

ERNANI

Music by
Giuseppe Verdi

English Version by
Donald Pippin
(1998)

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Ernani	An outlaw (Don Juan of Aragon)
Elvira	Niece and ward of Don Ruy Gomez de Silva
Carlo Holy Roman Emperor	Charles I, King of Spain, later Charles V,
Giovanna	Waiting woman to Elvira
Silva	Don Ruy Gomez, grandee of Spain
Riccardo	Lieutenant to Carlo
Jago	Esquire to Silva

Outlaws, Knights, Pages, Ladies and Waiting-women

Ernani

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ACT I

The scene is a remote, desolate clearing in the mountains of Aragon, toward sunset, where a group of far from desolate young men are eating, drinking, playing cards, cleaning their weapons, and celebrating the happy outdoor life of the bandit. One of them, however, stands apart, silently, his mind on more serious matters. The girl that he is in love with, who resides in the nearby castle, under the supposed protection of her aged uncle and guardian, is about to be forced into marriage with this same protective uncle and guardian. Ernani must act quickly and decisively, and he will need all the help he can get.

Scene 1: The mountains of Aragon. A band of rebel mountaineers and bandits are eating and drinking; some are playing cards, others cleaning their weapons.

BANDITS

Be merry! Hurrah, hooray!
Together we say
To hell with the law.

With soup in the kettle
We bandits will settle
For life in the raw.

Though danger we relish,
The days can be hellish
But never routine.

We gamble at poker
But jack and the joker
We'd trade for a queen.

Along the road we swagger
With musket, knife and dagger
In search of spice and sport.

For want of a tavern,
A cave or a cavern
Will do when cash is short.

Be merry! Again, some more!
Hooray, hurrah! Be merry!
As long as there is wine to pour,
To hell with the law.

Again we say
To hell with the law.
Hurrah, hooray
For life in the raw.
Come rain or shine,
At large and at leisure,
Our pleasure is wine.

Come rain or come shine
Our pleasure is wine.
Three cheers for wine!

Ernani, the loner!
Oh, valiant man of honor,
Why now so pale and sad.

Regardless of weather,
We're in this together,
On good days or bad.

As rebels, we revel
But play on the level
For all of our talk.

While sparing the sparrow,
We sharpen the arrow
And aim for the hawk.

Again some more.
Hooray hurrah! Be merry!
As long as there is wine to pour,
To hell with the law.

Again we say
To hell with the law.
Hurrah, hooray
For life in the raw.
Come rain or shine,
At large and at leisure,
Our pleasure is wine.

Three cheers for wine.
Come rain or shine,
Our pleasure is wine.

With soup in the kettle
To hell with the law!
We bandits will settle
For life in the raw.
Come rain or shine,
Our pleasure is wine.

ERNANI

My loyal friends, I'm grateful
For all the love you've shown,
But as you revel,
I am torn with sorrow.
My need for help is urgent.
If you deny me,
All, all is over.
Ernani is lost forever.

Like sparkling dew from paradise
Touching the faded flower,
With sweet caress, her gentle hand
Restores and rekindles sleeping fire.

Her breath of life has raised me from the dead,
And with a smile she's opened up
A door unknown before.

Old Silva, rich and powerful,
Dares lay a hand upon her.
By force he means to marry her
And drag her to the altar.
Ah! If I'm to lose her,
Surrendering
The only love I've ever known,
The pain is so unbearable
That life and death are one,
But sorrow goes on and on.
Help me take her!

CHORUS

With abduction!
We can lead, but will she follow?

ERNANI

She has sworn.

CHORUS

Then at the castle
We tonight will show our muscle.
In the dark and under cover
We'll assist the frantic lover,
And our daggers will be lethal
In the clash of good and evil.
We are few and they are many,
But we do it for Ernani.
We will live to tell a story
Full of passion, pride and glory,
And your ultimate reward
Later on.
And your ultimate reward
Of love hard won.
After clash of steel and sword
Comes a lasting peace accord.

ERNANI

In my painful lonely exile
She will be my shining angel,
My guiding star.

(Oh, blessed angel I adore,
Come, and my life will flower again.
Be mine, and we'll together soar
Far, far above the world of wind and rain.

When I behold the tender gaze
Of sparkling eyes so full of play,
The clouded skies of former days
Ernani can brush away.
Ah, the clouded skies of former days
Ernani can lightly brush away.)

CHORUS We will live to tell a story
Full of passion, pride and glory
And your ultimate reward,
The sweet reward of love hard won.

ERNANI (Oh, blessed angel I adore,
Come, and my life will flower again.
Be mine, and we'll together soar
Far, far above the world of wind and rain.

When I behold the tender gaze
Of sparkling eyes so full of play,
The clouded skies of former days
Ernani can brush away.
Ah, the clouded skies of former days
Ernani can lightly brush away.)

CHORUS Claim your ultimate reward,
Love hard won,
The sweet reward of love hard won.

Inside the castle, Elvira is restlessly waiting to be rescued from the pending marriage, relieved at any rate that Count Silva, her uncle, guardian and designated husband is temporarily absent. One may well suppose that a young woman of this era, like those in some parts of the world today, has little control over her own destiny, but Elvira has taken matters into her own hands. Passionately in love with Ernani, she is ready to forego the easy, luxurious life in which she is virtually imprisoned, for the freedom, however arduous and uncertain, that Ernani offers.

With the exception of her trusted friend Giovanna, her servants suspect nothing of her drastic intentions, and are mildly perplexed at her singular lack of interest in the approaching ceremony -- after all, the crowning event of a woman's life. Lucky Elvira!

Scene 2: Elvira's room in Silva's castle

ELVIRA Night all important!
My guardian gone, thank heaven!
Would he were gone for good!
Jailer and tormentor,
He follows like a shadow,

A surly stranger
Who harps on love
And our approaching marriage.
Revolted, to Ernani
I am drawn ever closer.

Ernani! Ernani! Oh, rescue me
From his unwanted embraces.
Together in regions far from here
We'll find in love safe haven.
Through wilderness of thicket and thorn
I'll follow wherever, wherever you go.
When nurtured by love, the barren desert
Becomes a garden where flowers grow,
A garden, a garden of flowers,
Where soft tranquil waters flow,
A garden of love,
A garden where flowers grow.

