

RIGOLETTO

Music by
Giuseppe Verdi

English Version by
Donald Pippin
(1997)

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

The Duke of Mantua

Borsa a courtier

The Countess Cepranno

Rigoletto the Duke's jester

Count Cepranno a nobleman

Marullo a courtier

Count Monterone a nobleman

Sparafucile a professional assassin

Gilda daughter of Rigoletto

Giovanna Gilda's nurse

Maddelena sister of Sparafucile

Courtiers, ladies and gentlemen of the court, servants

Rigoletto

Verdi

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ACT I

After a somber prelude that gives fair warning as to what lies ahead, the mood suddenly changes. We are in the midst of what seems to be a perpetually ongoing party at the magnificent, brilliantly lighted palace of the Duke of Mantua, a man who plays by his own rules and makes no secret as to where his pleasure lies: “Does it matter that love is the game I live to play? From my platter I feast on variety.” Already excited at the prospect of snatching up the pretty country flower that he has recently been following to mass on Sunday mornings -- the current term would be ‘stalking’ -- he proceeds to woo the alluring Countess of Cepranno, obviously not the simple country flower who attends mass on Sunday mornings, under the uneasy eyes of her jealous husband, all the while goaded on by his paid buffoon, the hunchback Rigoletto.

It goes without saying that in this brutal, corrupt though elegant society, a crooked back is an unfailing source of instant hilarity. But the crowning joke of all -- rumor is afloat that Rigoletto, the embittered, abrasive, ugly old hunchback, has a mistress. Absurdity can go no further.

However, the festivities take a sudden grim turn when an outsider interrupts the merrymaking. By the end of the scene, both the Duke and Rigoletto have been cursed by a father whose daughter the Duke has dishonored and discarded. The Duke, a worthy successor to Don Giovanni, laughs it off with a nonchalant shrug. Rigoletto, the jester, for once is unable to laugh.

Scene I

Scene: A splendid apartment in the ducal palace.

DUKE Now is the time!
 After stalking and pursuing,
 Today I pluck my simple country flower.

BORSA That pretty girl you see on Sunday mornings?

DUKE Months of masses I've attended!

BORSA Where will you find her?

DUKE A byway, not too distant.
 There some stranger pays a nightly visit.

BORSA Is she aware
 Of your exalted status?

DUKE Of course not.

BORSA Beauty galore to savor!

DUKE First prize I give to the Countess of Cepranno.

BORSA Don't let her husband hear you.

DUKE Why should I care?

BORSA He's a man with a temper.

DUKE That could make this affair
One to remember!

 Does it matter
 That love is the game I live to play?
 On, my platter
 I feast on variety.

 Doing duty
 To beauty in full array,
 I can lend my love
 For only a day.

 Ladies likewise so fickle
 But charming, too —
 I adore you made the way you are. Oh!
 Though I find one
 To tickle my fancy, by tomorrow,
 By tomorrow a dozen will do.

 Too confining,
 This notion of constancy!
 A haven for cowards
 Afraid of the open skies.
 To the craven
 A message I offer:
 In freedom's rapture lies
 The meaning of love.

 Jealous ravings of husbands or lovers
 I dismiss with a laugh and shrug the shoulder.
 My maneuvers become ever bolder,
 Ever bolder, ever bolder,
 Trading older for new.

(to the Countess of Cepranno)
 So cruel! Deserting me?

COUNTESS A wife does her duty;

BORSA and COURTIERS

He said something pleasant?
He did something decent?

MARULLO

Some news even stranger.
The madman, the jester ...

BORSA and COURTIERS

The hunchback ...

MARULLO

Has a mistress!

BORSA and COURTIERS

Has a mistress! You're joking!

MARULLO

The gargoyle, the reptile
Has turned into Cupid.

BORSA and COURTIERS

From lone wolf to lover!

ALL

A rare transformation!

The Duke enters followed by Rigoletto

DUKE *(to Rigoletto)*

The Count of Cepranno's the cross that I bear;
The wife I adore he refuses to share.

RIGOLETTO

Make off with her.

DUKE

With pleasure, but when?

RIGOLETTO:

This evening.

DUKE

The Count's on the lookout.

RIGOLETTO

So why have we prisons?

DUKE

Too crude.

RIGOLETTO

A boat ... to China ...

DUKE

That's asking for trouble.

RIGOLETTO

Solution ... The ax or the gallows.

CEPRANNO

(A man full of malice!)

DUKE

This head for a trophy?

RIGOLETTO No question about it!
That head is so empty
He's wiser without it.

CEPRANNO You viper!

DUKE *(to Cepranno)*
He's joking.

RIGOLETTO He brays like an ass.

COURTIERS The Count's turning purple.

DUKE *(to Rigoletto)*
You fool, let it pass.

BORSA The Count's turning purple.

MARULLO The heat slowly rising.

COURTIERS Expect an explosion.

DUKE As always, you go too far;
Your banter needs revising.

RIGOLETTO Why tremble at an idle threat?
No need have I to worry.
They make a racket but forget
The Duke is on my side.

DUKE Your tongue in time you may regret;
Take heed or you'll be sorry.
Be wiser, mend your ways and let
Discretion be your guide.

CEPRANNO He's asking for trouble.
He rides on the current,
But we'll turn the tide.
Vendetta!

MARULLO and BORSA
Vendetta?

CEPRANNO Revenge, if you value
Your honor and pride.

MARULLO and BORSA
Right!

CEPRANNO Be ready.

MARULLO and BORSA Tonight!

The fool riding high now is basking in glory,
But we'll end the story by turning the tide.
Vendetta! Vendetta!
Yes, a matter of pride.
On to vengeance!

