a child of mirth,
My little world a golden paradise on earth.

But happiness was not to be;
Though born to ease and luxury,
I long for even more:
To spread my wings and soar,
To leave behind these shallow revels
In search of distant deeper levels.

Alas, no carefree pioneer,
Instead, a craven coward,
Afraid of life, I lied;
My dreams I cast aside.
Now face to face with fear.
Still unresigned yet overpowered,
I falter . . . I waver . . . I waver . . .

Too sad a song for such a day!
Whatever was I thinking?
Badly chosen!
But frankly, dear, you don't look very happy.
I hope you're not uneasy
On your betrothal day. No, no, no!

(to the other ladies) It's up to us to chase away the gloom!

**From Lento to Allegro!
A merry song from the plains of Russia.
You know the tune,
So join me on the chorus.**

**FRIENDS: To Russia! To Russia! A peasant song,
And we'll provide the chorus.**

**PAULINE & FRIENDS: "Come," says he, "let's dance a measure."
Bend and dip.
Hand on hip.**

**She of course replies, "With pleasure."
Skip and then
Dip again.**

**"I am sturdy, stout and steady.
Let us wed,
Then to bed."**

**"Mother's picked the man already;
I'm to wed
Him instead."**

**"Tell the man he's much mistaken.
Shrug and say
Not today."**

**"Friend, it's you that have been taken!
I know which
Man is rich!"**

GOVERNESS: (*rushing in*)

**I am appalled! What bawdy stuff is this?
What would the Countess say?
Ah! Mon dieu!
And dancing like besotted peasants!
Such vulgarity!**

**Daughters of noble extraction
Should behave as they were taught.
Deep is my dissatisfaction:
Years of hard work all for naught!**

**Where are the ladylike touches
Patiently I've tried to convey?**

**Future Marquise, maybe Duchess,
How can you host a soiree?**

**Ladies, repeat to each other:
None but ourselves can we blame.
Think of your father and mother,
Even now blushing for shame.**

**I've come to tell you ladies
That the party is over.
Time to go home.**

(She and the ladies leave, except for Lisa and Pauline.)

PAULINE: Lisa, so forlorn and melancholy ...

LISA: Too, too absurd! Ridiculous!
On such a lovely night?
The wintry storm has cleared:
Again the stars are bright.

PAULINE: Denial will not do;
Your fiancé has to hear it:
On the day of your betrothal
You showed no spark of spirit.

LISA: Please, I implore you! Say not a word.

PAULINE: Then you must buy my silence --
Start by smiling!
Much better! . . . Good night for now. *(kisses her)*

LISA: Wait, I'll go out with you.

(They leave together. Masha enters, snuffs out the candles except for one, and approaches the door to the balcony as Lisa returns.)

LISA: No, leave the door a bit ajar . . .

MASHA: It may become chilly later on.

LISA: No, Masha. Not this time of year.
Lovely outside.

MASHA: You'll need me here to help you undress?

LISA: No, not tonight. Go on to bed.

MASHA: High time you also slept.

LISA: *(suddenly impatient)* No matter . . . just go! *(Masha leaves)*

From grand romantic passion
I turned away.
I gave a solemn promise,
Knowing it was just a lie.

I give instead a cold and empty heart.
Yet some would say I made a wise decision.
The man I chose to marry
Is a man to admire:
Refined, intelligent and charming,
The man I could have wanted –
Ah, but where's the fire?
High-minded, generous, a prince in more than name.
Besides, he loves me.
Still I want to weep and run for cover
When he comes near me.

From grand romantic passion
I turned away.
I gave a solemn promise,
Knowing it was just a lie.
And he believed in me . . .

A strange and dark encounter
Has overturned my sheltered life;
Hypnotic eyes have bored into my soul.

O moonlit night!
To you I must confide
The unyielding love tearing me apart,
Mysterious as the dark,
Emboldened by rebellious cries from the heart,
Now drowning out the voice of reason.

Exalted night!
The haunted beauty of a fallen angel
Has taken possession of my soul,
And softly lures me onward
To be consumed in my own fire,
Tormented by Satanic demons of desire

In dark of night . . .

(Hermann appears at the door of the balcony. Lisa steps back in horror. They stare at each other in silence. She makes a move as if to leave.)

HERMANN: For just a moment! Let me talk to you.

LISA: So late, how dare you break into my room?
What brings you here?

HERMANN: A last resort.. I've come to say goodbye.
That only. Then I shall go away
And we shall never, never meet again.
O stay, if only out of kindness.
A man in pain appeals for mercy.

LISA: Already I've been too kind!
Now leave me!

HERMANN: No!

LISA: What if I scream?

HERMANN: I carry a loaded pistol.
What matter if I die tomorrow or today?
You'll not refuse me
If you've an ounce of pity or compassion,
And you will stay to hear me out.

LISA: How can I? Spare me!