LADIES IN WAITING

Many a maid, it can be said,
Turns to you an eye of envy,
Eager to fill the bridal bed
Of one so high and mighty.

See what a heap of finery
On you the duke has showered,
Worthy a queen in robe of state
That sallies forth with pride.
Those who arrive to celebrate
Will salute a regal bride,
Salute and celebrate a regal bride.

ELVIRA

Your words of cheer will comfort me
On winding roads ahead.

ELVIRA *(to herself)*

(Take from me all but Ernani;
Hollow glory I gladly surrender.
No rare gem, no pomp nor splendor
Can replace the food of love.

Ah, light of heel, oh time, run faster
Till my torture and torment are over.
No ordeal for a waiting lover
Can compare with long delay.)

LADIES IN WAITING

For her wedding day tomorrow
No concern does she convey,
None at all,
No, no concern does she convey.

(They leave. Giovanna soon returns, followed by Carlo)

While Elvira, eager, expectant, starry-eyed, is awaiting the arrival of Ernani, someone else has decided to take advantage of the old Count's absence to pay her a call. It is Don Carlo, no less than the king of Spain, whose future grandson, by the way, will become the hero of a later Verdi opera. Like Silva, like Ernani, he too is enamored of Elvira, and as king it goes without saying that he has a dazzling array of splendors to offer, even if marriage is not on the list. Although she has rebuffed him already, he cannot believe that she is serious, or that she can hold out indefinitely. He will conquer through sweet persuasion. That failing, he has other means.

Carlo turns from persuasion to coercion, but Elvira is quick to counter with a knife seized from his side. She is spared using it by the most opportune appearance of Ernani. The bandit and the king meet face to face for the first time. But in fact their history goes far back. It was Carlo's father that persecuted Ernani's father and eventually brought him to the scaffold. Ernani, dispossessed, outlawed, reduced to banditry, has sworn to avenge his father's death on the son of the man who ordered the axe to fall, and his life until recently has been dominated by this hunger for vengeance.

Carlo, on the other hand, is no less aggrieved by the unrest and rebellion that the charismatic bandit has succeeded in fomenting among his discontented subjects. The stage set, these two dedicated enemies, each nursing a lifetime of grudges and grievances, are soon to discover that they are rivals in love as well.

CARLO *(to Giovanna)*
Go, bring her to me ... this minute!

GIOVANNA
But sir! She's in seclusion,
For days avoiding
Even her trusted servants.
And Silva now absent ...

CARLO
I've spoken, and now I'm waiting.

GIOVANNA
Yes, sir ... *(she leaves)*

CARLO
My peace of mind destroyed!
Robbed by Elvira.
I love her,
But not by passion nor position
Can I impress her.
Disdainful of my royal title,
She has chosen a bandit,
Sworn to rebellion.
But I shall try again
With sweet persuasion
To conquer.

ELVIRA *(entering)* Calling so late! Your Highness! Here uninvited ...

CARLO
Drawn by love too overwhelming.

ELVIRA Empty phrases, feather weighted.

CARLO You're mistaken. I live by honor.

ELVIRA Prove it so by leaving my chamber.

CARLO Love, come with me.

ELVIRA (So untimely!)

CARLO Come, and take the love I offer, love unbounded ...

ELVIRA I, too, have honor.

CARLO By my side, you're beyond reproach.

ELVIRA Go no further! Go no further!

CARLO On a lowly bandit
Would you cast away your heart?

ELVIRA Every heart holds secret chambers.

CARLO Let me open mine to you.

 From the day when first I saw you,
 Like a flower, my love unfolded.
 Pride of pomp and power melted:
 You and you alone,
 You and you alone I wanted.

 Take, oh Elvira, the heart I offer.
 Yours in turn,
 Yours in turn I'll guard and treasure.
 Ah! Be hereafter my core and center,
 Smile upon a helpless lover,
 Though royal king.

ELVIRA Daughter of Spain, I'm not for purchase,
 Nor am I dazzled by pretension.
 Crown and throne with all their splendor
 Hold no claim, no claim on my devotion.
 Free and proud, I need no approval
 Nor the favor of king or court.
 The gift of love you grandly offer
 Is too exalted.
 For me, though, it falls far short.

CARLO Take my heart, no longer proud;
 Yours in turn I'll treasure and guard.
 Oh, share a splendor high and exalted.
 Share the life of splendor a king can offer.
 Share in the splendor I can offer, so gladly offer.
 Rise, exalted by my power and my love.
 A life of ease and splendor I gladly offer.

Come, live exalted in a grand and gracious court,
For I adore you with all my heart,
All my heart.

ELVIRA Too exalted; for me, though, not enough.
The life of splendor you grandly offer,
Though exalted, for me is not enough.
The life of splendor you grandly offer,
Though exalted, falls too short,
Falls far too short,
Far too short.

CARLO Come along, if not by choice
By compulsion. *(he seizes her by the arm)*

ELVIRA *(disdainfully)*
Call this a king? Who would know it?

CARLO You'll know him later.

ELVIRA *(grabbing a knife from his side)*
This I know is all I need.
You will leave me
Or else this deadly blade
Will pierce your heart, then mine.

CARLO I have soldiers.

ELVIRA Hired henchmen!

ERNANI *(suddenly emerging)*
Add another to your list.

CARLO You're Ernani!
A sudden revulsion tells me all.
No introduction is needed.
You're Ernani,
The notorious bandit
And the scourge of the rich and the mighty.
With a nod, I could have you beheaded.
But I have pity,
Despite my disdain.
Go, before I change my mind.
Death if you linger!
Blinded fool, flee the wrath of your king.

ELVIRA Stop! I warn you, fury, fire and thunder
Serve but poorly your claim of devotion.
Why wage battle that does me dishonor?
Why devalue a proud reputation.
Dare persist in this path of persecution,
Here you'll witness this dagger in my heart.
One word further of wrath and oppression,
Here you'll witness
This dagger in my heart.

As you glower, distorted by passion,
No, no! I can respect neither lover nor king,
Favor neither, favor neither ...
Favor neither lover nor the king.
Before I yield, I shall die.

