

The Fiery Angel

Tony Rothman

A Drama in Five Acts

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## Author's Preface

The *Fiery Angel* is the third in a trilogy of plays begun with *Mélisande* and continued with *Plausibility*. Each—hopefully—reflects some aspect of our contemporary world by casting a light on events that took place a century ago. Each relies heavily on music, heavily enough that each should probably be called a musical play, if not a quasi-opera.

As in the previous two works, the story told by *The Fiery Angel* is essentially true. I would hazard, moreover, that it is the most realistic of the three. Prokofiev's opera, *The Fiery Angel*, exists and although it has perhaps never been performed by an American company, it is by now represented on several well known recordings, one of which won *Grammophone's* Best Opera Recording award for 1995. True as well is that the opera was never performed during Prokofiev's lifetime, despite many attempts by him to get it staged. The first performance took place in Venice in 1955, two years after the composer's death, but it never saw the light of day in the Soviet Union. The St. Petersburg premiere took place only in early January, 1992, literally within days—maybe hours—after the Soviet Union ceased to exist. By coincidence, I happened to attend the January 3rd performance, which was part of the premiere week; as far as I

know it the first time *The Fiery Angel* had ever appeared on a Russian stage.\*

More to the point, the story behind the opera, the story that Prokofiev himself never knew, is as factual as it is unbelievable. To be sure, the tortured love triangle involving Andrei Bely, Nina Petrovskaya and Valery Bryusov that resulted in Bryusov's novel *The Fiery Angel* may be the most famous story dating from Russia's silver age of poetry. References to it surface in almost any history of the period. What does not exist is a remotely consistent or unbiased account of what actually took place during that celebrated collision. The second volume of Andrei Bely's memoirs, *The Beginning of the Century*, contains an extremely vivid description of Nina Petrovskaya but it was written twenty years after the fact by a very hurt man. The actual course of events is alluded to only obliquely. A famous essay, "The End of Renata," by Nina's friend Vladislav Khodasevich is tainted by an absolute hatred for Valery Bryusov. Bryusov himself was so distraught over whatever took place that his own diary breaks off completely during the crucial years 1904-1905. Letters between himself and Bely are as oblique as Bely's memoirs. Nina Petrovskaya also glosses over events in her fragmentary memoirs. Secondhand accounts are secondhand and suffer from obvious errors and the usual mistransmission of rumor for fact.

So there has been room for invention. Because everyone agrees that Bryusov scrupulously transcribed the day-to-day events of the affair into the novel (Bely terms

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\* *The Gambler* played on the 2nd; I never discovered what happened on New Year's day. For this play I have put the premiere on January 1.

*The Fiery Angel* a “dissertation” about Nina Petrovskaya), I have once or twice taken the usually dangerous liberty of “reverse engineering” from the novel to real life. For the sake of compression, I have been unable to respect chronology. Incidents, acquaintanceships and publication dates have all been rearranged. I have also started the story about two years before it actually began in order to make it coincide with the opening of the new century, which I felt was not only compelling, but essential in order to give some idea of the milieu that engendered this bizarre and unfortunate tale. In the last act I have gone further and transposed some events from the Berlin apartment of Nina Berberova to the Paris apartment of Zinaida Gippius.

For all my juggling, I have confined the events of *The Fiery Angel* closely to the period in which they took place and all the poetry I have selected was written within a year or so of the appropriate dates and “used” pretty much in the manner described. Translation of the poetry has, as always, proved problematical. The originals are invariably rhymed, which is far easier to accomplish in Russian than in English. Also, much of it strikes the modern reader—at least this modern reader—as simple-minded and even silly. One must accept, I think, that theirs was a more naive age. Considering all this, I have striven to preserve meaning rather than rhyme and have attempted not to improve on sophistication. If this amounts to tightrope walking with the rope on the floor then I plead guilty. As to the result of the translations as well as the rest, that, as always, is up to others.

Fiery Angel/Rothman/5

T.R.

Cast

Principals:

Nina Ivánovna Petróvskaya (NINA); (Most reliable dates 1884-1928)—A minor poetess and short-story writer of the Russian symbolist, or decadent, movement. Physical descriptions of her vary considerably but she was apparently petite with penetrating eyes. An early photo in Bely's memoirs is not terribly revealing. Her laugh is contemptuous and, except for her moments of ecstasy, there is a dark edge to everything she says. About twenty at the opening of the play, forty-five in the last act.

Borís Nikoláevich Bugáev (BB); (1880-1934)—The real name of Andrei Bely, one of the leading Russian symbolist writers. His most famous work is *Petersburg*, considered by Nabokov to be one of the four greatest novels of the twentieth century. In his early-mid twenties at opening of the play, about forty-five in the last act.

Valéry Yákovlevich Bryúsov (BRYUS); (1873-1924)—The ostensible leader of the Russian symbolist movement; poet, novelist, translator, editor. Extremely famous during his time, largely forgotten today. Author of the novel *The Fiery Angel*, upon which Prokofiev based his opera. In his late twenties at the opening of the

play.

Supporting Roles:

Konstantín Dmítrievich Balmónt (BAL); (1867-1942)—The most famous poet of his generation. A legend in his own time, the equivalent of a rock star. Died in utter poverty and neglect. He evidently pronounced his name with the accent on the second syllable. In his early thirties at the opening of the play, about fifty-five in the last act.

Zinaída Nikoláevna Gíppius (GIPPIUS); (1867-1945)— Famous symbolist poet and critic. Mystical, capricious, malicious. With her husband, the even more famous Dmitri Merezhkovsky, founded the Religious-Philosophical Society in Petersburg. By her own description, “Physically more like a woman, emotionally more like a man.” Singular appearance with ankle-length hair. Thirty or so at the opening of the play, about fifty-five in the last act.

Renata(N)—A woman of 16th-century Germany. The heroine of Bryusov’s novel.

Renata(O)—The same as she appears in Prokofiev’s opera. This role is sung.

Ruprecht(N)—A 16th century German knight. The hero of Bryusov’s novel.

Ruprecht(O)—The same, as he appears in the opera. This role is sung.

Sergéi Sergéevich Prokófiev (PROK); (1891-1953)—The composer. In his thirties at the time of this play.

A Waiter in a Parisian cafe.

Minor roles, in order of appearance:

Mephistopheles, as he appears in the opera (silent)

Faust (silent)

A Grand Inquisitor, as he appears in the opera and novel. This role is sung for the opera, spoken for the novel.

Three Theatre-goers:

Galya, Misha, Anton

Prokofiev's Escort

The Argonauts—literary circle of Bely's friends and admirers:

Alyosha, Sasha, Volodya, Kolya, Liza, Tatyana

An Inkeeper (silent)

Madiel—the Fiery Angel (silent)

A Journalist

An Old Fortune Teller, as in the novel and also as in the opera

A Servant, as in the novel and also as in the opera

Hélène—a medium

Three sitters at a séance—two female, one male

Master Leonard—A satanic figure, half man-half goat



Sarraska—A young witch

Dmitri Sergeevich Merezhovsky (MEREZ); (1865-1941)—Famous symbolist novelist, polemicist and poet. The husband of Zinaida Gippius.

(The minor roles can be covered by four men and three women.)

Other guests, nuns and witches.

The action takes place in Paris in the 1920s, in Moscow in the first years of the 1900s, in a novel of 16th century Germany, and in an opera.

Music

Music is an integral part of the production. All the selections indicated are readily available on CD. The *Fiery Angel* is currently available in two recordings. The one used for the timings is the performance by Valery Gergiev and the Kirov Opera, [Phillips 442 078-2]. This production is also available on video, which could conceivably be used for the operatic sequences. The better program notes, ones more relevant to this play, are by Richard Taruskin for the Neeme Jarvi recording [DG]. There are several recordings available of Prokofiev's Third Symphony, which is based on music from the opera. For the timings I used Neeme Jarvi's recording with the Scottish Symphony on Chandos [8401], simply because I have it.

For the remaining music, the *Little Triptych* by Georgi Sviridov is available on Olympia OCD 520. The Liturgy of St. John of Chrysostom by Konstantin Shvedov is available on Melodiya [SUCD 11-00318]. A totally satisfactory recording of the Miaskovsky Sixth Symphony does not currently exist. The old Kondrashin recording, reissued on Russian Disc, is the better performance, particularly in the first movement, but the sound is far better on the more recent recordings by Veronika Dudarova with the Symphony Orchestra of Russia on Olympia OCD 510 and the Neeme Jarvi with the Goteborg Symfoniker on DG. The Kondrashin has been used for the first movement excerpts, Dudarova for the last movement excerpts. The electronic music by Xenakis is available on EMF CD 003. For the Shostakovich and Prokofiev violin concertos I use the

Vengerov-Rostropovich recording on Teldec [4509-92256-2]. The Shostakovich 11th  
Symphony as performed by Stokowski and the Houston Symphony [EMI CDC-7 47419  
2] has never been matched.

Act I

Scene I

The curtain rises to the finale of Prokofiev's opera *The Fiery Angel*. The scene is a convent in the sixteenth century. An orgy is in full flight. Nuns are stripping off their habits and copulating with demons, screaming hysterically. In their midst a GRAND INQUISITOR condemns one of the novices, RENATA, to be burned at the stake. MEPHISTOPHELES, FAUST and the knight RUPRECHT look on from the side. The music reaches a screaming pitch and the opera abruptly ends as RENATA is hoisted onto a cross and set afire. Blackout.

The lights immediately go up on the outside of the theatre. It is night, snowing. Enter three Russian theatregoers, GALYA, MISHA and ANTON, who have just seen the opera. They are dressed in winter clothing and laughing gaily. The music, however, is nostalgic and pervaded by melancholy—the opening to Georgii Sviridov's *Little Triptych*.

GALYA: *Bozhe moi!* That must be the strangest opera ever written. No wonder Prokofiev never lived to see it.

ANTON (Amiably): Why “no wonder”? I thought the music some of his most

powerful.

GALYA: The music, maybe, but the story—nothing but black magic and orgies! (She shivers and laughs.)

ANTON: So, Misha, was this premiere worth waiting half your life for?

MISHA: Absolutely. But I'm not surprised Prokofiev never saw it. You could slip a political joke or two past the censors, but they were smart enough to recognize sex.