HERMANN: Why should I live? My only hope is dead.
Today I learned you've chosen someone else.
What's left for me except to die?
How can I live without you?
Yet I am loth to die without your blessing,
Let me depart
With humble gratitude instead of curses.
Before I leave,
Grant me a final compensation:
One fleeting hour here alone,
To worship you in silent rapture
And adore the wonder of those eyes.
Before I disappear into oblivion,
For only an hour,

Here in the still of night,
O let me gaze upon your beauty.
To death I then can go in peace.
Lisa! Is that too much to ask?

LISA: I beg you to spare me . . .

HERMANN: I worship you! I love you, adore you!
Forgive a lover whose devotion
He dedicates to you alone.
A man whose one desire
Is loving you and serving,
Though now all hope is gone.
Forgive a man compelled by passion
To reach a place of no return.
No matter where, ah! for you only
That fire within shall burn,
In life or death a love eternal.
Be merciful, be lenient!
Can you deny me
A remembrance I can take away?
Dearest . . . you're weeping . . .
Tears as sweet as they are tender.
You waver . . . Is it surrender? . . .
And are these tears for me? . . .
I worship you! I love you, adore you!

(He takes her hand, which she does not withdraw. Noise is heard from outside, then a knock at the door.)

COUNTESS: Lisa! Let me in!

LISA: The Countess! Heaven help me!
She mustn't see you! The window!
Too late! The screen!

(Ghermann is hastily concealed behind a screen as Lisa opens the door for the Countess.)

COUNTESS: Not yet asleep? I heard a racket . . .
Not even undressed?

LISA: O grandmamma . . . Tonight I feel so wide awake,
Awake and restless . . .

COUNTESS: Why is that door not shut?

No more of your absurd romantic fancies.
So childish . . . Go to bed.
Enough excuses. Pronto!

LISA: Yes, grandmama, at once!

COUNTESS: Not sleepy! I have my suspicions.
Still wide awake . . . and restless!
To bed with you!

LISA: Forgive me if I am foolish.

COUNTESS: You ought to be ashamed,
Upsetting me for nothing!
Goodnight, dear,
And just be careful what you dream about! *(She leaves)*

(As Lisa ushers the Countess to the door Ghermann emerges from hiding.)

HERMANN: “O beware when a stranger appears
To implore you with tears of despair
For the secret, the sequence of three cards . . .”
The winter wind of death
Now spreads an icy chill.
Say, horrid phantom, say
Why do you haunt me still?

(Lisa returns) Dear Lisa, let me live.
Not long ago, I counted death my only friend,
A welcome liberation from thwarted passion.
But then you wept, and in that moment
My soul reawakened.
Your tears restored my hope and courage;
Then, only then, I knew you cared for me.

LISA: I wept to see you in pain --
Tears I would shed for anyone.
What do you want of me?

HERMANN: You must decide my fate.

LISA: Leave me, I've nothing more to say..
This instant!
Not a plea, that is an order.

HERMANN: I shall not plead again.

You have pronounced my sentence.

LISA: **My demon! My tormentor!**
 If you love me, go!

GHERMANN: **A clear command: "Die!"**

LISA: **God have mercy!**

HERMANN: **Farewell!**

(He makes a motion as if to leave.)

LISA: **Stay, and live!**

(He embraces her; she drops her head on his shoulder.)

HERMANN: **Now truly mine! My own, my angel!**
 My love, my own!

LISA: **Yours alone!**

End of Act One

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

A lavish ball in an elegant palace celebrates Lisa's betrothal to Prince Yeletsky -- a betrothal that she already knows is a lie. The prince himself, deeply in love with her, but sensing that things are not going the way he had hoped, is perturbed and agonized at the wall of silence that has recently come between them. Even while declaring his love, he generously offers to release her from her promise if she is unsure.

Among the guests, no doubt thanks to Lisa, Hermann seems oddly out of place, increasingly engrossed in his bizarre obsession, the three cards that could make his fortune and enable him to marry Lisa. Or quite possibly could turn out to be a delusion, goading him insidiously toward insanity.

When Lisa, at his insistence, agrees to an assignation in her bed chamber that very night, he sees his opportunity to confront the Countess and wrest from her the precious secret -- presuming that such a secret really exists.

A rich dignitary's palace where a masquerade ball is in progress.

CHORUS: Torches are festively lighted!
Enter the two newly plighted,
Nodding to all here invited.
No raucous intruders allowed.

Friend to friend, gather round
For a feast of delight.
Be happy, be merry
On this momentous night.

Let there be dancing and singing;
Soon wedding bells will be ringing.
Primed for a grand celebration,
Greet the elite of the nation.

Far from the world's helter skelter,
Safe in a haven of shelter,
Guarded by walls of a palace,
Love shall prevail over malice.
Among the superb and the proud,
We ward off the unruly crowd.