ERNANI

Sir, you know me, so no need to wonder
Why my hatred is driven by passion.
My own father slaughtered by your father,
Soon you brought me to shame and starvation.
Long pursuing this path of persecution,
Here you torment the woman of my heart.
Wrath and hatred allow no concession
When here you torment the woman of my heart.
As I tower above you in passion, come
Rise to my challenge, oh high and mighty king.
More than equal, more than equal,
I defy you, oh high, mighty king
Your crown I defy, defy!

CARLO

Leave the castle,
And flee my royal wrath.
Madman! Go!
Fool, go back where you belong.
Leave, and hurry! Leave, and hurry!
Blinded fool, leave the castle.
Defy not the king.
I give orders;
You acknowledge and obey,
You nod and obey.
Leave and hurry.
Flee the fury of your king.

The two rivals are trumped by a third -- Count Silva returns unexpectedly to discover two suspected lovers in his fiancée's bedroom. Privately, he laments the folly of his own situation -- an old man trying to force love upon a young woman. When the body reaches the season of winter, why oh why does the heart remain in springtime? But this does not mean that he is ready to capitulate. Ignoring the burden of age, he is quite up to the challenge of taking on these contemptible upstarts with the sword, and is stopped only by the revelation that one of these upstarts is the king of Spain.

Moreover, Carlo, practiced politician that he is, deftly maneuvers his way out of the awkward situation by claiming that he has come calling at this unconventional hour expressly to see Silva and ask for his advice. The old Emperor has just died. Carlo aims to become the next Emperor, as do several other plausible contenders. The esteemed Count no doubt can give valuable pointers on how best to proceed. Silva is charmed by this appeal to his sagacity, as well as vastly relieved to find that Carlo's motives are political and not romantic. And almost incidentally, Ernani is let off the hook. Carlo simply pretends that Ernani is one of his own followers and nonchalantly orders his dismissal.

If you think this is because Carlo has suddenly gone soft on Ernani, think again. What self-respecting man of honor would be so craven as to allow his revenge to be carried out by somebody else?

SILVA (*entering*) A welcome party!
Home sooner than expected from days of travel,
Here I find in the bedchamber of my fiancée
Not one but two randy lechers.

(*calling*) You knights, you ladies!
Come, I want you present.
You can see for yourselves the breach of honor,
The scandal casting shame upon your master.

(*to himself*) Foolish dreamer! A true believer!
To my eyes, she was chaste as a flower.
I'm in winter; frost is biting;
Toward the grave I go unwanted and distraught.
Ah, but why, but why
In bleak December
Does my heart yearn for buds of April?
Better far if the cold ice of winter
Froze the heart, the flaming heart
That burns for naught!
Would the snow and ice of winter
Froze the heart, the flaming heart
That burns for naught!

The assault upon my honor
Will not go unrepaid.
You servants, bring my sword.
Prepare for action!
Your aged Silva's not too old for vengeance!

SILVA A sword when duty must be done
Even the old can count on
To wipe away the fatal stain,
Or else on the blade to fall.

I tremble, overcome with scorn,
Marked with a shameful blot:
But my hand will tremble not at all
When plunging toward the heart,
The encroaching heart.

CHORUS That noble heart cannot contain
The raging storm within,
The wild and raging storm within.

SILVA A sword when duty must be done
Even the old can count on
To wipe away the fatal stain,
Or else on the blade to fall.

I tremble, overcome with scorn,
Marked with a shameful blot:
But my hand will tremble not at all
When plunging toward the heart,
The encroaching heart.
My hand will tremble not at all
When plunging toward the heart,
The hated heart.

CHORUS Ah, that noble heart cannot contain
 The storm that rages on.

SILVA To battle!

ERNANI Too unequal ...

SILVA Are you cowards? Do I scare you?

CARLO Pause a moment ...

SILVA My sword will do the talking,
 And most effectively.
 (to Carlo) You first can have the honor.

JAGO *(entering with Don Riccardo)*
 Just arrived, the royal squire Don Riccardo.

SILVA How timely! He can witness my vendetta.

RICCARDO You owe your king allegiance,
 Trust and devotion.

ERNANI and ELVIRA *(I tremble for you alone.)*

OTHERS I tremble! The King of Spain!

CARLO Note the change! So overheated,
 Now his wrath he tries to conquer
 Soon enough restored to reason
 By the presence of the king.

RICCARDO On the surface much abated,
 Inner fever burns the stronger,
 Though for now he bows to reason
 In the presence of the king,
 The King of Spain.

SILVA On my eyes a veil has fallen;
 Can I trust my wits no longer.
 Other means I might have chosen
 Had I known it was the king.
 Had I but known!

OTHERS From his eyes, so grim and sullen,
 I detect the heat of anger,

Though for now he bows to reason
In the presence of the king,
The King of Spain.

ELVIRA (*to Ernani*) Love, I hold a dagger waiting:
Death will save me from this marriage.
Years of pain have taught me courage
And your love has made me strong.
The years of torment
Have taught me courage,
And your love has made me strong.
Only your love has made me strong.

ERNANI (*to Elvira*) Love, at dawn I shall be waiting,
Sworn to save you from this marriage.
Fortified by faith and courage,
Love me, and for my sake, be strong.
Oppose the marriage
With faith and courage,
And for Ernani, for your Ernani,
Love, be strong.
For me, be strong.

CARLO
Soon enough restored to reason
By the presence of the king,
Before the king.
Soon, oh soon enough
Restored to reason by his presence
Before the king.
Fire and thunder before the king,
Unaware all along.
I'd better smile and let it go.
I am the king!

SILVA
Such a blunder before the king,
My own king!
How the hell was I to know?
Such a blunder
As on and on I raved and ranted,
Blind to reason
Before the king.
But how the hell was I to know
I was taking on the king?

RICCARDO and MEN
Hot of temper, he has to bow,
Bow to reason
In the presence of the king.
Fire and thunder to the king!
Unaware all along.
Before the king, before the king.

JAGO
So on and on he raved and ranted,
Unaware all along
Before the king.
Taking on the king. his own king.

GIOVANNA Unaware all along
 In the presence of the king
 Fire and thunder
 Before the king, his own king.

SOPRANOS Blind to reason
 Before the king!
 Yes, on and on, yes on and on
 Unaware all along,
 Before the king.

SILVA Do forgive my grievous blunder —

CARLO Minor matter, we'll overlook it.

SILVA I of course had no idea ...