DUKE and RIGOLETTO

On to pleasure!

ALL

On to wild and wanton pleasure!
Bar intruders from the door.
Here in luxury and leisure
Pour the wine and then some more!

MONTERONE (*entering*)

He'll hear my message regardless.

DUKE

No!

CHORUS

Monterone!

MONTERONE

You know my name ...
And from my voice of thunder
You'll find no place of hiding.

RIGOLETTO (*caricaturing*)

Let me answer:
Subversive traitor!
Against my power and person you have plotted,
Too lenient,
Instead of death, I granted you a pardon.
And to prove how sincerely
I stand for mercy, I settled merely
For your daughter's honor.

MONTERONE

Again you insult me.
I come to hound you,
To cry revulsion,
To interrupt your disgusting orgy,
A grim reminder of vile corruption
That brought my daughter to shame and ruin.
Though you can sentence me to execution,
From hell I shall return
To vent my fury.
A bleeding torso
Will rise accusing,
Demanding punishment and just revenge
Before the world and unto God.

DUKE

The nerve! Go, lock him up.

RIGOLETTO

A loony!

CHORUS

He's raving!

introduce himself as an impoverished student, and Gilda is utterly enthralled by his charm, his sweetness, his passionate sincerity, his idealistic, almost other-worldly approach to love, the love that she herself as always dreamed of. In fairness, we should add that not even the Duke envisions for a moment the cruel joke that Rigoletto's so-called friends at court are plotting against him -- these friends who were so amused at the absurd idea of the hunchback having a mistress, little knowing that this presumed mistress is in fact his daughter.

Scene: A deserted street.

RIGOLETTO (That father's curse hangs over me.)

SPARAFUCILE A word ...

RIGOLETTO Go ... I have nothing.

SPARAFUCILE No beggar, you see before you
A man whose knife is sharp.

RIGOLETTO A bandit?

SPARAFUCILE A friend whose services
Can rid you of a rival,
Asking no questions.

RIGOLETTO Murder!

SPARAFUCILE You have a loved one, perhaps ...

RIGOLETTO (These rumors!) To kill a man of note,
What is the price demanded?

SPARAFUCILE Class becomes expensive.

RIGOLETTO And when is payment due?

SPARAFUCILE Half in advance is fair enough,
The rest when work is done.

RIGOLETTO (The monster!) A risky business,
How do you pull it off?

SPARAFUCILE Though any street by night will do,
I choose to work at home.
There I can wait in ambush,
And with a thrust ... kaput!

RIGOLETTO (Remorseless!) You lure the victims?

SPARAFUCILE The easy way.
My sister does the honors.
She's a dancer ... gorgeous ... seductive ...
She leads, they follow ... and fall.

RIGOLETTO Your partner.

SPARAFUCILE Nothing crude or rough ...

RIGOLETTO But final.

SPARAFUCILE My knife at your disposal ... A bargain.

RIGOLETTO No, maybe later.

SPARAFUCILE Why put it off?

RIGOLETTO Who knows?

SPARAFUCILE Sparafucil's the man for you.

RIGOLETTO Sicilian?

SPARAFUCILE No, from Naples.

RIGOLETTO If needed, where can I find you?

SPARAFUCILE Here, every evening.

RIGOLETTO Go!

SPARAFUCILE Sparafucil ... Sparafucil ...

RIGOLETTO Go, go, go, go. *(Sparafucile exits)*

Kindred spirits, each with weapons,
My tongue, his blade.
I pierce the heart with mockery,
He with the dagger.
(That father's curse hangs over me!)

Malevolent! Misanthropic!
Both man and nature
Have produced a monster!
A hunchback, ugly and crooked!
A jester, trading in venom!

I'm to laugh,
Turning heartache into ridicule,
And the clown is denied the comfort
Of weeping ...

Look at my fine employer —
Youthful, successful,
Easy going, handsome —
He will say as he dozes,
Make me laugh! Entertain me!
And like a dog, I do it.

Lackeys and leeches!
How I loathe you disgusting fools that flatter,

And I grab the chance to show it.
I am what I am,
And it's to you I owe it.

Yet home again, I feel transformed ...
That father's curse hangs over me ...
From the shadows
It preys upon my mind,
Dark and foreboding;
What mortal blow is pending?
Oh, no! Sheer insanity!
(*Gilda enters*) Gilda!

GILDA My father!

RIGOLETTO Now reunited! You fill my days
 With joy and abundance.

GILDA So warm and loving!

RIGOLETTO You're all I live for!

GILDA So warm and loving!

RIGOLETTO Vacant and void
 Was my life till you filled it.

GILDA So warm and loving!
 Dearest father!

RIGOLETTO My lovely daughter!

GILDA But you are worried ...
 What is the trouble?
 Oh, tell me ...
 Your daughter longs to console you.
 What cloud of mystery
 Darkens your spirit?
 However painful,
 I want to share it.

RIGOLETTO Best not to know.

GILDA Father, who are you?

RIGOLETTO What does it matter?

GILDA Though your own story
 You hold inside you ...

RIGOLETTO (*interrupting*)
 Have you gone out?

GILDA To mass on Sunday.

RIGOLETTO No harm in that.

GILDA Not of yourself, then,
 But of another ...
 I ask this only:
 Who is my mother?

RIGOLETTO Ah! Speak not to one in poverty
 Of treasures lost forever.
 Tender of heart, she pitied me
 And sighed because I suffered.

 Lonely, a cripple, destitute ...
 Watered with tears, love grew.
 Ah! Too fragile ... She died ...
 The ground now covers her.

 Long have the flowers faded.
 You are her gift to me ...
 Living, a precious part of her.
 Almighty God be praised!
 Oh, God be praised!