The Master of Ceremonies enters.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES: I invite you all
To come to the garden right away
Where you can watch the dazzling firework display.

He opens the door for the guests, then follows them into the garden. Tchekalinsky enters, in conversation with Sourin and Tomsy.)

TCHEKALINSKY: Poor Hermann, acting strange as ever!
I'd place a bet that he's in love.
A while ago I caught him smiling.

SOURIN: Wrong! Even worse. He has a plan.
What is it all about? Cards!
The three that will beat the system.

TCHEKALINSKY: **Most bizarre!**

TOMSKY: **That's not the game he plays.
At times perhaps a lunatic,
But not a fool.**

SOURIN: **He told me so himself.**

TOMSKY: **A joke!**

TCHEKALINSKY: **My friend, he's laughing up his sleeve.**

TOMSKY: **Unlikely. He'll pursue his odd obsessions
To the bitter end.
A pity! Nice fellow!**

(They disperse as Prince Yeletsky and Lisa enter.)

PRINCE YELETSKY: **My love, so quiet and so distant?
Are worries weighing on your mind?
Confide in me . . .**

LISA: **Now's not the time . . . tomorrow is better . . .**

(She starts to leave, but Yeletsky detains her.)

PRINCE YELETSKY: **Allow me . . . Stay just a moment.
My darling, let me have my say.**

**My love for you no man can measure,
More dear to me than light and air.
Love goes beyond the bounds of pleasure,
When founded on the need to share.**

**My guiding star, my lovely Venus,
So near, and yet so out of reach.
A wall of silence stands between us,
A wall I'm not allowed to breach.
Am I unworthy of the honor?**

**In word or deed have I offended?
Reproach me and I'll not complain.
Misunderstanding can be mended.
How do I merit your disdain?**

It gives me pain to see you suffer

And not to know the reason why.
It well may be you love another
And in despair you pine and sigh.

My marriage claims are undisputed,
But force cannot be justified.
If now you feel that we're unsuited,
Without protest I'll step aside.

If I'm mistaken, let me know it!
For simple candor I implore.
But if you love me, try to show it;
Be again the angel I adore.
Confide in me! Confide in me!

(They leave. Hermann enters reading a note.)

HERMANN: "Wait for me after the performance. I must speak with you."
From this grotesquely wild obsession
Perhaps she'll set me free.
The secret!
Three cards in a row, and I'll be rich . . .
We'll slip away.
Together we both can escape.
Delusion! Lunging headlong to insanity!

(Several masked guests enter, Tchekalensky and Sourin among them. They steal up to Hermann and whisper mockingly.)

TCHEK. & SOURIN: Could you be the stranger
Who comes for the prize
And pleads till the old lady dies?
The secret of three cards . . . three only!
(They laugh as they blend in with the other guests.)

HERMANN: Taunting me? Perhaps my imagination?
No! Just possibly . . .
(He covers his face with his hands.)
I'm crazy! And yet, if only . . .

(He becomes absorbed in thought as the Master of Ceremonies takes over.)

MASTER OF CEREMONIES:

For your delight, two lovers in distress:
A charming pastorage we call

The wooing of the shepherdess.

CHORUS: The day goes down in shadows
 As sunlight turns to gold.
 Returning from the meadows,
 The flocks are in the fold.

 Our daily duties over,
 From work we turn to play,
 To dancing on the clover
 And lolling in the hay.
 (And frolicking in the hay.)

CHLOE: I adore my Daphnis, though
 He gives no hopeful sign.
 If only I were bolder,
 I'd lean upon his shoulder,
 Whisper, "O love, be mine!"

DAPHNIS: (Pauline) Too long I've hid my passion;
 I stammer and I stall.
 I fear a frank confession
 May lead to losing all.

 I adore my darling, though
 I give no hint, no sign.
 If only I were bolder,
 So closely I would hold her,
 Whispering, "O love, be mine!"

CHLOE: I adore my Daphnis, though
 He gives no hopeful sign.
 If only I were bolder,
 I'd lean upon his shoulder,
 Whisper, "O love, be mine!"

BOTH: And whisper, and whisper,
 "Forevermore be mine!"

PLUTUS: (Tomsy) Dearest, I also adore you
 And come to kneel before you,
 And on my knees implore you
 To hear me out, then choose.

DAPHNIS: I can delay no longer;

**Challenge has made me stronger.
With courage I shall conquer.
By standing still, I lose.**

PLUTUS:
**I bring to you in marriage
Prime real estate located
Upon a Southern shore,
Rare gems evaluated
At forty grand or more.
A gold and silver carriage
And all the goods I own
Shall then be yours alone.**

DAPHNIS:
**I bring to you in marriage
No real estate located
Near the shore.
No gold and silver carriage;
Instead, a love to last forevermore,
A love engraved in stone,
A gift for you alone.**

CHLOE:
**I crave no golden carriage;
No costly gems for me,
Nor castles by the sea.
I choose the humble shepherd
To take my hand in marriage.**

*(to Plutus)
(turning to Dahnis)*

**Goodbye, sir. go your way.
True love has won the day.**

**We've cast aside pretending
To reach a happy ending.
Love gets the final say;
No need for long delay:
I'll marry you today!**

BOTH:
**In spring or winter weather,
Our lives are bound together
With love sincere and deep,
That promise I shall keep.
For two hearts beating now as one
A long, happy journey's just begun.**

CHORUS:
**The two have found each other;
Their hearts now beat as one,**

As off they go together.
Their journey's just begun.