CARLO I am here on major matters.
 Death has taken our great emperor;
 His successor must be chosen.
 Well aware of your discretion,
 I have come here to seek your advice.

SILVA I am flattered, so undeserving ...

CARLO Friend, if you would be so kind,
 Here tonight you will give us lodging.

ERNANI and ELVIRA (Too close for comfort!)

CARLO (*to Ernani*) (I can save you.)
 (*indicating Ernani*) My faithful servant
 Will depart without delay.

ELVIRA (Kindly heaven hears my prayer!)

ERNANI (*to himself*) Faithful servant, indeed! Single-minded,
 I pursue like the low crouching hunter.
 Oh, my father! How long you have waited
 For the blow that will settle the score.
 Only vengeance will snuff out the fire
 That has burned so many years in my heart.
 With a blow I can settle the score.
 Only vengeance will snuff out the fire
 That has burned so many years in my heart,
 Fire that oh these many years
 Has seared my heart
 My embittered heart, my heart.

ELVIRA (*softly, to Ernani*)
 If but one wish of mine could be granted,
 You would flee from this fatal encounter
 And the two foes you've long scorned and hated.
 For your safety I plead and implore!

You are all that I have or desire,
Whether present or whether apart.

CARLO

(to Silva and Riccardo)

More than for treasure, I long for the glory
Shining forth from the proud crown of Caesar.
If I am fated to soar like the eagle,
All shall know I belong near the sun.
Law and order, majestic and regal,
Ever will lift and illumine my throne, ...
And shed new splendor on my throne.

Law and order, with justice for all
Will prevail in my wider domain.
They must prevail when I've ascended to the throne
In my wider domain, my new domain.

SILVA *(to Carlo)*

No paltry rival shall rob you of glory,
Of the people, but juster and wiser.
No, none so fitted to soar like the eagle
Past high steeples and mountains of Spain.
One so lofty, majestic and regal
Should rule over a wider domain.
One so lofty, majestic and regal
Should aspire to a wider domain.
There to reign, there long to reign,
A new and wider domain,
There to reign.

One so regal, a model for all,
Should aspire to a wider domain.
A new domain,
To a wider domain.

JAGO

(observing Silva then Carlo)

His shift is rapid to pleasure from fury,
Cast already as royal adviser.
Storm has abated, along with upheaval:
He has spotted a place near the sun.
To this castle, the king proud and regal
Brings potential till now never known.
He brings renown till now unknown.

High position and honor for all
Come to those with a place near the sun,
His new domain,
Come to those located near the sun,
Near the light of the sun,
His new domain, near the sun.

RICCARDO

No paltry rival shall rob you of glory
Shining forth from the proud crown of Caesar.
None so fitted to soar like the eagle.
Past high steeples and mountains of Spain.
One so lofty, majestic and regal

Should aspire to a wider domain,
There to reign, there long to reign,
A new and wider domain,
There to reign.

One so regal, a model for all,
Should aspire to a wider domain,
Should aspire to an even greater throne,
Lord of a wider domain.

GIOVANNA

Though in the season of youth in its glory,
Why does Elvira appear so to suffer?
Soon to be allotted a title so noble,
Not even one tiny smile has she shown.
Pure of heart, she alas is unable
To conceal what she feels when alone,
The pain she suffers when alone.

Pure of heart, she cannot now conceal
The despair that she feels when alone.
She cannot conceal, no!
Cannot conceal the pain she suffers when alone.

End of Act I

ACT II

This time it looks as if the wedding is for real. Elvira and Silva are about to be married. Time has elapsed. Ernani, again banished into the wilderness, is believed to be dead. Elvira, with nothing to live for, gives way to pressure. She can be forced to the altar -- so they think -- but she still carries the knife that she intends this time to use upon herself. Meanwhile, the wedding guests are giddy with pleasure. The long-awaited, long-delayed festivities are actually coming off. Hallelujah!

Scene: A magnificent hall in Silva's palace

CHORUS

Hallelujah! Today is the wedding.
Round the castle, the hustle and bustle!
Food abundant, the wine list colossal.
Here we meet after yearlong delay,
Yes, one year late.
Round the castle, the hustle and bustle!
Here we meet after yearlong delay.
Food abundant, the wine list colossal,
All set out in a splendid display.
Hallelujah! Together we gather!
Hallelujah! Celebrate!

SOPRANOS

Youth and age come together in marriage,
She so fair, and he so devoted,
Also rolling in wealth, be it noted.

For each other the couple are made.

MEN Brave and gallant, the man of the hour,
Born when nobles and knights were in flower.

ALL Though somewhat past the peak of his power,
By huffing and puffing he still makes the grade.

May this union be yearly rewarded
With the issue that clearly they merit,
Newborn nobles that stand to inherit
Pride of place in the passing parade.
The grand parade.

ALL From their parents they'll inherit
All the splendor here displayed.
Hallelujah! Together we gather.
Hallelujah! Celebrate! Celebrate!
Celebrate this wedding day that's one year late.

(all exit)

(Silva enters, followed by Jago)

SILVA Jago, bring in the pilgrim who came knocking.

A pilgrim knocks at the door, seeking asylum. As the rule of the day decrees, the request is granted without question, and the host thereby assumes a sacred obligation: the protection of a guest is inviolate, even when the guest turns out to be somewhat fraudulent. For when he sees Elvira in wedding attire, Ernani throws off his disguise. Giving vent to his despair and indignation, he bitterly offers his own head as a wedding present -- the head for which the king, even now in hot pursuit, has offered a goodly price: Such a violation of the code is of course unthinkable, but when Silva returns after a brief absence from the room to discover Elvira in Ernani's arms, the fire explodes. Though he cannot betray his guest to a third party, the rules do not preclude him from staking out his own revenge: "I want greater, sweeter pleasure, vengeance of my own creation." And when the king's entourage is heard at the gate, Silva insists that Ernani conceal himself. Scores can be settled after the king's departure. Once again, the strict code of honor puts Ernani's life on hold.

(Jago goes out, returns with Ernani, disguised as a pilgrim)

ERNANI May heaven bless your castle.

SILVA Say what you wish from me?
Pilgrim, your purpose ...

ERNANI Warm shelter for the night.