ANTON (With mock skepticism): They were?

GALYA: How many years since he wrote it and tonight?

MISHA: Sixty-five, if I'm not mistaken.

GALYA (Reflecting): A half century. More. Almost 'til the millennium.

MISHA: Well, as they say, one must be a living man and a posthumous artist.

ANTON: As they say...(He chuckles.) Do you think if you told Prokofiev that his *Fiery Angel* wouldn't be premiered in Peter until New Year's, 1992, the very day after the Soviet Union ceased to exist, he'd have spent eight years working on it?

MISHA: If you told him he'd never get paid, he wouldn't have...Well, Galya, Anton, Happy New Year. *S nóvim gódom!*

(MISHA waves and moves off. GALYA and ANTON begin to exit oppositely.)

GALYA: *S nóvim gódom, Misha!*

ANTON : *S nóvim gódom!* Let's hope we survive!

GALYA: I wonder what possessed Prokofiev to write such a thing...?

(Exit.)

Scene II

The first movement of the Sviridov continues. Snow continues to fall. As the set for Scene III (below) fades in, with its luminous forms glittering across the stage and laughter in the background, a spot goes up on SERGEI PROKOFIEV, about 30, and an ESCORT, who stand downstage. PROKOFIEV is dressed in an overcoat and a wide-brimmed hat; a suitcase rests by his feet. The conversation is somber and slightly awkward at the start.

ESCORT: I'm sorry America worked out so badly for you, Mr. Prokofiev. (He extends his hand.) May you have better luck in Paris.

PROK (Shaking): It's unlikely to be worse.

ESCORT (Searching for something to say): Do you have something to read for the voyage?

PROK: Yes, I picked up a novel here in New York. With luck it will see me across. (He hands a book to ESCORT.)

ESCORT (Examining cover): *The Fiery Angel*, by Valéry Bryúsov. I haven't read it. (He hands it back to PROKOFIEV.)

PROK: Neither have I. Bryusov was quite famous fifteen or twenty years ago, at

the turn of the century. I don't know what's happened to him.

ESCORT: The revolution?

PROK: Who knows? With bread in short supply, the Bolsheviks don't have much use for poets.

ESCORT: Do you think you'll ever go back—to Russia I mean?

PROK (Sighing): The Bolsheviks have even less use for composers than poets...(Heavily): Less use than America.

(A boat whistle sounds.)

ESCORT: Well, good luck again, Sergei Sergeevich.

(They shake once more. PROKOFIEV picks up his suitcase and turns away.)

ESCORT: Oh, by the way, Happy New Year. Happy 1920.

PROK (Glancing back, absently): Thanks, you too. (Glancing at book): A world gone forever...

(Exit.)

### Scene III

It remains night; snow continues to fall. The scene now changes fully to the wooded grounds of the Novodevichy monastery\* in Moscow, circa 1901. A high, white brick wall is visible. Onion domes rise above it in the background. Across the trees and

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\* Lit. "New Virgin monastery," a famous convent.

monastery walls flicker the outlines of unicorns, centaurs and winged horses, so incorporeal and fleeting that the audience doubts their reality. Above, across the sky, flickers a similarly insubstantial image of the “Blessed Damoiselle,” a beautiful, robed woman garlanded with the sun, moon and stars.

Several young Russian revelers, LIZA, SASHA, VOLODYA and ALYOSHA, all in their early twenties, prowl merrily among the trees, laughing as they search for the mythological creatures. The music is now full of sleighbells, but again touched with melancholy, the third movement of Georgii Sviridov’s *Little Triptych.*, [beginning at 0:08].

LIZA: Over there, Sasha, do you see it?

SASHA: No, where?

ALYOSHA: There, behind that tree, a centaur, it must be!

(General laughter.)

SASHA: I don’t see anything.

VOLODYA: Sasha, look, Bugáev was right—a unicorn! After it!

(All but SASHA scamper after a unicorn, fall on the ground laughing and begin pelting each other with snowballs. SASHA follows, but halts and stands apart, a little perplexed.)

SASHA: I still don’t see anything.

ALYOSHA (Getting to his feet): Hey, unicorn! You invited us! Why so shy?



SASHA: Is this one of Bugaev's jokes?

VOLODYA: See for yourself, Sasha, a calling card.

SASHA (Squinting in the dark): "Unicorns and centaurs of the Novodévichy convent. Receiving on New Year's Eve of the new century." Volodya, you can't pass—

LIZA: Aleksandr Mikhail'ich. Shhh! (She puts a finger to his lips.) Hear them? (Whispering): They're everywhere! (She kisses him playfully.) Like sleighbells!

(She runs off and immediately bumps into ALYOSHA, who puts her arm around her. Together they begin to walk off as he waves to the others. Enter BORÍS BUGAEV (BB) in opposite direction, dressed heavily, prowling as if searching for a centaur. When he talks, he speaks with a great range in his voice—almost singing—and he accompanies his speech with animated gesticulations and facial expressions. He wears a mustache and is about the same age as the others.)

ALYOSHA: Come on, children, it's getting late—time for the party. Sasha, Bugaev will be there—you can argue with him about centaurs.

LIZA (Excitedly): Boris Bugaev will be there? Alyosha, you didn't say. Andrei Bely himself?

ALYOSHA: Call him Borya—

LIZA: I couldn't.

(She bumps into BB.)

BB: Please, everyone does. I only took a penname because I didn't want to embarrass my father—

ALYOSHA: Professor Nikolai Bugaev—

LIZA (Rhetorically, with respect): —the mathematician?

VOLODYA (Turning to BB, earnestly): Embarrass! Borya, your *Dramatic Symphony* is the most revolutionary piece of literature in the history of the world. It's— a complete break with the past!

SASHA (Slightly apart from the others): Is it a novel, a poem?

VOLODYA: Both, more—an entire symphony in prose!

SASHA: I couldn't make it out.

LIZA: It's brilliant. (To BB): I can hardly believe you are still only a university student. Oh forgive me, Boris Nikolaevich, Alyosha didn't say you'd be coming. (She strikes ALYOSHA) I would have worn my best dress...

BB: Think nothing of it...?

LIZA: ....Elizaveta Fyodorovna.

(BB takes her hand and bows.)

SASHA: But Boris Nikolai'ich, centaurs, unicorns...This is one of your pranks. Admit it.

BB: Admit it? Admit it? Aleksandr Mikhail'ich, you—we—have lost the

ability to fly. (He jumps onto the nearest bench or gateway column.) We think so heavily that we no longer raise our eyes to new exploits. Life's rhythms have become sluggish. (He jumps off and acts out the remainder of his speech with exaggerated motions.) What do we do when we hunt unicorns, traipsing down to an ancient monastery on a snowy evening? We create a landscape, a magical landscape that lifts us above our common drudgery. When we prowl for winged horses we fly with them. We are taking art from paper and transposing it to life. Yes! this is what we must do as the new century dawns. We must sing our lives. We must abolish the distinction between life and art. Yes! (Pushing a handful of snow into SASHA's face): Do you understand?

SASHA (Spitting it out): You decadents.

BB: Decadents, yes. Art into life, life into art...We need a musical program of life, organized into song-adventures. Yes, yes, we'll call ourselves the Argonauts and sail forth into the new dawn on the wings of poetry.

(He recites. During the verse, the sky turns the color of rubies):

Come forth behind me, the old Argonaut summons,

Sounding his golden horn.

To the sun, to the sun; loving freedom,

We shall whirl away into the blue ether.

ALYOSHA: All the sky above in rubies,

Our Argo,

Our Argo—

VOLODYA: Beat its golden wings. To the sun, to the sun, we shall whirl away into the  
blue ether...!

OTHERS: The Argonauts. Yes!

(They cheer and begin to move off. ALYOSHA halts and looks about.)

ALYOSHA: By the way, have you seen Nina Ivanovna? She was to meet us here.

BB: Nina Ivanovna?

ALYOSHA (With the slightest hint of foreboding): Petrovskaya...Well, she knows the  
way. I'm sure she'll turn up.

BB: Forward then, children, to the new century!

LIZA: To the new world!

(Exit. More cheering as the music fades out.)

#### Scene IV

A turn-of-the-century salon with piano. It sparkles with candelabras and gaslight. A large grandfather clock is prominent. It is about 11:30 P.M.. As many GUESTS as forces allow are gathered, chatting, drinking. Several are playing with a ouija board. Standing alone on a balcony, gazing outward, is NINA PETROVSKAYA.

She is dressed entirely and dramatically in black. Across the room two women are chatting, TATYANA and ZINAÍDA GIPPIUS. GIPPIUS, about 30, has extremely long red hair curled into a chignon, wears a cross, a velvet suit with padded shoulders, a lorgnette, smokes a cigarette through a long cigarette holder and tonight, in addition, wears two muslin angel wings and goes barefoot.

Enter BB with LIZA, SASHA, VOLODYA and ALYOSHA. One or two of the GUESTS come to collect their coats, though KOLYA corners BB before he can take off his things.

GUESTS: *S nóvim gódom!*

Happy New Year!

*Bonne année!*

*Proxhodítje!*

Come in, come in!

KOLYA (To BB): How does it feel to be the literary lion of the hour? All Moscow is reading your book.

BB: I'll bask in the sun once I pass my exams this spring.

(ALYOSHA catches sight of NINA on the balcony, gazing upward.)

ALYOSHA: Nina, there you are!

(She doesn't answer and continues to stare upwards. ALYOSHA takes BB's arm and walks over to her. VOLODYA follows. LIZA and SASHA begin chatting with

TATYANA and GIPPIUS, across the room. )

ALYOSHA (To NINA): We missed you at the unicorn hunt. What happened? Did you change your mind? (She still doesn't answer. He notices her dress and stops short.) Nina, are you quite well?

(She turns and smiles cryptically, then speaks with a dark edge.)

NINA: I'm well, Alyosha. I'm...repenting.

ALYOSHA: Repenting? In God's name, Nina, for what can you possibly be repenting on New Year's Eve?

NINA: For what does one always repent on New Year's Eve? The past.

ALYOSHA (After a pause, recovering): Ah, forgive me. Nina Ivanovna Petrovskaya, may I present our illustrious friend, Boris Nikolaevich Bugaev, perhaps better known to you as—

NINA: Andrei Bely.