May blessings freely shower
Upon the happy pair
That love may come to flower
In skies serene and fair.

It's time we draw the curtain
And leave them on their own.
Moreover, we are certain
They want to be alone.

(At the end of the Interlude, some of the guests rise, others remain seated, in animated conversation. Ghermann comes to the front of the stage, lost in thought.)

HERMANN: The passionate stranger foretold . . .
 Ha! Avid to learn the secret . . .
 Who else but . . . me?

(He turns and sees the Countess before him. Both start and stare at each other. Sourin, masked, again mocks Hermann before vanishing)

SOURIN: Aha! The stranger and the witch!

HERMANN: Again . . . the voice . . .
 Still stalking, while masquerading . . . goading me . . .
 Human . . . or demonic?
 My wild imagination roams again!
 The three cards! Ah, from what heights
 I have fallen!

(Lisa enters, masked.)

LISA: I've only a moment . . .

HERMANN: Lisa, my darling!
 My joy, my happiness and hope!
 I love you so! I long for you!

LISA: Not here! Not now!
 We must be careful. Listen closely.
 Take it. This key unlocks the gate into the garden.
 A winding stair
 Will take you to my grandmama's apartment.

HERMANN: But why to hers? . . .

LISA: Of course, she'll not be there.
No, she will be safely down below
Till very late.
Close by her portrait
You will see a doorway to my room,
Where we shall be alone.
Be patient. Tomorrow I'm yours!

HERMANN: No, not tomorrow! No!
Tonight I shall be there!

LISA: But dearest . . .

HERMANN: I insist!

LISA: Then you must hurry.
Your wish is my command. Till then. *(She leaves)*

HERMANN: I, too, obey
The fate decreed by Satan.
Tonight I'll learn the secret!

MASTER OF CEREMONIES: *(entering in great excitement)*

Your attention, please!
Our great Czarina's now arriving!

CHORUS: The Empress! In person, to pay a visit!
Our great Czarina here to pay a visit!
The crowning moment of the ball,
A (very) special honor!
Her Majesty has deigned to call.
May heaven's blessings pour upon her;
She comes tonight to do us honor.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES: Prepare to sing the royal anthem.

CHORUS: The royal anthem, in chorus!
Now to sing the anthem, in chorus!
Now to sing the royal anthem!
Give a rousing cheer! All hail!
All in chorus! All in chorus!

Hail to the mother of our proud nation!

**Born to heed the call to glory,
Armies march at her command.
Glorified in song and story,
Hail the leader of the land!
Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah! Three cheers!**

All bow in homage as the Czarina makes a grand entrance.

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

As Hermann quietly lurks in the Countess' bedchamber, adjacent to Lisa's room, he broods upon the strange, dangerous, unearthly power that she seems to exert over him. Though still wondering if he is chasing a mirage, he remains determined not to back down. Love must wait until he learns the secret of the three cards, by persuasion, or if need be, by force.

The bedchamber of the Countess, which contains a youthful portrait on the wall. Hermann enters quietly and surveys the room.

HERMANN: I found it, just as Lisa told me . . .
 Here mainly because I love her,
 Yet . . . Now is my chance!
And love must wait until I learn the secret.
 Suppose it non-existent . . .
 A wishful thought, a mere mirage,
 A tantalizing dream?

(The clock strikes midnight.)

So there she is . . . the Venus of Moscow.
 In youth a raving beauty,
 But I see danger lurking:
Those flashing eyes have powers that compel
 If you come near.
 Now old and nearly blind,
 Their magic still is working.
 What strange, unearthly force
 Binds us together?
And one will die, but which is it to be?

Too late to call it off, it's now or never.
An angry fate conspires to drive me onward,
To stay the course,
To seize the ripe occasion.
Yes! To that fate I must surrender,
Come what may!
But hush! Approaching steps . . .
I must not waver!

(As Hermann conceals himself behind a curtain, the Countess enters surrounded by maids and attendants.)

CHORUS OF MAIDS AND ATTENDANTS

Home again, beloved lady;
Time for slumber, time for bed,
Then to awaken fresh and ready
For the day that lies ahead.

Clearly overwrought and exhausted,
Cast aside concern and care.
Rely on servants tried and trusted.
Standing guard, we're always there.

(They accompany the Countess into her boudoir.)