SILVA A sacred obligation under this roof.
Who you are, and where you come from
For me is not to question.
Guest — that sums it up.
The good Lord has sent you, so welcome.

ERNANI My humble, grateful thanks.

SILVA None needed. For here the guest is Lord.
(Elvira enters, in bridal dress, attended by ladies)

SILVA *(to Ernani)* Lovely! The bride that I'm to marry.

ELVIRA Marry!

SILVA This hour!
x(to Elvira) And why no jewels?
 No ring, no diamond necklace?
 Is this a day for mourning?

ERNANI Marry! This hour!
 I too, have a wedding present,
 A special gift of value.

SILVA You?

ERNANI I!

ELVIRA (My wedding!)

SILVA A present?

ERNANI *(throwing off his disguise)*
 My head for ransom!

ELVIRA Alive, alive! Ernani! ...

ERNANI Ponder the price for a criminal
 Greater than greed can fantasize.
 So easy! Why do you hesitate?
 Blood of my body
 Is bought so dearly.
 Hunters pursue the fugitive,
 The winded beast of the jungle.
 No rest for the bandit Ernani,
 Hated by all, who now wants to die.

ELVIRA (In pain, in pain and agony,
 His life he throws away.)

SILVA Despite the strong temptation,
 My guest I'll not betray.

ERNANI Companions are scattered in disarray.
 Go, say you've taken me prisoner.
 The king will pay you a fortune ...

SILVA Never shall I dishonor
 A sacred obligation.
 Honor and trust

A Silva would never betray.
A guest I would not for the world betray.
A guest I would never betray.

ELVIRA (So forlorn, his life he throws away.
So forlorn, his life he is throwing away.)

ERNANI Come, hand me over to those who will pay,
To those who are ready to pay,
Prepared to pay.

SILVA For us, throughout the centuries,
A guest is one of ours.
Attention, men! There's work to do.
Go, man the castle towers.
Come, follow me!
(he leaves, followed by Jago)

ERNANI Your promises!
How can you dare now face me?

ELVIRA I swear on my life —
My breast I offer —
I was and am
Steadfast and true.
News you had died confirmed my fear.
I wept, believing ...

ERNANI Rumor! Spread prematurely!

ELVIRA I remembered well our vows in parting.
(pulling out a dagger)
With this I meant to end it all,
Even before the altar.
Ah! I am not, I am not guilty,
And cannot bear your cruelty.

ERNANI Weep no longer, but forgive me ...
I was frantic ...
I love you with all my heart.

ELVIRA Stronger than pain or grief,
Your words restore my lacerated heart.

BOTH Ah, to die in your embraces,
Leave before we face tomorrow!
In your arms so close to heaven
And the bliss of life to come.
Love can bring us only sorrow
In a world of strife and storm,
A darker world, a darker universe of strife and storm.
Love turns to sorrow
Against a world of strife and storm.
Love can bring us only sorrow
In a world of strife and storm.

Never to be! Never to be!

SILVA *(returning, and seeing them in each other's arms)*

Desecration!
I leave for a moment
And return to find betrayal.
For assault upon my honor
I would have you drawn and quartered.

JAGO

(entering hastily)
At the gateway of the castle!
There the king has brought an army,
Demanding entry ...

SILVA

(after thought)
Open to the king. *(Jago exits)*

ERNANI

Kill me yourself, before they come.
Go on, sir, kill me here and now.

SILVA

I want greater, sweeter pleasure,
Vengeance of my own creation.
Till that moment, remain in hiding
Let them hunt for you in vain.
Later on, more open for action,
My bloodlust I'll not restrain.
Later on, when time for action,
Sweet revenge is mine to claim.

ERNANI and ELVIRA

Take your vengeance, name your pleasure.
I have earned your indignation.
Spare no mercy: demand satisfaction,
Yet on me only vent your anger.
I, not she/he alone am guilty:
On my shoulders bestow all the blame.
My shoulders bear the burden of the blame.
All, all the blame.
On me, on me alone bestow all blame.

Convinced that Ernani is hiding out in the castle, Carlo barges in and demands that Silva turn him over. But the more wildly he threatens, the more obstinately the Count resists, determined not to betray the code of the Silvas by violating the laws of hospitality. His own head he will surrender before he surrenders Ernani. Frustrated by the Count's intransigence, the king leaves in a fury, but not entirely in defeat. Ever the Machiavelli, he smoothly takes Elvira with him as a hostage. This breaks the old man's heart, but not his allegiance to principle.

(Ernani is secreted away; Elvira withdraws. Carlo and his entourage enter.)

CARLO

My kinsman — this grim reception,
Your castle barred and bolted —
Explain to me.

CARLO So you shield a proven traitor,
 And you dare defy,
 Dare defy a simple order.
 The excuse you proudly offer
 Is a challenge to my crown.

 You offend me at your peril;
 So be ready,
 So be ready for reprisal.
 My revenge will crash like thunder;
 You will tremble when I frown.

SILVA Shall I live to see dishonor
 Bring a loyal servant down?

CARLO On your house will fall my fury.
 If not his head, I'll have your own,
 I'll have your own.

SILVA Compelled to break an ancient code!

CARLO Now up to you!
 Ponder: will I have his head,
 Or will it be your own?

(the guards return empty-handed)

GUARDS Through the castle we have hunted
 From the storeroom to the stable.
 All in vain, for of the rebel
 We can find no hide nor hair.

 At the gate are sentry planted
 While the next foray we ponder.
 No compassion will we squander
 On the monster we ensnare.
 Not on him.
 Not in the monster we ensnare.

CARLO We're compelled to turn to torture
 Till the bandit is revealed.

ELVIRA *(rushing in)*
 Go no further!
 Be ruled by mercy.
 Regal power,
 Regal power cast aside.

CARLO Truce to anger!
 Elvira speaks and troubled waters
 Soon subside.
 (to Silva) I'll keep you under my control
 By taking her along with me,
 My hostage.

As for the criminal ...

SILVA No, no, no! Not that, not that! Ah!
While sparing this gray, withered head
You stab me in the heart.
No, no, no, no!
Ah, my beloved!
A lonely man with little left,
Her, only her, I lean on.
Oh, leave me my one happiness!
I had rather die than live without her.

CARLO Give up Ernani.

SILVA Take my all!
My trust I'll not betray.