(They stare at each other fixedly, then NINA slowly, deliberately extends her hand to be kissed. BB, just as deliberately and all the while staring at her, obliges.)

BB: A pleasure, Nina Ivanovna.

(NINA withdraws her hand and abruptly removes BB's hat, revealing a head of fiery blond hair and piercing blue eyes.)

NINA (With slight haughtiness, condescension): Please stay.

BB (Recovering his hat): I intend to. But Nina Ivanovna, if I may be so bold

on this fateful evening, you seem far too young to have a past.

(NINA breaks into amused laughter. ALYOSHA eventually attempts to introduce NINA to VOLODYA, who has followed the above with great interest. In the meantime the dialogue picks up across the room.)

SASHA: Why do you suppose she's dressed like that?

TATYANA: It seems to be on account of her last affair.

LIZA: Didn't she marry—oh, what was his name?—Nikolai Sazhin?

GIPPIUS: No, she was merely engaged to him. She married Sergei KrechétoV.

LIZA: The publisher?

TATYANA: Gryphon publishing house.

SASHA: Her marriage has broken up?

GIPPIUS: Of course not, my dear. She hates her husband. The affair has ended.

(Across the room, VOLODYA has offered NINA a drink, but she has ignored him.)

NINA (Sourly): I feel hungover.

ALYOSHA: Nina, allow us to take you home.

NINA (She takes ALYOSHA's glass and drinks. Then, as if talking to no one in particular): It feels...yes, like a hangover, as if he won't...leave me.

It began rapturously...His poetry, every phrase, each word, pierced my heart. He proposed we immolate ourselves on the altar of love—that we love with heat...ferocity, that we...burn ourselves to ashes. (With a sharp

glance at BB): Was it possible to refuse?

VOLODYA: Nina Ivanovna, if you'll permit me, this sounds like dangerous ground.

(Ignoring VOLODYA, NINA continues to gaze at BB with a gleam in her eye.)

NINA: I prefer the elixir of your lips, where love flaunts itself;

And in the wasteland of desire, your eyes afford the wells to slake my

thirst.

VOLODYA: Baudelaire?

NINA (Haughtily, still gazing at BB): Did anyone know love better?

(A perplexed pause. At that moment KOLYA grabs BB's arm motioning for BB to remove his coat. With a glance over his shoulder at NINA, BB follows KOLYA and removes the remainder of his things, handing them to KOLYA. VOLODYA quickly steps in to take BB's place.)

VOLODYA: Are you a poet yourself, Nina Ivanovna?

NINA (With anger and a hint of despair, as her eyes follow BB): Isn't everyone?

LIZA: Is she a poet?

TATYANA: She took dental courses.

GIPPIUS: For someone who would deal with open mouths, hers is remarkably closed.

LIZA: The affair, who—?

TATYANA: The rumors—



SASHA: She *is* very attractive, in a peculiar sort of way.

LIZA: You think so? She's so *angular*...

SASHA: What burning eyes. A man...

VOLODYA (Leaning toward NINA): Have you published, Nina Ivanovna?

NINA (A little absently, defensively): Not yet, no.

VOLODYA: Well, I'm sure you will.

NINA: Perhaps, but that is not what I wish most of all to do.

VOLODYA: No? Tell me then, what do you wish most of all to do?

NINA (Darkly): I wish to make a poem of my life.

(She leans over balcony and gazes upward.)

"Holy days are dawning over Moscow. We must go and catch a glimpse of them, brother, this frosty evening."

VOLODYA: That's Bely, isn't it?

(NINA doesn't respond; she is watching BB who, having taken off his coat and scarf, returns wearing an azure jacket with a large pectoral cross that hangs from his neck. As at the convent, he almost swoops and prances as he walks. With KOLYA he moves towards the center, where GIPPIUS is holding court. The other remaining younger GUESTS now begin to surround him, including NINA. VOLODYA shrugs and follows. ALYOSHA is addressing GIPPIUS.)

ALYOSHA: What a creation! First rumors that a centaur had visited Borya in his

apartment, then everyone in Moscow receives calling cards and before you know it—there we are, prowling around Novodevichy, as decadent as can be, hunting for mythological animals!

GIPPIUS (Removing her lorgnette and blowing a cloud of smoke): Is it possible to imagine anything more ridiculous?

(BB steps up to her and bows to the floor.)

BB: Zinaída Nikolaevna, Madame Gippius, I am honored. You object?

GIPPIUS: I do , *dorogoi*. Decadence. Hah! Another name for unbridled license, self-indulgence, boundless vanity—

BB: Yes, of course you are right but it was the perfect fusion of music and life. (He turns to KOLYA, dancing, swirling.) They were everywhere, Kolya, imagine! Centaurs galloping, winged horses soaring, unicorns—

NINA: “And on one cloud a woman clothed with the sun was holding in her arms the holy child.”

(The image rises across the set. NINA’s words go unheard. BB dances around

GIPPIUS.)

BB: If you had been there, Zinaida Nikolaevna, you would have seen the Zaphorozhian cossack frozen in a dance, one leg sticking out of the ice toward the sky. (He attempts to demonstrate, falling on the floor.)

GIPPIUS (Rustling her wings and blowing smoke): Cossacks freeze, Bugaev skates

above on decadent wings. Bely trips.

(She turns away. As KOLYA and VOLODYA help BB merrily to his feet, ALYOSHA speaks to NINA.)

ALYOSHA: I think we're all a little in love with him.

(NINA pays no attention. She is staring intently at BB, who catches her gaze and finds himself unwittingly returning it, not entirely understanding why. For a moment they stand transfixed, until BB is distracted by LIZA and TATYANA, who have sat at the ouija board. (If sufficient forces, JULIA and SVETA. ))

LIZA: I have a question: What can we expect in the new century?

(They place their hands on the planchette. While they wait for an answer KOLYA turns to VOLODYA.)

KOLYA: Volodya, I've been meaning to ask, What about the striking students?

VOLODYA: They'll be expelled. Hundreds.

KOLYA (To himself): While we hunt unicorns.

OUIJA: A-N-T-I-C-H-R-I-S-T.

L & T: The Antichrist!

(They jump up and overturn the ouija board.)

ALYOSHA (Seriously): Borenka, what do you think? Is the hand of Satan at work in Holy Russia? Solovyov says the sky will be rent in two by a great lightning and Christ will descend from heaven with blood dripping from the

wounds of his outstretched hands. He will rescue all those lured into destruction by the Antichrist, and for a thousand years they will reign with him in peace....

I find myself unsure, Borenka...

(An image of the Crucifixion descends from above.)

BB: The Antichrist stalks the land, can't you feel it, Alyosha? (He raises his arms skyward.) Yes, you can almost...(whispering) behold! (He shivers and crosses himself. Note: the orthodox cross from the right.) Solovyov has left it to me to realize his teachings, to bring them to the path of life. (As if suddenly having an idea): Alyosha, I want to give a blazing sermon in Moscow to awaken mankind, our mankind which has fallen into...spiritual hibernation.

ALYOSHA: Hibernation? Drunken stupor is more like it.

KOLYA: Then Borya, you believe Solovyov's prophecies are to be fulfilled?

BB: Yes, yes, beginning any moment.

NINA: "The Milky Way descended lower than it should. Like pearly mists it hung above their heads."

(The sky becomes flooded with stars. BB glances at NINA, then turns to ALYOSHA.)

BB (Earnestly): But people must not be seduced by false prophets. It is too easy to see God's intervention everywhere.

KOLYA: Have you been down on the Arbat? Mystics and preachers from all over Russia have gathered in Moscow.

BB (Somewhat amused): Yes, yes, I watch them every day from my balcony.

ALYOSHA: Professor Musatov has gone off to France to investigate sightings of the Beast.

KOLYA (With genuine interest): Truly?

VOLODYA: Borya, you warn against false prophets. But who speaks in your "Eternal Call"? (He begins to recite. The other GUESTS listen intently.)

Preaching the fast-approaching end,  
I appeared, as if a new Christ,  
the wreath of thorns, adorned with rosy flame,  
having been lain upon my head.

(Christ appears with the crown of thorns in flames.)

BB (Amused):

Clogging the sidewalk around me  
they listened to my words with astonishment.

ALYOSHA: They laughed at me,  
at the insanely funny false Christ.  
A drop of blood, like a burning tear,  
trembled, congealing on my brow.

LIZA: The harlequin grew pale and silent.

(A harlequin appears and disappears in the corner.)

BB: I hung my head and began to sob like a child.

They dragged me to the lunatic asylum,  
driving me on with kicks.

(A short silence. The GUESTS applaud.)

SASHA: Harlequin? What *does* he mean?

(The clock's hands move to midnight.)

ALYOSHA: Is it truly the end, Borenka?

(The clock strikes midnight. The room falls quiet. After a silence, everyone laughs, cheers and kisses each other on the cheeks, three times. BB kisses both LIZA and NINA nonchalantly, though NINA stares after him.)

GIPPIUS: The Antichrist seems no match for we archangels.

BB (Lifting a glass): My Argonauts, to new shores!

(An incorporeal form ripples across the stage.)

ALYOSHA (Laughing): Argus, some music, please.

(BB sits at the piano and begins to improvise, as if in a trance. The music is meditative and should probably resemble that of Nikolai Medtner, who was a friend of the family.)

NINA (Indicating music): Is this yours, Boris Nikolaevich?

(BB nods. NINA stiffens, as if shot through by electricity, then begins to dance in

ecstasy. BB continues playing during the following dialogue.)

VOLODYA: Zinaida Nikolaevna, honestly, what do you think of Borya?

GIPPIUS: Radiant Borya. There is a true decadent, the fall of man, a man-slave. A plaything of his own ideas, about to float away on the wings of a thousand thoughtless words. He talks too much...(She takes a drag on her cigarette.)  
In spite of his prophetic leanings, his thoughts have sparks of brilliance, tiny arrows of genius.

VOLODYA: You are direct, Madame.

(GIPPIUS blows a cloud of smoke slowly into VOLODYA's face.)

KOLYA (With slight skepticism): Zinaida Nikolaevna, I've heard that you would combine Christianity with paganism?