GILDA Oh! The cruel pain that you have borne!
 What years of grief now unfold in bitter tears.
 But say no more! Oh, say no more.
 My grieving father, say no more.
 I cannot bear to see you suffer
 By stirring up sorrow.
 Beloved father, let me console you.
 Too long alone you've suffered.

RIGOLETTO And now I have but you,
 And you alone.
 You only did she leave to me,
 As a parting gift.
 You are all I have in the world.
 For this blessing
 Almighty God be praised!

GILDA Your name at least confide in me
 That pains you so to utter.

RIGOLETTO A name is shallow, and meaningless.
 Love me, and call me father.
 Though some may scorn or scoff at me
 Dislike, despise or curse me,
 Here you and I, a world apart ...

GILDA Friendship ... relations ... a homeland —
 Do you lay claim to nothing?

RIGOLETTO Friendship ... relations ... a homeland ...
 All this, and more, oh my daughter!
 A universe entire I have found in you.

GILDA To see you smiling, radiant and happy,
Is joy and life for me.

Three months already since my arrival!
Confined and sheltered, I've seen so little ...
I might explore a bit, with your consent ...

RIGOLETTO No, no! You've not ventured on your own?

GILDA No.

RIGOLETTO Good.

GILDA (Dare I mention? ...)

RIGOLETTO See that you don't!
(She could be followed
And then assaulted.
The lowly daughter of a buffoon
One can rape, and boast of it later.
The swine!)

(*calling*) Come out!

GIOVANNA (*enters*) You called?

RIGOLETTO Did no one see me come home?
I want the truth.

GIOVANNA No, sir! Believe me!

RIGOLETTO All right ... The gate that we never open
Is locked and bolted?

GIOVANNA Around the clock. Around the clock.

RIGOLETTO I want the truth, only the truth.

RIGOLETTO (*to Giovanna*)
Ah! Ever guard the tender flower
I've entrusted to your care.
From her bower keep away
The howling wind, the driving rain.
From the prowling beast of prey
That comes to plunder and devour,
You will shield her until restored
To her father's arms again.

GILDA Such affection! Such precaution!
What misfortune can you fear?
Looking down, beatified,
There is an angel I revere.
From the beast and from the storm,
Safe and warm I shall remain.

A mother's prayer will surely guide
Your loving daughter home again.

RIGOLETTO Ah! Ever guard the tender flower
I've entrusted to your —
Someone is out there!

GILDA Father! Always so tense and nervous.

RIGOLETTO *(to Giovanna)* Sunday mornings
Are you sure you've not been followed?

GIOVANNA Yes.

DUKE *(concealed)* (Rigoletto!)

RIGOLETTO No one is to enter,
No matter who comes knocking.

GIOVANNA The Duke excepted!

RIGOLETTO Least of all that lecher!
My daughter, I leave you.

DUKE (His daughter!)

GILDA Dear father, you're leaving.

RIGOLETTO and GILDA

Ah! Ever guard the tender flower
I've entrusted to your care.
From her bower keep away
The howling wind, the driving rain.
From the prowling beast of prey
That comes to plunder and devour,
You will shield her until restored
To her father's arms again.

GILDA So much affection! Such precaution!
What misfortune can you fear
O dearest father?
Up in heaven, near to God,
An angel gazes down on me.
From far above,
In heaven, near to God,
An angel I revere
Will guide me home again.

RIGOLETTO Be watchful and wary;
Keep danger far away.
Daughter! My daughter! Be careful!

GILDA Father! My father! Return soon!

RIGOLETTO Gilda, my daughter, be careful! *(Rigoletto leaves)*

GILDA Giovanna, I feel so guilty!

GIOVANNA Whatever for?

GILDA We know of one
Who's followed us on Sundays.

GIOVANNA Why ask for trouble?
This charming stranger —
Don't tell me you dislike him.

GILDA No! There's none so beautiful!
Love seems to overflow ...

GIOVANNA He appears cultivated, perhaps important.

GILDA No man of consequence,
Or so I see him.
In simple honesty,
I'd love him all the more
If he were starving.

Dreaming, though wide awake,
Always I long for him,
Yearning to sigh and say,
Dearest, I love —

DUKE *(emerging, signals Giovanna to leave)*
--- love you!
Oh, say it once again!
I want to hear it.
Again throw open the doorway to heaven!

GILDA Giovanna, Giovanna! I'm mortified!
Why does she leave me
In dire emergency?
Giovanna! Where are you?

DUKE Fear nothing.
Believe a man who can but worship.
The land of love
You and I shall inhabit.

GILDA What power led you here? Who let you in?

DUKE Angel or Lucifer, I simply know I love you.

GILDA Then go away.

DUKE Abandon my darling?
Give up our happiness before it ripens?
Our god of mercy hears a lover's prayer;
Your fate forevermore is mine to share.

DUKE Soul of the universe,
 Love holds the center,
 A secret garden
 Few dare to enter.

Love is transcendent,
 A halo of glory —
 The rest is shadow,
 A mere passing story.

Close to divinity,
 Ours is the portal
 That opens paradise,
 The mystery of life immortal.

Build on the courage
 Your beauty inspires;
 Bow to your destiny.
 Oh, love! Be mine!

GILDA My fondest fantasy
 A dream no longer!
 A soul so sensitive,
 So fair, so fine!

His charm and refinement!
 The utter sincerity,
 So sensitive,
 So fair, so fine!

A sweet awakening,
 A revelation,
 I hear a harmony
 Unheard before.

DUKE With hearts unwavering
 We take a journey
 That leads to paradise
 Forevermore.

TOGETHER Ours! Ah!
 Paradise forevermore!