CHORUS (*to Silva*) Pleading will be of no avail;
The king you must obey.

CARLO (*to Elvira*) On a pathway strewn with roses,
Arm in arm we'll stroll together
As a painful chapter closes
That will open, no, no, never again.

CARLO Dry those eyes not made for weeping:
Wipe the cheek now pale with sorrow.
By and by, in my safe keeping,
Youthful laughter will return
Youthful laughter by and by will return.
Youthful laughter will again return.

GIOVANNA Sick at heart and devastated,
Silva's course is nearly run.

RICCARDO (*to Elvira*) Set apart and elevated,
You have everything to gain,
All to gain.

SILVA (Torn apart and desecrated,
I'll get even, man to man,
As man to man.)

ELVIRA (I depart, though devastated,
And the pain, has just begun ...
And the pain, the endless pain has just begun.)

Once the king has gone, there is nothing to prevent Silva from taking out his rage on Ernani, except that Ernani refuses to fight. Again, the code of honor, at its most pristine. The inequality of age would make a duel improper. But because Silva has sheltered him from the king, thus saving his life, that life now rightfully belongs to Silva. It is his to take, without resistance. Ernani's only wish is to see Elvira once more before receiving the deathblow -- a wish that leads

to the appalling discovery that she is now in the king's all-powerful hands. This is matter for alarm. She must be rescued, and like it or not, the bandit and the nobleman must combine forces.

To gain consent to this awkward alliance, Ernani proposes a solemn pledge: after Elvira is rescued, Silva can take Ernani's life whenever he chooses. He need but sound a signal on the horn, and when he hears, Ernani dies. The terms agreed, the two rush off to the rescue.

(Carlo and his suite depart with Elvira and Giovanna)

SILVA Oh, mighty king! The battle line is drawn.
While there is breath in my body
My hatred lives on.
Come out!
(Ernani emerges)
To work! Follow! Come with me.

ERNANI Your purpose! Say it.

SILVA A challenge!

ERNANI Unfair! Improper!

SILVA Fine excuse!
The truth is plain and simple:
You are frightened.
Follow me!

ERNANI In age we're too unequal.

SILVA Years, young or old, are irrelevant.
It's you or me —
But one of us must die.

ERNANI You spared my life, so take it now.
I have but one request.

SILVA You die!

ERNANI My life is yours,
But first I plead for a final favor.

SILVA For favors plead to God.

ERNANI No, no! This you alone can grant.

SILVA Briefly ... briefly ... I am burning in hell.

ERNANI Ah! One time is all I ask of you.
Sir, let me see her ...

SILVA Who?

ERNANI Elvira! Elvira!

SILVA Would that you could.
The king made her go with him.

ERNANI Madman! How could you let him?
He is your rival, and mine!

SILVA The viper! The serpent!
The king ... you say ... my rival?

ERNANI He loves her.

SILVA (*calling within*) You guards and soldiers, awaken!

ERNANI Include me among your forces
That go to wreak vendetta.

SILVA No! I mean to kill you first.

ERNANI First let me do the task ahead;
Then do with me what you will.

SILVA You swear a solemn oath?

ERNANI This I promise:
Choose the time, and I shall die as you determine.
Sound a signal on the horn,
And when he hears, Ernani dies.

SILVA Now raise your right hand. Swear to it.

ERNANI I swear by my own father.

BOTH Oh, God of wrath and righteousness,
Awaken to smite the scaly serpent.
Take from his eyes the light of day:
Consign him to dark, eternal night.

SOLDIERS Ever alert and vigilant,
We follow and obey.

SILVA Anger has made me young again;
We go to hunt the prey.

ERNANI and SILVA For the cause, gallop off and away.
Go leap to the saddle
All set for vendetta.

SOLDIERS For the cause, we are off and away,
Now ripe for the battle,
More yet for vendetta.

ERNANI and SILVA Onward! Onward!

Vendetta! Vendetta!
Count on Silva to guide
And provide
You with the prize coming due later on.

SOLDIERS Onward! Onward!
Vendetta! Vendetta!
For a leader whose fire
Will inspire
Us to pursue till the last blood is drawn.
No rest till we're done.

ERNANI and SILVA, then SOLDIERS
Oh, sword at my side,
Pierce the pride of the tyrant.
Aim straight for the heart,
Take the short cut to the target.

ERNANI and SILVA You foe that we meet,
Stand up and fight;
Far too late for retreat.
Friend, harden your heart;
Give all you've got.
Send the foe to defeat;
Men, pity them not,
Humble the foe in defeat.

SOLDIERS You foe that we meet,
Stand up and fight;
Send the foe to defeat;
Men, pity them not,
Humble the foe in defeat.

ALL Heed the wisdom said before:
All is fair in love and war.

End of Act II

Act III

The scene is the tomb of Charlamagne, the designated meeting place for a band of conspirators headed by Silva and Ernani, their purpose to assassinate Carlo, the king and would-be emperor. At the same time, not far away, another group is assembling to elect the next ruler of the Holy Roman Empire, the most powerful office in the Western world. A prime candidate -- Carlo, the king.

First to appear is Carlo himself, come to spy on the conspirators, and while awaiting their arrival, to reflect upon the vanity, the futility of earthly glory -- a gaudy illusion, but one to which he is irresistibly drawn.

Scene: The tomb of Charlemagne

CARLO The place of meeting?

RICCARDO Here.

CARLO The hour?

RICCARDO Approaches.
Here the league will assemble.

CARLO Against myself conspiring.
From the assassins' bullet
The tomb of Charlemagne will be my haven.
That other league?

RICCARDO The electors
Gather to weigh the claims of those
Now contending
For the world's highest honor,
The crown of laurel,
The heritage of Caesar.

CARLO I know ... Now leave me.
(Riccardo starts to leave)
But listen ... If I'm the one elected,
With three resounding cannon shots
Convey the awesome message.
To me you'll then return
Bringing Elvira.

RICCARDO In the meanwhile? ...

CARLO Enough.
Within the tomb I'll converse with shades departed,
And overhear the living.
(Riccardo exits)

(alone)
Assassins! Upon the white sepulchral marble
They sharpen up their knives
Drawn for my slaughter.
Power, position ... the honors, the pleasures ...
Youth and health ...
What do they come to?
Barks idly floating
On the sea of destiny
As waves come crashing,
Bearing wreckage of sorrow,
Till at last on the reef we call the tomb,
All ends in nothing,
The fragile spell of renown and glory broken!