GIPPIUS: Why not? Russia has come to a crossroads. Everyone feels it. There must be a new way, a third way.

ALYOSHA: There must.

GIPPIUS: Well then, *dorogoi*, why don't you come to the Religious-Philosophical Society meetings in Petersburg.

VOLODYA: Where are they held?

GIPPIUS (Gravely): They aren't, my dear. The authorities haven't permitted them. I intend that they shall.

(ALYOSHA goes to the balcony again and looks out. )

ALYOSHA: And now, midnight; I cannot tell whether the world has ended or just begun. Madame, when you look out over this kingdom of frozen tears, what do you see at this moment that stares both toward future and past? Christ descending or the Beast mounting the throne with the Great Whore?

(The sky begins to turn colors; a blood-red moon appears above the balcony. BB breaks off playing.)

KOLYA: One can almost sense the shadow of Lucifer's wings passing over Earth.

NINA (Raising her arms to the sky): I think we are all Lucifer's children.

LIZA: Oh, I'm frightened. (She moves closer to BB and slowly takes his arm.)

GIPPIUS (Improvising):

We have not lived and are surrounded by darkness.

Thou shalt return but how shall we recognize thee?

We tremble at thy silence,

Grant us a sign!

(There are distant groaning sounds, thunder and lightning. The moon begins shedding drops of blood. The GUESTS huddle together. GIPPIUS continues, raising her arms.)

GIPPIUS: Where art Thou?

The hour has struck but has yet to sound.

Still we believe. Thou shalt again walk among us.

(A crack of thunder. The door blows open with a loud creak. All eyes turn toward the



door. Enter KONSTANTIN DMITRIEVICH BALMÓNT, about 30. He wears a sort of Van Dyke beard, long moustache, both very black, He is dressed in a xhalat (a robe) from Bukhara, wears boots, spurs and an épée. Two glamorous WOMEN accompany him. He is evidently somewhat drunk. As he enters he unsheathes his sword.)

GUESTS: Balmont!

BAL: We shall be like the sun!

(Several of the FEMALE GUESTS faint straight away. NINA first averts her eyes, then stares at BALMONT. BALMONT begins to improvise in a sonorous voice.)

BAL: Long centuries of centuries shall pass,  
Uncounted millenniums as locusts in death-laden clouds descend,  
And to the babble of centuries fleeing  
The same enduring firmament shall witness the bitter end.

BB (To ALYOSHA, in admiration): He *is* a genius at improvisation, even when he's drunk.

BAL: Drunk! Boris Nikolaevich, drunk you dare call me? (He threatens BB with his sword and belches.) I'll cut out your golden tongue.

(He half-heartedly lunges at BB but is restrained by his WOMEN, who kiss him and urge him to keep reciting.)

The mute, dead firmament—

The firmament spurned by God,

He who breathes Eternity beyond the farther skies.

(The set utters a great sigh.)

VOLODYA: Thus the eve of the New Dawn.

BAL (Grasping his sword): Eh? Who dares interrupt Balmont?

KOLYA (Contritely): You are the master of us all.

BAL (Pleased): Ah. Where was I?

SASHA (To LIZA): I prefer Pushkin.

(LIZA hits him.)

ALYOSHA: Konstantin Dmitrievich, we were discussing the coming of Christ. Perhaps  
you have—

BAL: Christ was a lackey, a philosopher for beggars.

(Some GUESTS are stunned, others giggle. GIPPIUS reacts quickly and sharply.)

GIPPIUS: Better a philosopher for beggars than a beggar for philosophy.

BAL (Peering at her): Zinochka. How good to see you. I didn't recognize the  
serpent in angel's wings.

GIPPIUS (Blowing smoke): To be sure, it is always easier to recognize the fool in  
king's clothing. (She improvises):

What is sin?

Inattention, inoccupation.

Self-hatred, self-absorption,

Unbridled dissipation,

Calm intoxication.

GUESTS: Ooh!

BAL (Girding his loins): What is sin?

To be callous in thought,

To wield words like knives,

To divide, to sift, to skim,

Never stirring once to life.

(GUESTS applaud.)

GIPPIUS: I pray to you, Lord, for the Devil, he your creation.

I love him, Lord, for I see in him my suffering.

When the Last Judgment comes, O Lord,

Release him, for his agony, for his madness.

GUESTS: The Devil! Ooh, good! Bravo!

BAL: Your Judgment shall never Last.

Your "Christ," "Antichrist," "Devil" begone.

I am the tender hoar-frost of autumn,

I am the murmur of the barely heard sigh.

GUESTS: Yes!

GIPPIUS: You are the clumsy bear of verses.

You are the moan of an idol aging.

GUESTS: Ah! Nooo!

BAL: Adorned with wings, you are an angel not,  
Merely an albatross, so burdensome, so leaden, so...dead.

GIPPIUS: You are as light as the wind—

BAL: —unfettered, free—

GIPPIUS: —and like the wind, infertile.

(BALMONT takes an unsteady step toward GIPPIUS, waving his sword, but also as if to embrace her.)

BALMONT: Zinochka!

(He crashes onto a divan.)

GIPPIUS: Babylon has fallen...Ah, I am weary of harlequins and murmurs, of symbols, symbols that have become repetitive, empty, an excuse to escape—

(NINA breaks into derisive laughter. The GUESTS all turn to her. GIPPIUS is shocked.)

NINA (Haughtily): I apologize, Zinaida Nikolaevna, but who can blame us for gulping down Balmont's shadows, moonlight, elves? Dostoevsky was buried twenty years ago. What, *what* since then? Pale social dramas, long-winded hymns to peasant life. (She ironically sings a phrase of a Russian folk song, then clasping her head, apparently loses track of where she was.)

Twenty years of drab, dreary *existence*. Impossible...Religion in crisis, art in crisis...life in crisis. Worse than death. Unless something changes, we will all die of starvation—

BAL (Half asleep, snorting): Quite right.

(GUESTS applaud.)

GIPPIUS: Stop. You are all so childish. Give me meaning!

BB (Evenly): Nina Ivanovna is right, Zinaida Nikolaevna. We need magic. Our lives must be strewn with magic.

BAL (In his sleep): I am a “petallar.” I strew petals of verse, laden with meaning and magic. Fairy, be like us, the flowers...Playing with a sunbeam, the fairy didn’t become a flower and laughed and loudly—. (He begins to snore loudly.)

(GIPPIUS, waving at BALMONT contemptuously, begins to leave.)

ALYOSHA: It is getting late.

BB (Gazing at BALMONT): Balmont may be the Master; Bryusov is the Magician.

BAL (In his sleep): Bryusov, yes, the Mag.

(GIPPIUS momentarily turns and practically spits.)

GIPPIUS: The demon!

(Exit GIPPIUS. A strange, distant noise is heard. The GUESTS gradually begin to put

on their wraps and exit, leaving BB and NINA alone. BB also puts on his coat.)

BB: You are passionate, Nina Ivanovna.

NINA Do you hear that noise...? (Disdainfully): Madame Gippius...(she laughs to herself, then suddenly): Will we see each other again, Boris Nikolai'ich? You are music incarnate, attuned to the chords of this new time...

BB: I must try to fill Solovyov's shoes. It is impossible, of course... Do you attend the Tuesday evenings?

NINA Only when I am certain I won't see my husband.

BB: Good. Then let us meet at one soon and watch the fate of Russian literature decided (with a glance at BALMONT) by the Master and the Mag.

NINA: Yes, yes, we must. Thank you.

(They begin to exit.)

BB: Don't mention it. And Happy New Year.

(Exit. A cascade of diamonds fills the stage and is blown away by black whirlwinds.)

### Scene V

Evening. A Paris cafe in 1920. PROKOFIEV is sitting at a table covered with a book and paper. He is writing a letter. A WAITER watches him as we hear a voiceover.

(Alternately, PROKOFIEV may stand up and speak the first lines.) Music is playing:

second theme from opening movement of Miaskovsky's Symphony No. 6, [2:38-3:16 on the Kondrashin recording; same on Jarvi].

PROK (Voiceover): Dearest Miaskovsky, I send this from Paris, not knowing whether you are dead or alive. News from Russia is infrequent. At age sixty-five my mother has joined the desperate flood for Constantinople. As for me, I have quit the New World with its indifferent skyscrapers and its critics original enough to proclaim "Beethoven is a genius..."

(Enter NINA PETROVSKAYA, about forty now, walking with a pronounced limp; she is almost a cripple. She is dressed poorly and years out of fashion, wearing a long, rustling decollété dress, a large black hat with an ostrich feather and berries. She is not immediately recognizable as NINA. PROKOFIEV tips his hat to her without recognition. She nods and continues on her way. The WAITER addresses PROKOFIEV with some hesitation.)

WAITER: *Bon soir*, Monsieur Prokofiev, is everything fine?

PROK (Distractedly, still composing his letter): Yes, yes.

WAITER: The usual then?

PROK: *Oui*, the usual. I must have arrived in America too early. The infant hasn't matured to an understanding of modern art.

(The WAITER moves to a bar and prepares a drink.)

WAITER: Well, Paris is old; perhaps she can appreciate the new...(He indicates the

paper lying on the table.) What have you been doing there?

PROK: (He sighs.) Struggling with the libretto—for an opera. After all, two unperformed operas, why not a third?

WAITER: You must enjoy it to risk so much.

PROK: Enjoy? No. I've gotten tired of hearing about Stravinsky the composer and Prokofiev the pianist. I'm tired of the sassy adjectives critics are paid to coin: "witty," "delicious"—

WAITER: "Bolshevik"?

PROK: Of course. I have no interest in politics. (Sighing): But with the news from *there*, I find myself unable to write a comedy. (Indicating papers): This one should fit the bill. Of the divine there is very little; of orgies there is no end.

(The WAITER picks up the book.)

WAITER: *Eh bien*, what's it about?

(PROKOFIEV brightens a little and sits down.)

PROK: There is a knight of the 16th century, Ruprecht; at least he calls himself one. He's studied at the University of Cologne and is forever quoting famous writers and obscure alchemists. The most overeducated knight in literature. That, of course, can be remedied.

(PROKOFIEV takes his pen and crosses out a passage from the paper.)