DUKE You love me! Oh, say it once again!

GILDA I love you.

DUKE I am in heaven!

GILDA Your name that means so much to me ...
 I dearly want to know it.

CEPRANNO (*from outside*) And here's the house ...

DUKE My name, my name ...

BORSA Well done!

DUKE Gualtier Maldè ...
A lowly student, in poverty.

GIOVANNA *(returning)*
Some footsteps coming closer!

GILDA Perhaps my father ...

DUKE (The fool! I ought to have him drawn and quartered!
He dares disturb me!)

GILDA *(to Giovanna)*
You'd better let him leave by the alley.
Do hurry.

DUKE Your love is for real?

GILDA And yours?

DUKE Divine and sacred. Ah!

GILDA No more ... no more ... now leave me.
We'll meet tomorrow ...

BOTH Goodbye, oh my darling!
My hope! My happiness!
As one, though parted;
Alone no longer.
Goodbye, beloved!
My only, my all!

BOTH My heart I give forever
And it's yours until I die,
And even beyond.
Hereafter may we never, never
Have to say goodbye.
My dearest! My darling! My only!
Farewell, my love!
(the Duke exits with Giovanna)

GILDA *(alone)* Gualtier Maldè! Dear name of my beloved,
Deep within my faithful heart
Engraved forever!

Far or near, the name alone
Of the hero I adore
Stirs a shy delight unknown
To the child I was before.

On the wings of sweet desire
To my love I long to fly,

There to give my life entire
Till I breathe a final sigh.

Ah, my Love!
Gualtier Maldè! Gualtier Maldè!

Far or near, the name alone
Of the hero I adore
Stirs a shy delight unknown
To the child I was before.
Gualtier Maldè! Gualtier Maldè!

BORSA It's her!

CEPRANNO So beautiful!

COURTIERS A gorgeous number!

MARULLO The face angelic ...

COURTIERS The secret mistress of Rigoletto!
That lucky fellow!

RIGOLETTO *(returning)*
 (What draws me back?)

BORSA *(to companions)*
 Be ready for action.
 There's work at hand.

RIGOLETTO (Why does that father's curse hang so heavy?)
Who is there?

BORSA *(to companions)*
 Be quiet! It's Rigoletto.

CEPRANNO An added bonus;
We kill the bastard.

BORSA No, no! Tomorrow
We'll laugh the louder.

MARULLO This I can handle.

RIGOLETTO (Did someone speak?)

MARULLO Hey! Rigoletto! Say —

RIGOLETTO Who is there?

MARULLO Don't bite my head off. Me —

RIGOLETTO Who?

MARULLO Marullo.

RIGOLETTO As dark as pitch ... The eyes are useless.

MARULLO Ah, here is matter for your amusement.
 Poor old Cepranno!
 His wife we're after.

RIGOLETTO (Relief to hear it!)
 But how will you reach her?

MARULLO *(aside to Cepranno)*
 I need your key.

(to Rigoletto)
 Oh, we will manage.
 I wouldn't worry.
 We have our methods.
 His key we have copied.

RIGOLETTO *(fingering the key)*
 His winged lion.
 (Yes, I was foolish —
 Stupid to worry.)
 His place is handy,
 And I am with you.

MARULLO We're masquerading.

RIGOLETTO Give me a mask to wear
 And I'll join the party.

MARULLO *(handing him a mask)*
 We come prepared.
 You hold the ladder.

RIGOLETTO Darker than dead of night ...

MARULLO *(quietly, to companions)*
 I covered up both his eyes and ears.

CHORUS Slyly, swiftly,
 The target selected,
 We deliver
 When least expected.

 This old lecher,
 In malice so gifted,
 Will hereafter
 Go lonely to bed.

 With his backing,
 The lady is lifted.
 Come tomorrow
 When we laugh instead.
 Chuckle, chuckle, chuckle, chuckle!

With his backing,
The lady is lifted.
Come tomorrow
When we laugh instead.

This old lecher, prone to laughter,
Will hereafter, will hereafter
Go lonely to bed.
Pity, pity, pity, pity!
Chuckle, chuckle, chuckle, chuckle!

So onward with the job as planned,
And he will lend a helping hand.

GILDA (*from a distance*)

Oh, father, father! Help me!

CHORUS

(*also offstage*)
A triumph!

GILDA

(*still further*)
Oh, father!

RIGOLETTO

The comedy goes on.
They still are laughing.
And I'm blindfolded ...

(*he tears off the blindfold and recognizes the scarf*)
Ah! Ah! Ah! The curse of Monterone!

End of Act I

ACT II

Deeply disturbed on discovering that Gilda has disappeared -- a maneuver which, to his credit, he had no hand in -- the Duke has returned to his palace, where he anxiously paces the marble floor, by no means aware that she is close at hand, in fact in an adjoining chamber, precisely where he would want her to be. From his outpouring of sorrow and anger, for a moment we are almost persuaded that the Duke has at last found the real thing . . .

Scene: An antechamber in the ducal palace.

DUKE (*alone*)

Stolen the day I found her!
But how, and when?
The perfect timing!
I had a vague, uneasy feeling,
And hurried back
Only minutes after leaving.
Her door was open,
The darkened house deserted ...

What have they done with my unguarded angel?

Her beauty wakens
A sleeping inner fire,
A lasting love that could burn on forever.
Her modest manner
Would convert a Casanova,
Turn the seasoned sinner
To the path of virtue.

Now cruelly assaulted!
Who dared to do it?
Cry out for mercy when I catch the culprit!
Somewhere, defenseless,
My darling calls her beloved ...