Dreams of my youth so alluring,
Hunger for power and glory,
Now turn to dust and shadow,

To illusion, illusion that long has faded.

Lifted to a broader vision,
High like a hallowed eagle
Scorning the world of struggle,
On virtue, on wisdom I shall soar.
Ah! Hailed through the unfolding centuries
A hero, whose name will live forevermore.
Hailed through the unfolding centuries,
A name that will live on,
A ray of light forevermore.
A name that through the centuries
Will live forevermore.
(the conspirators enter)

The conspirators gather, exchange passwords, and cast lots to determine which one of them is to have the pleasure and distinction of killing the king. The winner -- Ernani, whose dream of avenging his father's death seems about to come true. Silva, green with envy, is so covetous of the privilege that he offers even to rescind the gruesome pact that Ernani has agreed to, if Ernani will turn over the job to him. But Ernani is not to be bought. Like their counterparts in the world today, the conspirators are united in the certainty that they are serving a noble cause, backed by the blessings of a just God who shares their political beliefs.

TENORS Ad augusta!
BASSES Who is there?
TENORS Per angusta.
BASSES All is well.
CHORUS Bound by oath to serve the rights of all,
 We're united, to rise or fall.

(Silvo, Ernani and Jago enter)

ERNANI and SILVA Ad augusta.
CHORUS Per angusta.
ERNANI and SILVA We conspire by all that's holy.
ALL From the tomb that wise men revere
 The will of destiny we wait to hear.
SILVA Who when called has not come forward?
CHORUS There is none so base and coward.
SILVA Carlo burns with high ambition:

To rule the Holy Roman Empire.

CHORUS He will fall like a tree uprooted.
Duly warned, his overthrow
We've planned and plotted.
Up in arms, we unite
To land tonight the fatal blow.

SILVA Why so many?
One alone, as chance decrees,
Can deal with murder.

(Each man writes his name on a paper then tosses it into the pile)

CHORUS Each prepared to die as willed:
Kill the tyrant or be killed.
Who is chosen?

(Silvo draws one paper and reads:)

SILVA Ernani!

CHORUS Ernani!

ERNANI Confrontation too long awaited.
Father! Oh, father!

CHORUS Though you fall as well as he,
We know no sweeter way to die.

SILVA The deadly deed let me take over.

ERNANI I am a man of pride, no craven coward.

SILVA Yield the honor, and your sentence
I shall cancel ...

ERNANI No!

SILVA You'd rather
Die at once, as you have sworn?

ERNANI No! Let me kill, then sound the horn.

SILVA Have it your way. My turn comes later.
Look for a vengeance even greater.

CHORUS Side by side, a band of brothers,
Let us swear to stand together.
As brothers, we stand together.

ALL Reawaken the proud lion of old Castile;
Hear it roar from the shores to the mountains.
Warn the foe that would stifle independence
How we fought to drive off the all-powerful Moor.

Here conspire my overthrow.

(to conspirators)

So now you quake and tremble.
Too late, though.
My hold will not be shaken
I have you by the throat.
Seek not for mercy.
I want them separated,
Nobles apart from rabble.
The rabble to prison,
The nobles to the scaffold.

ERNANI

On me let fall the axe!
Why are you waiting?
Born a noble, rich with titles
From Segorbia to Cardona,
From the great am I descended;
All revere my lustrous dead.
For my country and for my father
Called to vengeance, I meant to murder.
Doomed to failure, I surrender,
And I'm ready to yield my head.

(Elvira enters)

CARLO

Soon to fall along with others.

ELVIRA

Ah, my Lord! You'll soon be seated
On a throne laden with power.
Yet there's a higher rule of heaven
You will some day have to answer.
Render mercy, ever hoping
To receive it by and by.

CARLO

I have spoken!

ELVIRA

Ah, no! Go further.
By our Savior and Lord be guided.
Compassion shines brighter
From a throne so high.

CARLO

(looking at the tomb of Charlemagne)
Charlemagne, my beacon! My inspiration!
More than your title,
I long for your virtues.
Your wise example,
The path you have lighted,
I mean to follow
And make my own.
To all, my pardon.
(guiding Elvira into Ernani's arms)
(My lust I have mastered)
You will be married;
Love on and on ...

The light of Charlemagne
Will shine on my throne.

OTHERS The light of Charles the Fifth
Will shine from the throne.

ELVIRA, ERNANI and OTHERS
A man for the ages!
Noble of spirit,
Wise and majestic
No less than a God among mortals.
Tempered by mercy,
Guided by heaven,
His glory (far) transcends the throne.
Hard won, his royal power he uses to pardon.
Long may his legacy shine like the sun!
To Charles the Fifth and his larger domain.
Long may he reign! Long may he reign!

SILVA (My just revenge
I must pursue on my own.
Wrinkled and aged,
I still have spirit,
Though fatalistic
When facing hurdles.
Scornful of mercy, foraging on,
Inflamed by rage, I yield to none.
No, none! Greedy for vengeance,
Gorging on hatred,
I live to reclaim that life on loan.
Nor can I sleep again
Till the task is done.
Nor shall I sleep till the task is done.)

CARLO Your wise example, the path you have lighted,
I mean to follow and make my own.
The hallowed light of Charlemagne
Now and forever will shine on my throne
And my domain.

The hallowed light of Charlemagne goes on!

End of Act III

Act IV

For a third time, guests assemble to celebrate the pending marriage of Elvira, this time to the man of her choice, the man that she loves, an occasion of unmitigated happiness, only slightly shadowed by the unwelcome presence of a somber masked figure in black who clearly does not belong. But later, after the guests have departed, after the music has stopped, as Ernani and Elvira, together at last, rejoice in the serenity of the starry night, their ecstasy is jarred by the faint sound of a horn, a signal that Ernani recognizes with chilling clarity, the end of

any hope of happiness. The code of honor -- merciless, tyrannical, unsparing and unforgiving, allows no escape. His debt has come due, and must be paid.

Scene: a terrace in Ernani's palace

CHORUS So happy, this couple
 About to be married!
 Like two budding blossoms
 That grow on one stem.