Ruprecht throws over his studies for knightly activities: six years



campaigning in Italy and daring exploits in the West Indies.

WAITER: The usual.

PROK (Nodding): Eh, we'll skip all that. (He strikes out another passage.)

Finally Ruprecht returns to Germany. Nearing Cologne he puts up for the night at a shabby roadside inn...

(As PROKOFIEV narrates the last, enter RUPRECHT(N), dressed in 16th century garb.

He follows an INNKEEPER to a small room and pays her something; he puts down his gear, spreads his cape on the miserable bed and lies down.)

PROK: Until midnight all is quiet...

(A soft, female voice is heard uttering cries from the next room. Lights fade out on PROKOFIEV and cafe.)

VOICE: No! No! Away! Begone!

(RUPRECHT starts and sits up. Swift, urgent "demon" music fades in from Prokofiev's "Fiery Angel" symphony, [Symphony No. 3, third movement, 0:25]. It continues until RENATA calms down, below.)

VOICE: Away! Away from me!

(RUPRECHT gets up, takes his sword, walks into the corridor and faces the door.)

RUP: Milady, may I be of assistance?

VOICE: Away! Away! Back! Leave me!

RUP: Milady, I offer you the protection of my sword.

(There is no response. The cries continue. RUPRECHT tries the door. It is locked. He then breaks it open. Before him is a young woman, hair streaming, clothes in disarray, illuminated by moonlight. She sits on the floor, fending away unseen attackers with her arm. As RUPRECHT enters, the woman, RENATA(N), throws herself on her knees before him, clasping his legs.)

REN: Ruprecht! Finally you are here! I have no more strength!

RUP (Aside, puzzled): She knows me! (To RENATA): Noble lady, who is attacking you?

(RENATA does not answer. Instead she points to the corner and begins to utter cries again.)

REN: No! Begone! Leave me!

(As RUPRECHT watches, RENATA now launches into uncontrolled tremors and contortions. She stiffens, bends forward until her nose touches her toes, then backwards until the back of her head nearly touches the floor, all the while uttering strange sounds. RUPRECHT, in horror, grasps his sword by the blade and makes the sign of the cross with it in the air. The music rushes on, interrupted by sharp outcries.)

RUP: Away dark spirits!

(RENATA continues her convulsions, suddenly leaping backwards.)

RUP: *Libera me, Domine, de morte aeterna!*

(RENATA begins banging herself against the floor.)

RUP: *Vade retro, spiriti maligni! In nomine Patris, Filii e Spiritu Sancti, vade retro!*

(Now RENATA gradually calms down. Music fades out.)

RUP: Have the spirits fled, Milady?

REN (Wearily): Yes, they have fled, seeing we are well armed against them.

They cannot bend a strong will.

(She begins to sob and nearly faints onto the floor. RUPRECHT lifts her and carries her to the bed, covering her with a blanket. However, she continues to cry, then suddenly ceases and looks up at him.)

REN: Ruprecht, you have saved me. I am indebt—

(RUPRECHT cuts her off with a wave of his hand.)

RUP: Milady, I ask only the honor of knowing your name.

REN: Renata, I am Renata. (Suddenly): Ruprecht, you should know something of the one you so gallantly served—

RUP: Milady, it is not—

REN (In a sort of ecstasy): I was eight when he first appeared to me in my room on a sunbeam, an angel, a fiery angel in snow-white dress. His face shone with heavenly radiance, his eyes were blue like the skies and his hair was...as if spun from fine golden threads. His name was—Madiel.

(As RENATA(N) narrates, the scene is enacted upstage in mime by RENATA(O) and MADIEL, all ablaze. The flute solo at 0:33 of the Third Symphony's second movement

fades in and accompanies the scene. (Alternately use first movement, 11:22, the actual “Fiery Angel” theme.))

I wasn't frightened, not at all, and from that day on Madiel visited me daily. We would play with my dolls, he would tell me stories and comfort me in my tears. He was always kind and gentle, but forbade me ever to tell anyone about our secret meetings, or he would vanish forever.

I remember—sometimes would spend the night with me, like a cat, curled up on my bed until dawn, and sometimes he would carry me on his wings far from my home to show me great cathedrals and unearthly kingdoms.

He spoke about Christ the Son, about His sacrifice for our sins. In a moment of doubt, I wondered whether Madiel was the servant of the Dark One, sent to seduce me, but he then appeared to me as Christ himself, crucified, his nailed hands dripping with crimson blood, and I knew, I knew that my fiery angel was a messenger from God.

I became his disciple; for days on end I would pray, kneeling, before the Cross, and I lashed my back with knotted ropes.

When I came of age, I turned to Madiel with my fateful request: I asked to be joined with him in body, as I had long been joined with him in spirit.

Love was higher than all—he had told me so himself—and what could be sinful for two who loved each other to be joined as closely as possible?

But Madiel, his face furious, forbade me to ever think such base thoughts.

I beseeched him to spend the night with me in bed, the way we did in my childhood. He agreed, but when I embraced him and in every way tried to become one with him, he grew more wrathful than I had ever seen him.

Before my eyes he turned into a fiery pillar and ascended to heaven.

(At about this point, RENATA(O) begins singing part of the corresponding aria from the opera, [track 2, 7:30]. The two RENATAS weave their monologues together until the conclusion, below.)

For two months I cried, I begged, I prayed for my Madiel to come back but he had turned from me. Finally, one day I saw him, dressed in white, fair, radiant—Count Heinrich von Otterheim—and I knew, I knew then that Madiel had returned to earth. We met, the Count declared his love for me and carried me off to his castle on the Danube. There we lived for two years, close to angels who visited us nightly. I was happy, but Heinrich never once admitted he was my Madiel. Yes, evil forces were at work. One day, my Count was overtaken by dark thoughts and—vanished. I waited for days, weeks for him to return, but he there was no sign...and now I have gone in search of him...

RUP: In all truth, Milady, I have never heard such a story.

REN (Grabbing RUPRECHT): Ruprecht, help me find him, help me! We must

depart immediately!

RUP (Bowling): Very well, Noble lady, I am your servant.

(Exit.)

## Scene VI

The stage is divided. One part is occupied by a large salon, which can be the same set as for the New Year's party. The CAST is assembled for a literary meeting. ALYOSHA, KOLYA, VOLODYA, GIPPIUS and NINA are present. GIPPIUS again wears angel wings; NINA is tonight dressed very provocatively in a crimson gown. The other part of the stage is occupied by the editorial offices of Scorpio Publishers, circa 1901. A large desk piled with books and manuscripts dominates the center; drawings by Bakst and Benois line the walls above the filing cabinets. The furnishings are new, metal, sparkling, all in the latest art nouveau style. The lamps are electric; an electric teapot sits on the desk and a telephone hangs from the wall. Through a window scaffolding is visible.

Downstage, enter VALÉRY YÁKOVLEVICH BRYÚSOV, about 30. BRYUSOV (BRYUS) has black hair, wears a full but well-groomed beard and moustache, is dressed in an overcoat and is smoking a *papirosa*, a Russian cardboard cigarette. With every motion and gesture he gives the impression of immense, almost superhuman energy. He strides quickly, purposefully, but as if deep in thought. He pays no attention to the

meeting and walks by it altogether, just as a young POET rises.

POET<sub>1</sub>: Bryusov is leading literature into the new age. I say we follow his example.

We must learn from Edgar Poe, from Oscar Wilde...from Bryusov.

ALYOSHA (Rising): I'd like to read a poem of my own...

(A third POET detaches himself from the crowd and accosts BRYUSOV.)

POET<sub>3</sub>: V...valery Yakovlevich, can you spare a moment?

BRYUS: One; what is it?

POET<sub>3</sub>: I...I was hoping you'd be so kind as to comment on my work...if it's not...

(He hesitantly hands BRYUSOV a piece of paper.) Perhaps a position at  
your office...

(BRYUSOV quickly scans the poem.)

BRYUS: I am told the city is in need of manure collectors. Have you considered  
applying for the position?

(BRYUSOV hands back the paper and moves on toward the office door, while the POET  
stands stunned. A JOURNALIST now exits the meeting and approaches BRYUSOV.

BRYUSOV continues to walk briskly.)

JOURN: Valery Yakovlevich, for the readers of *Russian Morning*, is it true that  
Scorpio Publishers is launching a new literary journal?

BRYUS (Hardly turning): I am. I'm calling it *Libra—The Scales*. It will be the most  
modern journal in Russia. Stories, poetry, criticism by the best writers of

the new generation. Translations from French, German, Eng—

JOURN: Who will translate?

BRYUS (As if stating the obvious): I will.

JOURN: But do you expect competition from *The World of Art*?

BRYUS: No. Diaghilev has asked me to contribute.

(They approach the office door. As BRUYSOV unlocks it, the  
phone begins to ring. )

Excuse me, I believe I have the only telephone in Moscow.

(He enters, slamming the door in the JOURNALIST's face, then answers  
the phone. As he talks, he takes off his coat and scarf.)

*Allo...Govorit Bryusov...Of course Libra will be a decadent journal. No  
politics, no socialism, no communism will weigh down my Scales....Do I  
consider myself the leader of the decadents? Vel caeco appareat [wel kí-koh  
ahp-páh-ray-aht.]...I intend that by the time the Apocalypse arrives my  
place in the history of Russian literature shall have been secured....*

Yes. I would say this cycle of my life has given me too much happiness  
and success. I have succeeded in almost everything that I have begun. Tell  
your readers to watch for the new poetry series I'm editing...*Northern  
Flowers...If you'll excuse—Yes, I believe with time, spiritual forces will be  
thoroughly studied and may even find application in technology, like*



steam and electricity....Do I believe Baradyuk has succeeded in  
photographing thoughts? I'm willing to consider it...*Pozháluysta..*

(He hangs up, then slowly places his coat and scarf on a chair. He sighs, resting his  
hands on the desk. He closes his eyes and recites to himself.)

My soul is a sunken tomb.

Fleeting encounters, and vows, and passionate words.

And there is no one to know all that was,

This momentary quiver of hours lived by me.

(He sits down, covering his face with his hands. There is a knock on the door.)