Somewhere, lonely and desolate,
You weep in forced surrender.
Captive, in mortal danger,
A prey to wolves and tigers.
Oh, were I there to comfort you!
Oh, were I there to comfort you
And share the tortured pain.
What hand can I extend to you?
Shorn of the wings of power,
Thwarted by brutal savagery,
Though I long to slay the dragon,
Proving a love unquenchable,
I can but sigh, can only sigh in vain.

Lonely and desolate,
She is this moment calling, calling,
Calling for me to comfort her,
And I am far away,
Far from my only love.

Marullo enters with Borsa, Cepranno and Courtiers.

MARULLO and CHORUS

Triumph! Triumph!

DUKE How so?

CHORUS We carried off
The mistress of Rigoletto.

DUKE How? And where?

CHORUS He assisted.

DUKE Aha! Speak. Tell me more.
Do continue! Tell me all!

CHORUS The place, a dark, remote and rundown alley;
No sign of moon or star to light the sky.

Coordinated,
We soon located
A girl designed to catch the eye.

Aha! The lady love of Rigoletto!
The job at hand was simple and routine.
Before we men did
The deed intended,
The old buffoon was on the scene,
Was on the scene.

With hearty laughter,
We say we're after
Cepranno's wife instead;
So he agreed,
Now even gladder
To hold the ladder,
The ladder needed
To do the deed.

The gull agreed
To hold the ladder
We needed to succeed.

With aid provided by the fool blindfolded,
We scale the wall and pounce upon the prey.

DUKE (Gilda! Assaulted ...
But I have found her.)

CHORUS The plot completed,
The chump we cheated
Is left behind to rue the day,
To slap his forehead and rue the day.

DUKE The poor unfortunate!
Where did you leave her?

CHORUS For your amusement
We brought her here.

DUKE (So nearly lost, but now so near!)

To claim her for my own!
Full of fire, I rise to the occasion.
The splendor of a throne
I would sacrifice for her.

Inspired by hope alone,
With persistence and persuasion
I'll prove none stand above
The raging fever of love.
All-compelling, all-consuming,
None are above the raging fever,
That raging fever of love,

That raging fever called love.

CHORUS I notice now in listening
Some new excitement glistening,
A fire in his eye.
I wonder why.
Oh, why? Oh, why?

MARULLO Poor old Rigoletto!

RIGOLETTO (*enters*)
La ra, la ra, la ra, la ra,
La ra, la ra, la ra, la ra.

CHORUS He comes! Be quiet!
Ah, good morning, Rigoletto!

RIGOLETTO (They're all in this together.)

CEPRANNO Any news from the clown?

RIGOLETTO Any news from the clown?
Why, that you're growing
Day by day more obnoxious.

CHORUS Ha, ha, ha!

RIGOLETTO La ra, la ra, la ra, la ra,
La ra, la ra, la ra, la ra.

(*looking all about*)
(Where do they keep her hidden?)

CHORUS (Observe the agitation.
Yes, yes! The stress and agitation!)

RIGOLETTO (*to Marullo*)
I'm delighted to see you well recovered.
Last night was nasty weather.

MARULLO I was sleeping ...

RIGOLETTO What a deed of daring!

MARULLO Sleeping like a baby.

RIGOLETTO Ah, you were sleeping!
And it's I who was dreaming.
La ra, la ra, la ra, la ra,
La ra, la ra, la ra, la ra.

CHORUS (See him peer in every corner.)

RIGOLETTO (*picking up handkerchief*)
No, not hers.

Is the Duke still asleep?

CHORUS Yes, so exhausted!

PAGE (*entering*) From the Duchess,
A message for her husband.

CEPRANNO Sleeping.

PAGE No, I'm told you were together.

BORSA He is hunting.

PAGE Unprovided? Untended?

CHORUS It would appear you miss the point.
He's not to be disturbed.

RIGOLETTO Ah! He has her with him!
Here in the palace!

CHORUS Who?

RIGOLETTO The helpless girl you stole from my house
And now are hiding.
No, I'll not leave without her.
She is here!

CHORUS If your mistress is missing,
Someone else is lucky.

RIGOLETTO I want my daughter!

CHORUS She, his daughter!

RIGOLETTO Yes ... she's my daughter.
Why the fallen faces?
Eh? The joke is less amusing?
Let me by! I demand it!
Give me my daughter!

RIGOLETTO Fawning courtiers! Vile leeches and vermin!
For a profit you'd sell off your sisters.
Dangle gold, and nothing is sacred.
But my daughter is dear beyond a price.
Give her to me!
You refuse at your peril.
I will fight
Tooth and nail, single handed,
Fortified by the need of my daughter,
I am stronger and sharper than steel.

Let me to her!
You assassins! You assassins!
The door! Let me enter.

Get out of my way.
Open, open!

Ah! Rock solid,
All are joined against me.
No one on my side.
Ah! You win ... I'm weeping.

Marullo! Cepranno!
Have you no tiny drop of compassion!
Say at least
Where my daughter is hidden.
Marullo! Kind Borsa!
Say at least where my daughter is hidden.
In there? Won't you tell me?
Or there? Won't you tell me?
Or there? Won't you tell me?
No answer? Dear Lord!

On my knees, now I plead for your pardon.
To an old man, return his only daughter.
Such a kindness will cost you nothing,
Not so much as a farthing.
And my daughter is dearer
Than all the world to me.
Have mercy, forgive ...
Oh, pardon! Forgive ...
Return my only daughter,
Dearer than heaven and earth to me.

I plead for mercy,
Give me back my daughter.
She's all I have.
I plead with you for mercy.
Have mercy on a father.

GILDA (*rushing in*) Oh, father!

RIGOLETTO Gilda! My Gilda!

(*to courtiers*) Behold her!
My daughter, my treasure, and all I live for.