 The troubles are over,
 The tempest has lifted
 For sunshine forever
 To smile upon them.

(a masked man in black appears)

TENORS Who's the man of gloom and doom,
 His cloak of black so out of keeping?

BASSES Like a specter from the tomb,
 He comes to cast an evil spell.

TENORS Anger on the verge of snapping ...

BASSES Eyes ablaze like glowing embers ...

ALL Rancor must not spoil the party;
 Send the devil back to hell!
 If only to foster
 The spirit of laughter
 Remove this imposter
 And all will go well.
 Away!
 The devil we banish and all is well;
 The devil we send back to hell.
 When the imposter is gone
 The party goes on.

(all depart, leaving Ernani and Elvira alone)

ERNANI The lights have faded
 And the music is over.
 Friendly darkness and silence
 Belong to lovers.
 See how the stars above are brightly shining
 To give their blessing on the marriage
 That makes you mine.

ELVIRA I saw them shine not long ago
 From Silva's gloomy castle,
 Fearful and worried
 While I was waiting ...
 So restless, so impatient!
 Each lonely hour

Seemed to last a lifetime.
And here we are, as one!

ERNANI And for always!

ELVIRA For always!

ERNANI Our love will be forever.

BOTH Love, even when life has ended,
My soul with yours is blended.

(the horn signal sounds from the distance)

ERNANI (My bargain with the devil!)

ELVIRA But why are you not smiling?
Our trials are over.

(the horn sounds again)

ERNANI (Ah, the blood-thirsty tiger
Stalks the quarry)

ELVIRA Dearest! So pale! So shaken!

ERNANI *(raving)* Do you not see it?
The smirk of satisfaction,
The man of malice
Grinning out from the shadows,
Coldly claiming his victim. Spare me!

ELVIRA My dear! Have you a fever?

ERNANI (He's not forgotten.)
(calmer) My love, think nothing of it.
Only an early wound,
Painful for the moment ...
But maybe
You could find me a sip of brandy ...

ELVIRA And leave you untended?

ERNANI If you love me, run! I need it.
(listening) Only the whispers of nature ...
Was I the victim
Of my own delusion?
My heart, to perfect rapture unaccustomed,
May have conjured up
The early, still remembered sorrows. I'm free ...

(he starts to leave as Silva enters)

SILVA *(unmasking)* A moment!

ERNANI (My demon! For my wedding
He brings a suit of mourning.)

SILVA I remind you:
“Choose the time, and I shall die as you determine.
Sound a signal on the horn
And when he hears, Ernani dies.”
So was your pledge a lie?

ERNANI I beg you, implore you,
Hear me out!

I’ve wandered for many lonely years,
Far from the world I wanted.
When handed the cup of agony,
Large was the dose I swallowed.
Now that the heavens smile on me
And skies are serene and gentle,
Let me enjoy, though briefly,
The wonder, the new-found warmth of love.

SILVA Here is my offer: poison or the sword.
It’s your decision.

ERNANI Have mercy!

SILVA Why do you hesitate?

ERNANI Either is too repellent.
Spare me from this atrocity!

SILVA The son of so fine a father,
A coward and deceiver.

ERNANI The sword ... Hand me the sword!

ELVIRA (*appearing*) Stop him!
(*to Ernani*) Cruel! You take my life as well.
Could I survive, bereft and broken?

ELVIRA (*to Silva*) Monster! Malign, you rise from hell
To spread your own pain and anger.
Your life so near the end,
Face to face with God,
You dare call for vengeance.
(*taking out a knife*)
But why prolong your life?
Old man, my blade is drawn.
Prepare to die.
Ah, what have I said? Oh, pardon me.
Grief and confusion came over me,
For you I wish no harm,
No harm at all.
I spoke in despair,
Shattered by growing pangs of fear.

SILVA Your tearful call for compassion is wasted.
You plead in vain for reprieve and for pardon.

ERNANI (His fury is insatiable.)

ELVIRA Know that my love is forever.
A daughter of proud and noble name,
If he's to die, together we die.

SILVA Love that will seal his fate.
My meaning is clear; your love will cost his life.

ELVIRA Oh, turn away from cruelty.
In tears, I plead for him, I plead for me.

ERNANI Conceal these bitter tears, my love.
The time now calls for courage.

ELVIRA For me!

ERNANI Beyond despair and agony,
Grimacing death will conquer.

ELVIRA Torture us both no longer!

ERNANI I owe a debt that now has come due;
Death is the price demanded.

ELVIRA Relent!

SILVA No!

ERNANI Brief dreams of hope and happiness
Were only cruel mockery.

SILVA He dies, he dies!

ERNANI and ELVIRA For us, no return to paradise;
The Gods have turned the key.
Implacable gods have turned the key.

ELVIRA Facing the end,
With all my heart I plead for mercy,
For him, for me.
Ah! With all my heart, I plead, implore,
For him, for me! Ah!

 Spare him for me!
I plead, implore for him, for me. Mercy!

ERNANI Facing the end, my time has come.
In vain you plead, implore for mercy,
For mercy! His heart of stone remains unyielding.
In vain you plead, implore.

No, no! He'll never bend.
He'll never sway.
For you, for me, never!

SILVA Love that belongs to me!
Facing the end,
Your tearful call for compassion is wasted.
In vain you plead, you implore for mercy.
For that love that belongs to me
He dies! He dies today.
My heart remains unyielding.
For love that long I've hungered for
He dies! I'll never bend. He dies!
I'll never sway. For him, for you, never!
"Sound a signal on the horn
And when he hears, Ernani dies ..."

ERNANI The signal has sounded,
I have heard, and go where I am summoned.
(he plunges the dagger into his breast)

ELVIRA How can you leave me?
My love, we die together! Give me the dagger!

SILVA No, let him go his way alone.
Wail if you must hereafter.

ERNANI *(dying)*
Elvira! Elvira!

ELVIRA Oh, wait for me,
For I intend to follow ...

ERNANI Dearest, you must live on for me.
Love me ... Be happy ... Remember ...

BOTH Death has prepared our wedding bed
On the altar of eternity.

SILVA Spirits of vengeance, claim your dead;
Rejoice in victory!

ERNANI Elvira! Elvira! Remember ...

ELVIRA Oh, wait for me!

SILVA I've waited ...

End of the Opera