BRYUS: *Entrez!*

(Enter BALMONT. Not drunk, but disheveled, tired and unhappy, he sits down  
heavily without taking off his coat, absently picks up a few items and examines them.)

BAL: The smell of wet plaster assaults the nostrils, half the hotel *Metropole* is still  
under construction, the public is barred from entry, and Valery Bryusov  
has managed the most civilized office in Moscow.

BRYUS: Where have you been, Mont? You vanish for weeks on end and suddenly  
reappear—

BAL: —like an ancient troubador...(He grunts.) If you must know, I was  
supposed to visit Nina Petrovskaya last night, but instead went to a whore  
house. Not that I did anything.

BRYUS: Who?

BAL: Petrovskaya? Krechetov's wife. You don't know her?

(BRYUSOV shakes his head.)

BRYUS: Still cavorting, like we used to. Ah, Mont, I miss those days. When everything was before us. When the world sparkled. Taverns until dawn, women, drinking bouts that lasted days, bitter arguments. What happened, Mont?

BAL (Seriously): You grew up.

BRYUS: Mont, we swore brotherhood to each other. You, *you* know that my youth was the youth of genius. I lived, I acted so that only great deeds can justify my behavior. They must take place soon or I will be ridiculous.

BAL (Dryly): Of course.... (He picks up something.) So Diaghilev has invited you to contribute to *The World of Art*.

BRYUS: Yes.

BAL (Ironically): "The wave wafts me will-lessly upward."

BRYUS: Endlessly....What's wrong, Mont?

BAL: Nothing, nothing at all.

(BRYUSOV waits, crossing his arms high across his chest.)

BAL: They've searched my apartment.

BRYUS (Sternly): It's that poem of yours, isn't it? "The Little Sultan."

(BALMONT nods.)

What did you expect? It hadn't been passed by the censor...

(POET<sub>4</sub> at the meeting stands and recites.)

POET<sub>4</sub>: In the name of liberty and faith and science,  
There once gathered disciples of ideas.  
But against them — wills unleashed by ferocious passions —  
Charged headlong the Sultan's troops.

(Phantom horsemen surge through the air above the stage.)

BRYUS: Do you think anyone, *anyone* believed you were talking about Turkish horsemen in one of your fairy tales, and not the Tsar's cossacks beating up students in Petersburg?

BAL (Chastened): No. (With exasperation): The Devil take me, I don't care. The cossacks massacred four hundred Jews in Kishinyóv over Easter while the police looked on. Gorky's in jail. How can I stand by?

BRYUS (Gravely): Stand by, or they'll revoke your residency permit.

(BALMONT laughs, then guffaws.)

You find it funny.

BAL: Infinitely. In most countries they ignore poets, in this country they shoot them..(He continues to laugh.) Revoke my residency permit, the great vagabond! My sweater is more useful.

(They fall silent.)

Valery the Great, you are unhappy.

BRYUS: Unhappy? Not at all. I feel strangely exhausted, as if my inspiration has deserted me. So I occupy myself with all this... Since Cologne I've had the idea for a novel, *The Witch* or the *Witches' Hammer*. I don't know; it refuses to take form...

BAL: Remember Pushkin.

BRYUS (Nodding): A poet must be reborn; he must meet at the crossroads an angel who will pierce his breast with a sword and put there, in place of his heart, a burning coal. Until that happens, you must drag yourself through the barren desert.

(As BALMONT nods, a knock at the office door.)

BRYUS: *Entrez!*

(Enter BB, very shyly. He bows contritely as he notices BALMONT, who does not rise.)

BB: Ah, Balmont. My apologies, Valery Yakovlevich, I see you have important company. Konstantin Dmitrievich, people are reciting your "Little Sultan" everywhere.

BAL (Soberly): I know.

BRYUS (With some condescension): To whom do I have the honor..?

BAL: You don't know your own author? (Offhandedly): Allow me to present

Boris Nikolaevich Bugaev—Andrei Bely.

BRYUS (Neutrally): Ah!

(He extends his hand, but BB is so busy bowing that he doesn't take it.)

BB: Valery Yakovlevich, it is I who have the honor...Since my days in the gymnasium I have seen you brilliantly everywhere—but never summoned the courage to introduce myself. You have singlehandedly revived Russian poetry. How you have changed my life, the life of an entire generation! “I am the Tsar of earthly tsars—I am Esarhaddon! To you, sovereigns and lords, I say—woe!” Yes! For months I have wanted to thank you for publishing my *Dramatic Symphony*. My exams you see—

BRYUS: (Raising his hand for BB to stop. I was pleased Scorpio could publish your Symphony, even if we couldn't pay for it.

BB: Yes, yes. Valery Yakovlevich, if I may be so bold, I believe your name will stand beside those of Pushkin and Lermontov in the annals of Russian poetry.

(POET<sub>1</sub> rises at the meeting as Esarhaddon is seen with his arms raised on a pyramid of skulls.)

POET<sub>1</sub>: I have drunk you to the dregs, earthly glory!

And now I stand alone, by greatness intoxicated,

I am the Tsar of earthly tsars—I am Esarhaddon!

BRYUS: Boris Nikolaevich, your *Dramatic Symphony* has been a tremendous success. You are of course aware of my opinion of it.

BB: No, Valery Yakovlevich...

BAL: He praises it.

BRYUS (Reluctantly): The *Dramatic Symphony* is a step toward the literature of the future.

BAL: A significant step.

BRYUS (Beat): A proposition: We Scorpions are launching a new journal, *Libra*. I'd like you to join my editorial staff, if you are not too occupied with chemistry.

BB: Valery Yakovlevich—

BRYUS: I consider the offer accepted. Good. And please come to one of the Tuesday evenings, where the most idiotic orators receive the most applause. I want to introduce you to your public.

BB (Still in shock): At your earliest convenience.

(The three rise, gather their coats. BB turns to BALMONT.)

BB: Perhaps in the future there will be no chemistry, no science. People will come to the sea and compose a song about the sea. In place of science there will be a very detailed song.

BAL: I like that.

(They enter “the” meeting. By this time “the” meeting has nearly broken up and people are on their feet, talking to each other. Someone is at the piano playing Debussy’s *Claire de Lune*. As BRYUSOV, BALMONT and BB enter, POET<sub>1</sub> rises.)

POET<sub>1</sub>:       Who will surpass me? Who will equal me?

                  The deeds of all compared to mine are but shadows of mad dreams.

                  Desires of conquest rise no higher than children’s games.

(The GUESTS applaud. BRYUSOV nods.)

POET<sub>2</sub>:        Balmont! The Little Sultan!

(BALMONT declines with a wave of his hand. Several WOMEN attach themselves to BRYUSOV and BALMONT with books to autograph. BRYUSOV waves everyone quiet.)

BRYUS:        Allow me to introduce the most interesting man in Russia— Andrei Bely.

(Applause. BB is surrounded by friends. NINA, eyes fixated on him, circles from afar.)

BB:            My Argonauts, tonight we set sail!

(BRYUSOV speaks to a few young admirers as he autographs books.)

BRYUS:        Bakst is designing the logo for the journal...No, Diaghilev is too much of a baby. Bely, on the other hand is a major figure, exhibiting maturity and even a senility of mind, along with a strange youthfulness. I expect him to be my lieutenant at Scorpio.

(ALYOSHA, who holds a book in his hand, is talking to GIPPIUS.)

GIPPIUS: No, darling, I don't have the slightest idea of what goes behind the doors of the church. That's what we're trying to find out. It's essential for us to talk to the clergy.

ALYOSHA: You've heard the news?

(GIPPIUS cocks her head.)

They've excommunicated Tolstoy.

GIPPIUS: So, it comes. And my point is proven. We must talk. Diaghilev, Bakst, Benoit, they're all with us. We must find a third way; the Third Testament that will proclaim the Kingdom of the Third Humanity. We seek new forms, a new death, a new resurrection.

ALYOSHA (Nodding): Do you know that Bryusov has dedicated a poem to you in his latest collection?

GIPPIUS: Yes, I supplied him the rhythm, although he didn't get it quite right.

ALYOSHA (Reciting):

In unshakable Truth,  
I have long since ceased to believe,  
All seas, all safe havens  
I love with equanimity.  
My ship is to sail freely every ocean,  
Both God and the Devil



I intend to glorify.

GIPPIUS: Why not? When you love only yourself, what difference does it make whether you worship God or Satan?

(NINA advances toward BB purposely, as if she intends to strike him. All eyes turn toward her.)

VOLODYA (Extending his hand): Nina Ivanovna, so good to see you again.

(NINA hardly glances at him and passes BALMONT.)

BAL: Nina Ivanovna, forgive me for not calling on you as I promised. An emergency...

(NINA remains fixated on BB.)

NINA (Coldly): It's quite all right.

BAL: Perhaps this evening...?

(She doesn't answer.)

BRYUS: (To BAL): Who is she?

BAL: (Grabbing NINA by the arm): The very Nina Petrovskaya you have managed not to meet. Nina Ivanovna, may I introduce—

(She glances at BRYUSOV as if startled and curtsies. BRYUSOV takes her hand.)

BRYUS (Bending slightly): My rival's wife?

NINA (A little flustered, as if coming out of a trance): You have no rivals, Valery Yakovlevich.

BRYUS: None that I know of. Allow me to present Andrei Bely—

NINA (Somewhat coldly): We've met.

BRYUS: Really?

(BB is about to speak but is interrupted by GIPPIUS, who addresses ALYOSHA, intending not to be overheard.)

GIPPIUS: What do men see in that talentless little slut?

(ALYOSHA is taken aback. BALMONT answers.)

BAL: No one would expect an androgenous snake such as yourself to understand, Zinochka, but mark my words, hers is the poetry of the age, not yours, not mine.

(NINA has overheard GIPPIUS, faces her, then breaks out in scornful laughter.)

NINA (To BB): Would you be so kind as to escort me home, Boris Nikolaevich? It's getting late.

BB (Bowing, with a glance at GIPPIUS): With pleasure.

NINA (To BRYUSOV, smiling, with a glance at GIPPIUS): Valery Yakovlevich, I hope someday to have the honor of hearing your poetry from your own lips.

BRYUS: The honor would be mine.