(*to Gilda*) Child, you're safe. It's over.
Try to forget it.

(*to courtiers*) Admit it. You were joking.
(*to Gilda*) See, tears are followed by laughter.
My child! Are you weeping?

GILDA I weep for shame, oh father!

RIGOLETTO What are you saying?

GILDA I've need to blush,

But not in front of others.

RIGOLETTO (*imperiously*)
Leave us alone together.
And furthermore,
The Duke himself you must ward off
Should he dare try to enter.
For I have spoken.

COURTIERS
(He's as loony as a lover
So it's better to comply.
We shall leave, but undercover
We can listen on the sly.) (*they leave*)

RIGOLETTO (*alone with Gilda*)
Tell me what happened.

GILDA
(Dear God! Give me courage!)

Ever at church on Sundays,
Even beside the altar,
Close to me stood a handsome man
Gazing in soulful silence.
Though from his lips came not a sound,
His eyes told me more than words can say.

Out of the dark, last night he came,
Furtive and shy no longer:
"I am a student, proud but poor."
Melting inside, I listened.
Borne on a tide of ecstasy,
His love came pouring out.

He left ... he left ...
Rapture filled my heart and soul
With hope sweeter than roses,
When suddenly brutes and savages
Dispelled my fond illusions.
They seized and overpowered me;
In tears, they brought me here.

RIGOLETTO
(I was content to bear rebuke,
Loathing and degradation
Only that she could rise
From the dunghill where I had fallen.
Placed near the gruesome gallows-tree,
The altar shines the brighter.

Now shattered, now broken,
Utterly ruined!
My altar crumbles to dust ...
Its light has faded
To shine never again. Ah!)

Weep on, weep on, my child!

My little one, weep on!

GILDA Father!

RIGOLETTO Pour out, pour out
Your tears upon my heart.
Let your father relieve
The pain so hard to bear.

GILDA Father, so kind and tender,
My angel in despair.
So kind and tender, so caring,
So full of loving care.

RIGOLETTO When I have completed my one task remaining,
We'll go far away from this den of corruption.

GILDA Yes.

RIGOLETTO (In one day alone is my life overturned.)

Monterone passes through, under guard.

FOOTMAN The scaffold! Monterone goes now to his death.

MONTERONE Oh, Duke! Since my curse has till now come to nothing,
And God from His fury has seen fit to spare you,
My hopes I relinquish: live on, and prevail.

RIGOLETTO Too soon you surrender. Revenge will be mine!
Blood and revenge I have made my mission.
Heartless Duke, your days now are numbered.
Fear the rage and the wrath of the jester.
Come what may, you have not long to wait.
Armed with justice, the sanction of heaven,
Your buffoon controls your fate.

GILDA Father, I fear such a bloodthirsty passion.
Joy so ferocious will lead to disaster.
Pardon, forgive, and in turn be forgiven;
Render mercy and hope for the same.
Pardon, father!

RIGOLETTO No!

GILDA Look to heaven.

RIGOLETTO No!

GILDA (Though misled, I cannot stop loving,
Rising above desolation and shame.)
Render mercy,
And from heaven receive the same.

RIGOLETTO Armed with justice, the sanction of heaven,

Your buffoon controls your fate.
Determined on vendetta,
Your buffoon controls your fate.

End of Act II

ACT III

In a desolate and dilapidated inn on the bank of the Mincio river, Sperafucile, the hired assassin that Rigoletto met earlier, lives with his sister and accomplice, the seductive Maddelena, the Duke's latest heartthrob. It is here that Rigoletto takes Gilda, under cover of night, to eavesdrop -- to see for herself the true nature of the man whom she still loves, and who, despite all, she believes still loves her.

Scene: In front of a rustic inn at by a river.

RIGOLETTO You love him?

GILDA Always.

RIGOLETTO Though you've had ample time to think it over.

GILDA I love him.

RIGOLETTO How to account for women!
A proven scoundrel!
But I'll see you soon revenged.

GILDA Forgive him, father.

RIGOLETTO What if you saw for certain
He still betrays you?
Would you remain so loving?

GILDA Who knows? I know he loves me.

RIGOLETTO Does he?

GILDA Yes.

RIGOLETTO Indeed ... Then watch him prove it.

GILDA (*peering inside*)
I see a stranger.

RIGOLETTO Observe. Be patient.

The Duke enters the inn

GILDA Father, I'm fearful!

DUKE (*to Sparafucile*)
Two orders, and quickly.

SPARAFUCILE
Orders?

DUKE
First your sister, then a bottle.

RIGOLETTO
(A night like countless others.)

SPARAFUCILE
(A charming rascal!)

DUKE
Women are one and all
Off again, on again,
Here now then gone again,
Ruled by caprices.

Each a mere weathervane
Spun by the breezes,
Shifting and turning,
Loving, then spurning;

Burning, than freezing,
Taunting and teasing,
Fair but most pleasing
Seen from afar.

Though I would credit all
Women with beauty,
Mozart once said it all:
Così fan Tutte.

Pity the worshipper
Prone to surrender;
Shame on the featherbrain
Stung by that gender.

Though I deplore them,
Try to ignore them,
Still I adore them
Just as they are.

SPARAFUCILE
(*to Rigoletto*)
Your man ... I've got him.
Life or death — give the order.

RIGOLETTO
The word will have to wait
Till I return.

DUKE (*to Maddelena*)
I well recall the day we met;
It made a deep impression.
To arrange a second tête-à-tête
I overcame discretion.
Again I stand before you
To tell you I adore you.

GILDA (*looking on*) (Betrayal!)

MADDELENA Ha ha! Told to twenty others
You loved and soon got over!
As dedicated lover,
You sound like Casanova.