Close your eyes, the party's over.
Time for slumber, time for bed.
Happy days lie ahead.
Time for slumber, time for bed.

(Lisa enters, followed by Masha.)

LISA: Please, Masha! Just leave me alone.

MASHA: What has come over you? Me, not needed?

LISA: Can you not guess?

MASHA: O saints above! A rendezvous!

LISA: Yes, and I'm late . . . He's waiting . . .
You mustn't tell a soul! Can I trust you?
You'll not betray my secret . . .
Will you promise?

MASHA: Lord, don't you know the risk you run?

LISA: Don't be afraid. He is my husband
 Before the eyes of God.
I have chosen him my lord and master;
When he commands, I humbly obey.

(They leave. The maids bring in the Countess, in dressing gown and nightcap.)

CHORUS OF MAIDS AND ATTENDANTS

Off the dear Countess goes
For some rest and repose,
Waking up good as new.
Fresh as dew upon the rose.
Off the dear Countess goes
For some rest and repose,
As she dozes
Once again a chapter closes
(Thus a chapter closes)
Till the break of dawn.
Safe and unforsaken,
May she awaken
With the dawn,
Pleasant dreams, pleasant . . .

COUNTESS: Jabber, jabber! I'm no baby!
 Just exhausted . . . tired out . . .
No, not the bed, I want the chair.

Ah, I've lived perhaps too long.
These wretched times!
The world I knew has turned to dust and ashes.
Where is culture? Where is class?
Who now appreciates style and tradition?
As for dancing and singing ---
Sacrilige! Vulgarized by peasants . . .
Oh, the balls I attended back then! . . . Enchantment!

*Le duc d'Orleans,
Le duc d'Ayen,
Duc de Coigny,
Le contesse d'Estrades,
Le duchesse de Brancas . . .*

Those proud aristocrats!
All famous, and I knew them all . . .

La Marquise de Pompadour as well . . .
The night I sang at Versailles
The royal entourage applauded me . . .
King Louis himself was there,
Magnificently attired.
He said my French was superb.
I can recall each moment . . .

*Je crains de lui parler la nuit,
J'ecoute trop tout ce qu'il dit.
Il me dit: je vous aime,
Et je sens malgre moi,
Je sens mon coeur qui bat, qui bat,
Je ne sais pas pourquoi!*

(As if coming out of a dream, she suddenly looks around, realizing that she is not alone.)

COUNTESS: *(to servants)* And why do you stand gaping?
Leave this minute!

(The servants discreetly withdraw, and the Countess lapses back into her private fantasy.)

*Je crains de lui parler la nuit,
J'ecoute trop tout ce qu'il dit.
Il me dit: je vous aime,
Et je sens malgre moi,
Je sens mon coeur qui bat, qui bat,
Je ne sais pas pourquoi!*

(Hermann steps out and stands in front of the Countess, who comes out of her trance in dumb horror, soundlessly moving her lips.)

HERMANN:
Have no fear of me.
Hear me out for just a moment.
I can turn to no one else.
Grant a favor and I'll leave, to trouble you no more.
My life is in your hands;
I plead because I'm desperate..
It will cost you only a few short, simple words.
I'm told you know of three cards . . .
What is gained by hoarding your secret?

Can you remember the magic of falling in love?

Can you remember the fire, the despair and rapture of youth,
Can you remember the pain and joy
Of becoming a mother?
Search your hear; put yourself in my place;
Make the connection.
By all that is dear to you, all that is sacred,
I appeal to you!

Be kind! Pass on to me what you have been given.
O tell me the secret once told to you
When you pleaded.
Why hold it within?
Why not let it go?
Or perhaps, obtained at a price that stains your conscience,
Stubbornly it comes back to haunt you in the dead of night.
So near your day of judgment,
Let me relieve the load
And take upon myself the burden of guilt.
I'll stake my own damnation.

Harpy! I warn you!
Pushed now to the edge, I've one final resort.

(He pulls out a pistol and aims it at the Countess. She raises her hands as if to protect herself, then slumps over dead.)

I'm no longer asking you.
By God, I am demanding.
So answer! Out with it!
My God! She's dead!
And now . . . I'll never learn the secret.
Too late . . . the secret gone forever . . .
She is dead . . . she is dead . . .

LISA: *(entering)* I heard a noise. *(seeing Hermann)* You! Why here?

HERMANN: Too late, too late . . .
Now she is dead, the secret gone forever.

LISA: Who is dead? And what is going on?

HERMANN: *(stunned)* The Countess. Now she is dead,
The secret gone forever.

LISA: *(seeing the Countess)* No! O my God! You killed her!
Her blood is on your hands.

HERMANN: I swear that I am innocent.
I came to ask about three cards.

LISA: And not for love of me?
Now I understand
Why you were so impatient --
For gold, pretending it was love.
Three cards! And so you lied to me.
Because I loved and trusted,
I face disgrace and ruin,
My love betrayed by a scoundrel!
A monster! By a murderer! Out! Out!