(For a moment, BRYUSOV, BB and NINA stand, staring at each other. Then BB and

NINA exit, arm-in-arm. BALMONT stares after them. Lights on the crowd fade out as

the poets continue talking.)

Scene VII

Immediately after the previous. A Moscow street. It is now dark and streetlamps are lit. Enter BB and NINA. BB is almost prancing, several steps ahead of NINA.

NINA: Gippius! (She laughs sarcastically.) Who can call that drivel poetry? What is her mysterious Third Way, the Third Kingdom? Can anyone understand it? So full of herself, the High Priestess of literature —

BB: The role suits her —

NINA: And Balmont! (Too seriously, colored by irony): “We shall be like the sun!” Like a gong it sounds—

BB (Trying to get a word in edgewise): Yes—

NINA: It has become our national motto. “Be the incarnation of unexpected dreams!” (Abruptly): I love Balmont’s poetry. Years ago I never would have dared imagine that I would meet him—*you*, the great writers of the age! (She suddenly halts.) Save me! Save me from Balmont’s vanity! I’ll die if I must bear it any longer!

BB: Come, don’t be harsh. His is an innocent soul, though I can hardly separate the man from all the legends. Has he really just returned from Tasmania?

Bryusov...I can't believe I have met Bryusov, *him!* He strikes me somehow as a madman strapped in a frock coat.

NINA: He is so cold, cold as ice. (Suddenly laughing): They say he eats sugared violets—

BB: At night he plunders burial vaults—

NINA: By day he turns into a faun and frolics with goats in Moscow pastures. He must hate me.

BB: Hate you, why? He doesn't even know you.

NINA: My husband is the head of Gryphon Publishing.

BB: So you are the Gryphoness.

(The shadow of a gryphon leaps across the stage.)

NINA: Yes...Not that my husband stands as tall as Bryusov's ankles.

BB: Then he doesn't see you.

NINA: No. (Suddenly, as if remembering she is angry at BB): Boris Nikolaevich, what happened to you? I waited one hundred years for you to call on me.

BB: Again my apologies—the university. But now I am free of it.

NINA: What do you plan to do, Boris Nikolaevich?

BB: I don't entirely know. This new year, this new century has dawned so brightly for me. A whole year of dawns, yes! I have made new friends; my strength is growing, I feel strong, physically strong; the biography of

Andrei Bely has begun; I have been recognized by Bryusov, Balmont, Gippius, Merezhovsky; I feel a harmony between life and my world view...And yet...

I am the intersection of many things: music above all, poetry, prose, philosophy. But one without the others—empty. How to reconcile all of them? I don't know. Will I become a magician, a poet, a novelist, a composer, or even a scientist? I don't know. I know only that a strength beats in my breast. I see the future as a great keyboard and on it I will compose my song of life, my symphony.

(NINA is struck dumb by the foregoing.)

NINA: You are beautiful, a chord struck by the heavens.

BB: Yes, our life-song is just beginning. Our spirits are like lost Eurydices. Orpheus is calling his Eurydice.

NINA: But you have warned that the Apocalypse is approaching.

BB: Yes, yes, can you not feel it? The final battle is about to be fought between the Great Whore and the Woman Who is Clothed With the Sun.

(The Blessed Damoiselle glides across the sky on the wings of an eagle.)

Sacred days are upon us....(He points upward.) Look, the Milky Way—

NINA: “—shining with past youth and dreams beyond recall.” Who will win the final battle, Boris Nikolaevich?

BB: I don't know. I am certain only that music is the highest art, that the words of Christ, the apostles, the prophets, were magic, that the magic has been lost, that humankind is enduring a crisis, and that after the battle a new universal age will begin. If the Woman Clothed With the Sun triumphs it will be because love is higher than all, love of Christ, love between sisters and brothers, love of mystery, the great mystery.

(NINA is again stunned.)

NINA (Softly): Andrei—the first Russian saint; Bely—white—

BB: The color of the Apocalypse.

NINA: Pure, clean, untainted. Your friends will follow you anywhere, I think, your Argonauts, Andrei Bely.

BB: Yes, we will find our Golden Fleece, I feel it, I know it...What about you, Nina Ivanovna? You write, don't you?

(NINA grows dark.)

NINA (Sarcastically): Yes, I write. (She laughs.) Every poem or story I start breaks off in the middle. I don't know why. I can't finish anything.

BB (Stretching out his hand): Nina Ivanovna...

NINA: I can tell you this, can't I? Until now, this year...Each day from morning to night I am (she looks about hopelessly)—the feeling of complete, utter uselessness. Nothing ripens, nothing is compl—. At night I walk home

alone and stare into emptiness...absolute despair. It all seems—. To live one day—for what? To wake up the next and begin again this nonexistence...

BB: Nina Ivanovna, let me help—

NINA: No! A new age has dawned, hasn't it? (She laughs.) This year is already different. I feel it. I am beginning the poem of my life, "The incarnation of unexpected dreams!"

BB: Yes, yes, it's true. "From my poor and accidental life, I created ripples that spread far and wide." To be sure a life-poem is a higher art than miserable verses set down on paper.

NINA: Perhaps you will compose music to it.

BB: Perhaps I will.

(They stop in front of a door just as a phrase of excruciatingly beautiful Russian choral music floats over them. [Konstantin Shvedov, Liturgy of St. John of Chrysostom for mixed chorus, track 9, 0:36]. NINA looks up in wonder.)

NINA: Do you hear that?

BB: From the church?

NINA: Yes. I can't imagine anything more beautiful. It's like a chorus of angels crying for the world. It is so beautiful the pain pierces your heart.

(They listen for a moment. NINA's face is upturned with tears streaming down it.)

Then she turns to BB.)

NINA: This is my home, Boris Nikolaevich. I expect you to call on me soon.

BB: I will be happy to, Nina Ivanovna. Good-night.

(BB takes her hand and exits. Enter TWO PASSERS-BY. NINA abruptly walks up to them and speaks in a confrontational manner.)

NINA: Who are you?

(The PASSERS-BY quickly walk off. NINA, pauses, turns walks to her door, opens it and enters the house. Fadeout.)

### Scene VIII

A dark, smoky room inside a log house. Dark red cloth hangs from the rafters, a fire burns in the oven. A wooden table stands in the center; on it is a bowl with water and other containers with herbs, roots etc.. At the table sits a very old, wrinkled FORTUNE TELLER (FT), who wears a red kerchief, necklaces and a large shirt decorated with crosses and horns. Enter RUPRECHT(N) and RENATA(N), led by a SERVANT. RENATA heads straight for the FORTUNE TELLER, as if drawn to her.

SERVANT: Are you on your way to Cologne?

RUP: Yes, but the fame of this sorceress has spread across Germany and Milady wishes her fortune told. In my travels I have seen many such, and I am not sure that their "sista, rista, pista, xista's," ten times over, are any more than



superstitious old women trying to relieve their pains.

FT: So, beautiful ones, what have you come to learn from grandmother? We've no warm beds here. But don't worry, everyone's turn finally comes. There was a time for strawberries and there will be a time for apples. Tell your fortune, my little dove?

(RENATA nods. The FORTUNE TELLER cracks open an egg and drops the whites into the bowl of water. As she speaks RUPRECHT cannot hide his skepticism.)

FT: I see a road, my children, but not a long one. Where you are going—go; there you will find the fulfillment of your desires. One strong man, yes strong, will try to separate you but you are joined by a strap at the waist. A warm bed awaits you, my beautiful ones.

RUP (Waving his hand in disgust): Aah.

FT: Here my sweet bird, take these herbs, this grass. It's good grass, only once a year does she flower, on midsummer's eve.

(RENATA and RUPRECHT move closer to take the herbs. Suddenly the FORTUNE TELLER becomes agitated and her eyes grow wide. She grabs RUPRECHT's sleeve, then hisses like a snake. )

FT: What is this I see! Blood on your coat, blood! (She grabs RENATA's sleeve.) Blood everywhere! Rivers of blood!

RUP: (Tearing himself away): Away witch! Or I'll run your accursed body

through like a toad!

FT: Blood! Blood!

(RENATA begins screaming and runs out. The SERVANT strikes the FORTUNE TELLER and knocks her over. RUPRECHT runs after RENATA, grabbing her outside the house.)

RUP: Think nothing of it, Noble Lady, I have seen many such imposters. I knew of a youth, whose death a seer foretold to the day and hour, and to avoid his fate, the boy killed himself.

(Exit RUPRECHT and RENATA. Simultaneously, lights fade up on the corresponding scene from the opera [CD1, track 5]. To some eerie music the FORTUNE TELLER is chanting, "Sista, pista, sista, rista..." as RENATA(O) and RUPRECHT(O) look on. The scene continues in much the same way as above, but with different dialogue and the addition of a LANDLADY; it ends in a similar uproar. If the scene is cut at about 3:05, where RUPRECHT and RENATA run out and the FORTUNE TELLER sings, "Blood, blood, blood," some superfluous lines can be eliminated. )

### Scene IX

Fade in on a séance. The room is dark, four SITTERS are gathered around a table, including BRYUSOV. (SITTERS 1 and 3 are women, 2 is a man.) On a nearby couch lies a medium, HÉLÉNE, who is in a trance. At the start, she is murmuring softly

and monotonously, almost unintelligibly, somewhat like RENATA at the opening of Prokofiev's *Fiery Angel*, though more slowly. Swift, agitated electronic music by Iannis Xenakis is playing [*Hibiki-Hana-Ma*, opening]. It seems to race around the room from one corner to the other.

HÉLÉNE: I feel you, I feel you, you are here, Elimir, you have come, you are with me,  
you are with me, I feel you, you are here, you are here, you are here...

(Suddenly, there are three sharp knocks. The SITTERS start. SITTER2 bolts to his feet and BRYUSOV pulls him down.)

HÉLÉNE: Elimir, you are with me, I know it, you have told us, I feel your presence,  
you have come, you are beside me—

(Three sharp knocks. Again the SITTERS start. A wind blows through the room, causing the lights to flicker. HÉLÉNE continues murmuring. In the midst of the agitation, SITTER1 speaks.)

HÉLÉNE: I feel you with me, Elimir, I feel you entering me, you are entering me, we  
are becoming one...

SITTER1: Spirit, if you have come as a friend, knock again thrice.