DUKE Just ... a hopeless case.

GILDA (*to Rigoletto*)
(How can he, O father?)

MADDELENA Slow down, and keep your distance.

DUKE Ah, such a lady!

MADDELENA Be careful.

DUKE My sweet, cooperate
And drop the absurd resistance.
My heart and soul are yours alone —
A promise that offers pleasure.
(*takes her hand*)
This pretty hand of ivory!

MADDELENA How well you smile and flatter.

DUKE No, no!

MADDELENA So ugly.

DUKE I long for you.

GILDA (How can he?)

MADDELENA Drunkard!

DUKE By love made tipsy!

MADDELENA Enamored of a gypsy —
But I can call a bluff.

DUKE I want you for my wife.

MADDELENA More proof of that is needed.

DUKE On bended knee I've pleaded.

RIGOLETTO (*to Gilda*)
Have you not heard enough?

GILDA He dares to speak of love!

DUKE Ripe for love in youthful splendor,

Ah, let me worship and adore you!
Give but a single hopeful sign,
A message reading you are mine,
That you are mine,
All mine, all mine!

MADDELENA It's the old familiar story;
Sympathize and you'll be sorry.
Watch out, beware!
Once again the same old story
I have heard until I'm weary.
Ha ha! Ridiculous! My word!

Rather silly, though amusing
And forgotten by tomorrow.
Little sleep will I be losing —
He is no concern of mine.
Once again the same old story —
He is feeding me a line.
The same old story,
The standard line.
I say in turn,
Your burning heart is no concern,
Sir, of mine!

RIGOLETTO *(to Gilda)*
Listen ... Go home at once,
There is money ... and a horse,
And some clothes to disguise you as a man.
Ride swiftly toward Verona.
I'll join you by and by.

GILDA Do come with me.

RIGOLETTO Not till later.

GILDA Father!

RIGOLETTO Go! *(Gilda leaves)*

Sparafucile enters

RIGOLETTO Twenty scudi we agreed on?
Ten in advance,
The rest when you are finished.
He's staying over?

SPARAFUCILE Yes.

RIGOLETTO On the stroke of twelve
I shall return.

SPARAFUCILE No need to.
By myself, I can toss him in the river.

RIGOLETTO No, no! That will be my pleasure.

SPARAFUCILE So! You know his name?

RIGOLETTO Our names intertwine;
His name is "Guilt";
"Punishment" is mine. *(he leaves)*

SPARAFUCILE What a night!
Darker and darker.
The storm is getting closer.

DUKE *(inside)* Maddelena!

MADDELENA Later, later. I expect my brother.

DUKE What of it?

MADDELENA Thunder!

SPARAFUCILE *(coming inside)*
It soon will start to pour.

DUKE All the better.
(To Sparafucile)
My friend, your room will serve my purpose.
In the stable you will be cozy.

SPARAFUCILE How thoughtful!

MADDELENA *(softly, to Duke)*
Go now, I warn you.

DUKE *(to Maddelena)*
In this weather?

SPARAFUCILE *(softly, to Maddelena)*
Remember, twenty scudi.

(to Duke) I'm delighted
To offer you our finest.
If you are ready,
Come, you can look it over.

DUKE Lead on. Show me the way.
Come, sir. Let's see it.

MADDELENA (Poor unsuspecting!
So young and handsome!)
Heavens! The storm is raging.

DUKE *(upstairs)* Like sleeping in the open!
Rather rustic, but refreshing.

SPARAFUCILE Goodnight, and God be with you.

DUKE I will sleep for an hour.
 Lord, I am tired!

 Women are one and all
 Off again, on again
 Here now then gone again,
 Ruled by caprices.

 Shifting and turning,
 Loving then ...
 Now burning, then freezing,
 Fair but most pleasing
 Seen from afar.
 Afar, afar, seen from afar,
 Seen from a —

MADDELENA The man is so charming!
 I'm not without feeling.

SPARAFUCILE But twenty gold pieces
 Are also appealing.

MADDELENA Just twenty? Too little!
 Forget the reward.

SPARAFUCILE Go, see if he's sleeping ...
 Then bring me his sword.

GILDA (*enters outside*)
 Near madness, I am driven
 By love, not by reason.
 Oh, father! Forgive me!
 The horror continues
 And how will it end?

MADDELENA Oh, brother ...

GILDA (*eavesdropping*)
 (Who's speaking?)

SPARAFUCILE (*rummaging*)
 Get out of my way.

MADDELENA He's fair as Apollo,
 And innocent.
 I love him ... he loves me ...
 Oh let him sleep on,
 Do not kill him!

GILDA (Oh, heaven!)

SPARAFUCILE This sack needs some mending.

MADDELENA For what?

SPARAFUCILE To hold your Apollo
When cut by the throat,
And tossed in the river.

GILDA (What hell have I entered?)

MADDELENA I've got a solution:
You suffer no losses
And he goes on living.

SPARAFUCILE And how would you do it?

MADDELENA Now listen ...
Here's a plan that should give satisfaction:
You have from the hunchback
Ten scudi already.
He's bringing the rest
When he comes for the body.
You knife him, then smoothly
You pocket the money.

GILDA (Oh, horror! My father!)

MADDELENA You get what you're after
And I do the same.

SPARAFUCILE To kill my own client
To save your Apollo?
You think I'm a robber?
Some kind of a bandit?
A pro never never
Goes back on a bargain!
A player must follow
The rules of the game.

MADDELENA Oh, spare him for my sake!

SPARAFUCILE A deal is a deal.

MADDELENA I'll wake him and warn him.

GILDA (May heaven preserve her!)

SPARAFUCILE We lose too much money.