HERMANN: The secret lost!

(Hermann rushes out. Lisa, sobbing, falls on the Countess's lifeless body.)

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

In his barracks room late on a stormy night of howling winds and rattling windows, Hermann reads a despairing note from Lisa, begging him for another meeting. As a distant choir sings the late Countess to eternal rest, he recalls with a shudder the funeral he attended unobserved. Looking down upon her dead body inside the casket, he could have sworn that her eyes, staring back at him, gave a gleeful wink. Now haunted by shapeless terrors, he is unprepared for the visitor he least expects.

(A barracks room, late night in winter. A howling wind. Moonlight gleams fitfully through the window. Military calls are heard. Ghermann is seated at a table, holding a letterH

HERMANN: *(reading)* "How could I have thought for a moment that you meant for the Countess to die? I feel wretched, knowing that I have wronged you. Set my mind at rest. I shall wait for you this evening on the embankment. If you are not there by midnight, I must face the unbearable possibility that you do not love me. Forgive me, my dearest! I have suffered so . . ."

Poor Lisa!
I drag her down into an abyss of my own making.
Not even sleep erases mounting horrors . . .

(Throughout, he seems to hear a distant choir singing the dead Countess to rest,)

CHORUS: (God of mercy, show thy love.
As we walk in the shadow of death,
Save the weak and wayward from the fires of hell.
Guide the footsteps that wander far astray
From the straight, narrow path that leads to paradise
And the hope of peace eternal.
Receive your humble servant.)

HERMANN: They never leave me –
The somber thoughts and gruesome dreams . . .
The ghostly Countess . . .
I revisit the funeral I attended unobserved . . .
Horrible! Vivid in my memory, implanted.
I see it now . . . there, once again!
The crowded chapel in the church . . .
The candles on the altar . . .
Muffled sobbing . . . the catafalque . . .
The corpse inside the open casket,
Like a statue newly painted,
Yet small and withered underneath the wax.
By a strange compulsion,
I bend down to kiss the hand now cold as marble.
While staring at her frozen face --
Oh, no! Her eyes are staring back at me,
Then give a gleeful wink!
Off, you pernicious phantom! Off!

(He falls back into the chair, covering his face with his hands, Amid intermittent howling winds outside, a few repeated knocks are heard at the window, which blows open, extinguishing the candle. A shadow appears at the window. Hermann stands up in horror.)

HERMANN: Strange terrors seize me . . .
Soft . . . soft . . . I hear it . . .
There! From outside, a step . . .
No, no! I shall bar the door!

(He runs toward the door which flies open, revealing the ghost of the Countess in a white shroud, who slowly approaches him as he recoils.)

COUNTESS: I can find no rest in the grave.
Against my will, upon command, I bring a message:
Do right by Lisa and marry her,

I shall name the cards.
The cards that will make your fortune.
Remember: three, seven, ace!
Three, seven, ace! Three, seven, ace!

HERMANN: (*in a mad daze*)

Three, seven, ace! Three, seven, ace!

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

Lisa waits for Hermann on the deserted embankment convinced that she has wronged him in thinking even for a minute that he deliberately killed the Countess. But if he does not show up by midnight in response to her desperate note, it can only mean that he does not love her, that he has never loved her, and in fact has used her merely to gain access to the Countess and to her fateful secret. Still waiting as the deadline draws closer and closer, she fears the worst, not yet knowing or even daring to imagine what that worst might be.

(*Lisa, dressed in black, stands on the embankment overlooking the Neva in a dark corner under an arch.*)

LISA: Near midnight, and still no sign . . .
I've waited, so far in vain,
Still hoping he will come,
I long for reassurance . . .
He must be innocent . . .
However far from perfect,
A killer he is not!
But I am weary, and I fear the worst.



Lost in the dark on a murk-y road, trust-ing in love, here I have come,
Far from the shelter of hearth and home.
What lies ahead for a soul in flight?
Either rebirth or eternal night.

On flows the river, so cold and black,
Swirling below, bound for the sea,
Blindly impelled to its destiny.
Onward and onward! There's no turning back.

Wild is the sky, not a star in sight.

Searching, I find no guiding light.
Ah! Fiercer by far than the wind and rain,
How can I run from the storm within?
Fiercer by far than the wind and rain,
Oh, how can I run from the storm within?

Spellbound by a stranger,
From stifling safety
I rush headlong to unknown danger . . .

The hour about to strike,
The hour of truth.
Unless by midnight he's responded,
I'll know that all is lost.

(The clock begins to toll midnight.)

Still waiting . . . every fateful stroke a deadly blow.
My dearest! There still is time! Hurry!
Come, and I shall ask no questions . . .
Only save me!

The knell has sounded,
Grimly tolling;
The hour of hope has come and gone.
A heartless murderer.
A conniver . . .
With soothing lies he lured me on.