MADDELENA Too bad!

SPARAFUCILE I am thinking ...

MADDELENA Do something, but save him!
Do something, but save him!

SPARAFUCILE A corpse will be needed.
By twelve, but no later,

If someone comes knocking
He dies in his stead.

MADDELENA The night so ungodly,
The storm unabated,
What stranger would venture
In search of a bed?

GILDA Despair drives me onward!
To die for my darling,
However mistreated,
However misled!
God have mercy, heaven forgive!
God have mercy, mercy on my soul!

(a clock strikes)

SPARAFUCILE I'll wait half an hour.

MADDELENA *(weeping)*
Oh, longer! Much longer!

GILDA What! (Her sort is weeping
While I'm merely watching!)
Although my love he abused and rejected,
To save his life I offer my own.
(she knocks)

MADDELENA Who's knocking?

SPARAFUCILE The wind.

MADDELENA It's somebody knocking.

SPARAFUCILE I doubt it ... Who's there?

GILDA Be kind to a beggar.
A bed for the night,
Some relief from the storm.

MADDELENA (And peace everlasting!)

SPARAFUCILE But not for a moment.

MADDELENA We've got what we wanted!
Come, what could be better?
One life we are taking,
Another to save.

SPARAFUCILE One life or another
To me is no matter.
The money we're making
I hunger to have.

GILDA My life nearly over,

So young, so tormented!
I pray for my killers
And die for my love. Ah!

Oh, father, forgive me,
Soon to weep no longer.
May God in his mercy
Bless the man I save.

MADDELENA Hurry up.

SPARAFUCILE Open.

MADDELENA Come in, sir.

GILDA Lord ... On their souls have mercy.

MADDELENA and SPARAFUCILE
 And welcome!

(Storm)

RIGOLETTO *(coming forward as the storm gradually abates)*
My hour of vengeance
Is at last in the offing.
Nearly a month I've waited,
Concealing tears of revulsion, rage and anguish
Under the jester's grinning mask.
The entrance ... Why bolted?
No, no! I've come too soon.
Be patient.
A night of evil omens!
Thunder and fire in heaven;
On earth, a scoundrel murdered.
Called forth as captain,
My hand turns the tiller.

(the clock strikes twelve)
Stroke of midnight! *(he knocks)*

SPARAFUCILE *(from inside)* Who's there?

RIGOLETTO Your client.

SPARAFUCILE One moment.

(he emerges, with a large sack)
Here's your man, dead on schedule.

RIGOLETTO Let's see him! A lantern!

SPARAFUCILE A lantern? No, first the money.
Help me ... we'll give him a heave.

RIGOLETTO Go ... I can do it.

SPARAFUCILE Just as you please.
Farther down is safer,
The water runs a little deeper.
Hurry ... The sooner done the better.
Pleasant journey! *(exit)*

RIGOLETTO In my hands! Slaughtered!
My foe! ... Should I confirm it?
No, why bother?
Let him vanish into the water.

 Take heed, you fellow mortals!
Here stands the jester;
There lies the mighty ruler.
Who emerges the winner?
My triumph! My glory!
The tears of sorrow
Have sprouted seeds of vengeance!
His grave will be the river,
His winding sheet a bag of burlap.
Now silent forever!

DUKE *(offstage)*
"Women are one and all
Off again, on again!"
Here now then gone again,
Ruled by caprices.

RIGOLETTO His voice!

DUKE Each a mere weathervane
Spun by the breezes,
Shifting and turning,
Loving, then spurning;

RIGOLETTO Slight of hand ... The night's confusion.

DUKE Burning, than freezing,
Taunting and teasing,
Fair but most pleasing
Seen from afar.

RIGOLETTO No, no! No! He's alive!
The work of Satan!

(shaking his fist at the house)
You crook! You fiend! You traitor!

DUKE Fair but most pleasing
Seen from afar.
Seen from afar,
Seen from afar ...

RIGOLETTO But who lies here instead?

I tremble ... a human body.
My Gilda! Oh, God! My Gilda!

Ah, no! This could never ...
She's away, in Verona ... Am I mad?
My daughter! Oh, my Gilda! My darling!
How did it happen?
Who would harm you or hurt you?
Come out! No answer. They're gone.
My daughter! My Gilda! Oh, my darling!

GILDA Someone calls me ...

RIGOLETTO She is speaking ... Still breathing ...
Still living! Oh, heaven! Ah!
My only love in all the world!
My darling, look at me and speak to me.

GILDA My loving father! ...

RIGOLETTO Who could do it? Why you?
Where are you wounded? Tell me!

GILDA Wound ... here ... here in my heart.

RIGOLETTO Who was the monster?

GILDA I am guilty.
Too much did I love him,
And to save him
I was willing to die.

RIGOLETTO God of anger! My own innocent daughter
I have slain in my hunger for vengeance.
Dear beloved! My angel!
Don't leave me!
Speak, oh speak to me ...
My lovely daughter!

GILDA Let me be silent.
Forgive the man who misled me.
Bless your daughter
And forgive her,
Oh, my father!
Held by my mother,
Now smiling in heaven
Past mortal sorrow,
For you I shall pray.

RIGOLETTO Too young to die!
Dearest, live on, for my sake.
My gentle dove,
You are all that I have.
Do not take it away.

Do not leave me, dear child.
Do not die.
Without you I have nothing,
Nothing at all.
Oh my daughter! Oh, my Gilda!
Do not die.

GILDA

No more ... forgive him ...
My father ... forgive me.
There gazing down,
There I shall pray ...
For you I shall ...

RIGOLETTO

Gilda! Gilda! My daughter!
Ah, ah! The curse of Monterone!

End of the Opera