A man adept at pretty phrases,
Who like a spider wove a spell,
In his arms he carried me to heaven,
Then left me, forsaken,
To find myself alone in hell.
Oh, no! Together,
Together lost, we both shall writhe in hell.

(She is about to flee when Hermann suddenly appears. Lisa is instantly ecstatic.)

O God be thanked! You've come at last!
Your love is all I need to know
To drive away the tears that flow.
Long days of agony are past:
You're mine again and I am yours!

HERMANN: My love, I am forever yours!

LISA: The hours of torment are over,
And gone are the anger and pain.

HERMANN: Forgotten, the anger and pain.

LISA: Secure in the arms of my lover,
No menacing shadows remain,
Now that we are together again.

HERMANN: Secure in the arms your lover,
No menacing shadows remain.
Released from the dungeon of sorrow,
We enter the temple of light.
The sun will again rise tomorrow,
Dispelling the doubts of night.

LISA: We enter the temple of light,
Overwhelming the demons of night.

BOTH: (And) empowered as husband and wife,
Together we'll start a new life,
And trusting in powers above,
We'll find a warm welcome for love.

HERMANN: But time is short; we mustn't linger.
We'll take the plunge!
So are you ready . . . or no?

LISA: Lead on, my love!
Lead on, and I shall follow.

HERMANN: Far, far away.
But first, to the casino!

LISA: I can't believe I heard you clearly!

HERMANN: I stake my fortune on the cards!
There I shall find a ton of gold,
And all, all of it mine,
Just waiting to be claimed.

LISA: Delusion!
Dearest, what you need is peace and quiet.

HERMANN: Don't be alarmed! I've had no time to tell you.
Three cards!
Determined to extract the fateful mystery
From that old witch's bosom . . .

LISA: Sheer madness! Rant and raving!

HERMANN: So obstinate! Her lips were sealed and silent.
But later, reappearing as a ghost,
She named the cards I needed, one by one.

LISA: So you *are* the one to blame for her death?

HERMANN: I plead, not guilty.
I raised my pistol . . . pretending . . .
And she collapsed and died of shock and terror.

LISA: Of shock and terror? (*bitterly ironic*) Just that!

The knell has sounded,
Grimly tolling;
The hour of hope has come and gone,
Beyond redeeming. All is over,
And once again I walk alone.

A heartless fiend, a man of evil,
Who like a spider wove a spell.
In his arms he carried me to heaven.
Reawakened, eyes opened,
That heaven has become a hell,
My lover no devil,
But merely a man whose heart is made of stone.

HERMANN: Yes, yes! Those three cards!
Their secret now is mine.
For that the lady died --
The secret obtained by pulling out a gun.

Though bold, I never came to kill;
By desperation I was driven.
So frail! But how was I to know?
Three cards! Three cards!
Too soon to say that all's forgiven,
So leave it for now and let me go.
No turning backward; what's done is done

Youth is made for fun and laughter,
Not tomorrow but today!
Time for sober thoughts hereafter
When the gold has turned to gray.
(When the gold turns to gray.)

SOURIN: (*at the table*) Here goes!

TCHAPLITSKY: I'm in the game.

NAROUMOV: I'll raise you.

TCHAPLITSKY: Not you again!

TCHEKALINSKY: Who else is playing?

SOURIN: A seven!

TCHEKALINSKY: Eight!

SOURIN: The same old story.

TOMSKY: (*to Yeletsky*) You're quite a stranger here.
 For years we haven't seen you in this house of sin.

PRINCE YELETSKT: Well, better late than never.
 Remember the old saying:
Unlucky in love, lucky in cards.

TOMSKY: Just what does that imply?

PRINCE YELETSKT: My engagement's broken off.
 But please, no more of that.
The wound still hurts too much.
 I've come to seek revenge!
 I'll turn around the proverb:
"Lucky in love unlucky in cards!"

TOMSKY: Once again you speak in riddles.

PRINCE YELETSKT: Just be patient.

TCHEKALINSKY: Let's have a song!
 Perhaps our friend can be persuaded.

CHORUS: Tomsky's the man!
 He'll have a grateful audience,
 But make it bright and merry.

TOMSKY: Tonight I'm not in voice.

TCHEKALINSKY: Fear not, no critics here.
 Drink up! You need a bracer.
 A cheer for Tomsky, hip hooray! Let's hear!

CHORUS: We'll even sing along:
 Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah, hurrah!

TOMSKY: If you girls had wings like starlings,
 How I'd dote upon the darlings
 As they flit from tree to tree.
 And were I a birch or willow
 I'd provide an ample pillow,
 Calling out, "Come perch on me!"
 Calling out, "Come perch on me!"

CHORUS: Charming! Charming! A second verse, go on!

TOMSKY: Light and airy like canaries
 Or a band of woodland fairies,
 Heed a lover's tender plea:
 "Pretty birds, reserve your cooing
 Or whatever you are doing
 Till you do it just for me.
 Till you do it just for me."

CHORUS: Danger! Danger! Keep a watchful eye on Tomsky,
 Lovers! On alert!

 "Pretty birds, reserve your cooing
 Or whatever you are doing
 Till you do it just for me.
 Till you do it just for me."

TCHEKALINSKY: Another! All together, let us sing
 The Gambler's Song!

CHORUS: Sleep all day, play all night
 Is the gambler's delight.
 Play on!

As the wind lightly blows,
So the gold comes and goes.
Play on!

Fortunes go down the drain,
Shrug it off, start again.
Play on!

Maybe up, maybe down;
So the wheel spins around.
Play on!

With a king or an ace
You are back in the race.
Play on!
Onward! Onward! Onward! Onward!

TCHEKALINSKY: Come along, let's get to work. I'll shuffle.
(to waiter) Champagne for all!

CHORUS: The game begins!

TCHAPLITSKY: Two deuces.

NAROUMOV: Pair of nines.

YCHAPLITSKY: I'm folding!

SOURIN: I still am undecided.

TCHAPLITSKY: You win.

NAROUMOV: My luck begins to turn.

(Hermann enters, pale and distraught.)

PRINCE YELETSKY: He comes! My hunch was right,
A nagging premonition.
Who knows where this may lead?
I may require a second.
I trust you'll not refuse.

TOMSKY: Of course, that is understood.

CHORUS: Hermann so late! What has kept you? Where were you?
Late maybe, yet welcome. But what a sight!

(The way he stares and glowers!)
A fortune strangely won,
As if in league with (secret) powers
That will surely bring him down.

PRINCE YELETSKY: I see what's going on!
That scoundrel is a fortune hunter,
Cold-blooded and malign,
My own life torn asunder.
I'll see him brought down:
Vengeance will soon be mine.

TCHEKALINSKY: Stop playing while ahead.

HERMANN: No! Double or nothing.

CHORUS: Either a wizard or a madman,
Out of control, but who can stop him?
The man is not himself!

HERMANN: Agreed?

TCHEKALINSKY: Agreed. You name it.

HERMANN: Right. A seven! Aha!

CHORUS: He wins again!
Uncanny! Surely in league with Satan.

HERMANN: Why do you stare in horror?
The luck of beginners. (*He laughs hysterically.*)
Pour out the wine!

CHORUS: Hermann, calm yourself!

HERMANN: (*with glass in hand*)

What is this life? A game! A world that's sel-dom what it seems,

Where right and wrong are youthful dreams,
Where trust and candor are for sale
And daily toil a fairy tale.

Today the luck is mine;

**Your turn may come tomorrow;
Till then, go beg or borrow.
So lift a glass and pour the wine!**

**What lies ahead? You die!
No need to whine or shed a tear;
For one and all the goal is clear:
The wise, the gifted and the brave
Return to dust inside the grave.**

**Today the luck is mine;
Your turn may come tomorrow;
Till then, go beg or borrow.
Cheer up and pour the wine!**

HERMANN: Another round?

**TCHEKALINSKY: No, I am through!
The devil steer you toward the winning cards.**

**HERMANN: Who knows? You may be right.
I want to play!
Who dares oblige me?
To win or lose the total sum . . . speak up!**

PRINCE YELETSKY: I, sir!

**CHORUS: No! Don't be rash. Think again.
No time to intervene.
(While you can)) Be sensible. Slow down!**

**PRINCE YELETSKY: With cards, not guns, we'll settle scores,
And this duel I shall win.**

HERMANN: You throw the gauntlet?

PRINCE YELETSKY: Yes! Start shuffling, Tchekalinsky.

HERMANN: An ace!

PRINCE YELETSKY: Ah! You appear mistaken.

HERMANN: I hold the ace!

PRINCE YELETSKY: Then look again -- you hold the Queen of Spades!

(The ghost of the Countess appears.)

HERMANN: **Betrayal! All is lost!**
 The witch is laughing,
Come from the grave to wreak revenge.
 My curse on you!
Now in death you haunt me still.
 Speak, if you can,
 But I shall have the final say.

(Drawing out a sword, he plunges it into his chest, then falls onto the floor.)

CHORUS: **Tormented, then defeated,**
 He dies by his own hand.
 But no! He's breathing still . . .

HERMANN: **Prince! Oh, forgive a fool!**
Deluded, driven, now I'm dying . . .
 Miracle! Lisa!
 I called, and you heard!
 Come close! Come close!
 Can you hear me now
 And forgive?
 I die, loving you as ever . . .
Dearest! Remember me . . . Forgive me . . . Ah!

(He dies)

CHORUS: **O Lord, reclaim your own.**
 Relieved of mortal pain and bondage,
 May his soul at last find freedom.

The End