(Three sharp knocks. The SITTERS calm down a little.)

SITTER3 (Anxiously): Elimir, can you tell me what has happened to my departed  
husband, Gregorii Fyodor'ich?

(No response. HÉLÉNE continues murmuring.)

HÉLÉNE: Elimir, Elimir, my beloved, I am with you, we are one, we are joined unto  
eternity...

SITTER<sub>1</sub>: Knock twice, if no.

(Two knocks.)

SITTER<sub>3</sub> (Alarmed): You know nothing of Gregorii Fyodorovich? Nothing?

(Three knocks.)

What do you mean, nothing or something?

(Two knocks.)

(To HÉLÉNE, with mounting hysteria): What does he mean? Tell me, what  
does he mean?

SITTER<sub>1</sub>: Spirit, do you know something of her husband?

(Suddenly, a whole clatter of knocks. All the SITTERS jump to their feet, except  
BRYUSOV.)

SITTER<sub>2</sub>: This demon is playing tricks!

SITTER<sub>1</sub>: Sprit, are you Elimir?

(Suddenly, HÉLÉNE rises, and speaks in a completely different voice. The SITTERS are  
terrified, even to some extent BRYUSOV, who watches in amazement.)

HÉLÉNE: *Elimir, Elimir, pater nash quesque in caleix sanctificetus nomine tume; adventitur  
regna tume, regna tume, fiat voluntare tua sistus in terra, regna tume, regnea  
tume, fiat voluntare, tu sistus in terrus, sistus fiat, sistus fiat, libera nos,*

*gosposzhe, libera nos, libera nos, malo, malo, malo...*

SITTER<sub>1</sub> (In astonishment): Elimir?

(SITTER<sub>3</sub> nearly collapses. BRYUSOV helps her to a chair. HÉLÉNE collapses on the couch. The others bring her a glass of water. The lights gradually come up. The music fades out. HÉLÉNE comes to.)

SITTER<sub>1</sub>: Hélène, where did you learn to speak Latin?

HÉLÉNE: I have never spoken Latin, not a word.

(The others gasp at the revelation.)

BRYUS: Even a schoolchild could recite the Pater Noster in that hash of mangled Latin, garbled Italian and Biblical Russian.

SITTER<sub>1</sub>: You don't believe her?

BRYUS: I believe I have just witnessed something amazing. That is what I believe. Now, Ladies, Gentlemen, I must be on my way. I have several pressing engagements. If you'll excuse me.

(Exit BRYUSOV. He walks directly into a bookstore where a sign reads OCCULT BOOKS. There he encounters NINA, who is dressed like a gypsy and perusing a book. BRYUSOV watches her for a moment, trying to remember who she is. She remains oblivious. He then shrugs and moves toward a shelf and bumps a chair. NINA jumps.)

NINA: Valery Yakovlevich. You startled me.

BRYUS: My apologies.

NINA: Why are you—?

BRYUS: (Glancing toward door): I was just up the street at a spiritualist session.  
I'm doing research for a book...Uh, remind me of your name.

NINA: Petrovskaya, Nina Ivanovna. (She stares at him intently.)

BRYUS: Ah yes, the Grypho<sup>n</sup>ess. You have an interest in these matters?

NINA: Who can live without them? Last night, Valery Yakovlevich, I dreamt of faces in a whirlpool, masked faces, all in carnival masks, all swirling in glittering black. All gasping for breath and drowning.

BRYUS: A vivid dream to be sure.

(The bookstore recedes until the two seem suspended alone in space.)

NINA: It was more than a dream. I watched it, as if from outside. I am sure there must be another dimension. (Quickly, intensely): Do you believe that Baradyuk can photograph thoughts?

BRYUS: It is possible.

NINA (Swiftly): Valery Yakovlevich, of all today's writers, you come closest to me. These dark mysteries, physical love, science, only Bryusov dares...For years I wanted to meet you, but your existence seemed...legendary, like some magician in a distant, ivory tower. (A pause.) They call you the Mag—

BRYUS (Laughing slightly, but pleased): I've heard.

NINA: But you believe?

BRYUS: I believe art is the comprehension of the world by other, unrational paths. When an artist perceives truth, he experiences what religious people call a revelation. The creation of art is an opening of doors to Eternity.

NINA (Not a question): You do believe in the other dimension.

BRYUS: I don't know. At the spiritualist sessions, I sometimes experience a sensation of trance and clairvoyance. You must understand, I am a rational man, possessed by reason to such a degree that those instants, those rare instants which tear me away from life are like...gems glittering in the dark. I don't know why I'm telling you this, Nina Ivanovna, but it is true.

NINA: You are writing a book?

BRYUS: Not yet. I'm gathering material.

NINA: What is it about? Don't hold back, tell me.

BRYUS: I don't know exactly. I know only that it will take place in medieval Germany, in Cologne, and touch on spiritual matters, witchcraft. I haven't found a plot yet, or the characters. It's very difficult.

NINA: Valery Yakovlevich, it must be a masterpiece. It will be a masterpiece. You are the Mag.

BRYUS: I suppose I am. And you are a gypsy.

NINA (Glancing at herself): Tonight, yes. I felt a compulsion. (She begins to

dance.) Do you follow your compulsions, Valery Yakovlevich?

BRYUS: Were I a true decadent I would, but as I said, I am a rational man. (He checks a pocket watch.) I see I have tarried too long. Nina Ivanovna, it has been delightful. Good-evening.

NINA: Good-evening, Valery Yakovlevich. We shall see each other again?

BRYUS: If that is what fate has in store. Now, once again, *spokóinoi nochi*.

(Exit BRYUSOV. NINA continues to dance as the lights come up momentarily on the cafe, where the WAITER is reading the novel and PROKOFIEV is working on the libretto.)

WAITER: M Prokofiev, can you tell me how the novel ends?

PROK: It ends as all Russian novels end.

(Enter the older NINA as before. PROKOFIEV tips his hat, again without recognition.

Exit NINA. The lights fade out.)

End Act I



## Act II

### Scene I

Nina Petrovskaya's apartment. It gives the impression of being cut off from the rest of the world. According to Bely's memoirs, a heavy carpet lies on floor; the furniture is orange-brown, covered with spots; heavy drapes hang over the windows and doors. There is also a writing desk with discarded scraps of paper lying about. The wallpaper has lotuses on it and a portrait hangs near one corner. The whole is permeated by bright red reflections and shadows thrown from a lamp with a red silk shade.

The lights are down as the dialogue begins. A conversation between NINA and BB has evidently been going on for some time. NINA is heard laughing.

NINA: Can you imagine living side-by-side with real centaurs? Or winged horses? What means of transportation they would provide! We could dispense with ordinary coaches and carriages!

BB: Real centaurs? How often must I say it? Of course they're real!

(NINA laughs.)

One doesn't have to imagine them, Nina Ivanovna. They speak to us; they imagine themselves.

NINA: They write calling cards?

BB: They have called to us throughout the ages.

(Images of mythological animals flash across the darkened stage.)

NINA: The world is full of magic to you, Boris Nikolaevich. You see it where the rest of us...

BB: Yes, yes, magic must be restored to our lives. Each day I become more convinced it is possible.

NINA: Show me, Boris Nikolaevich; allow me to see what you see.

(The lights go up. Wine glasses are scattered around the apartment. NINA is revealed wearing a black cassock with a large wooden cross and rosaries. She reclines on the divan watching BB, who is flying about the room dressed in an identical costume. The Fiery Angel theme is heard.)

BB: Magic is everywhere, in everything. This lampshade casts a strange, mysterious light. Who knows what it means? What gates does it open? This inkwell, full of cigarette butts, what passions, frustrations has it witnessed, hidden in these crumbled wads of paper? These drapes, so dark, so heavy, are they guarding the secret altar of some ancient priestess? The rug, so deep, so soft, what winged animals have graced it nightly, nuzzling each others' breasts for warmth?

(He sits down cross legged on the rug. NINA claps.)

NINA: Bravo, Boris Nikolaevich, you might restore one's faith in life.

BB: Nina Ivanovna, each of us strives for spiritual unity, for the Ultimate, but

how are we to attain it? I don't know. I do know that the Sun is calling us and all we see are its spots. We say to ourselves, "We do not exist," when the Sun is saying to us, "You are." We are, Nina Ivanovna. You are.

NINA: Thank you, Boris Nikolaevich. (She leans close to him.)

BB (Ignoring her): Solovyov put it best. (He raises his arms to the sky and recites):

All that was and is, and ever shall be  
My steadfast gaze embraced it all in one  
The sea and rivers sparkled blue beneath me,  
And distant woods, and mountains clad in snow.  
I saw it all, and all was one fair image  
of woman's beauty, holding all as one,  
The boundless was within its form enclosed  
Before me and in me is you alone.

(NINA clasps her hands together in delight and gazes  
ecstatically at BB. BB stands.)

Solovyov *understood*. We must unite our experience of Christ with that of Sophia, the incarnation of wisdom. She is the breath of God and the pure outpouring of the glory of the Almighty.

NINA (Standing): Christ is in you, Boris Nikolaevich. Christ is in us.

(She offers him a glass. He takes it and turns slightly away.)

BB: We must love.

NINA: Yes, we must!

BB: We must love Christ. Love of Christ, love of mystery, is the purest, highest form of love.

NINA: Nothing is higher.

(She walks to the window. BB watches her, takes a step in her direction, halts.)

BB: When the Woman Clothed With the Sun has defeated the Great Whore, we will experience the boundless, mystical love of Christ.

(NINA parts the drapes and gazes out the window.)

NINA: I love the moonlight, how the rays stream downward like petals from a heavenly flower. My spirit overflows with love, intoxicated.

(BB pauses and stares at her for a moment.)

BB: Nina Ivanovna, I hear you quoting Balmont. Has he been here?

NINA: You're quite mistaken, Boris Nikolaevich. Why would I have Balmont here?

BB: I...I wouldn't know.

NINA: Balmont is a conceited ass. How many times must I say it? Hardly better than Gippius. "My husband and I have decided..." And Bryusov...

BB: Nina Ivanovna, don't. Bryusov is a great man, my teacher—

NINA: Hah! Do you think so, Boris Nikolaevich dear? He is trying to destroy me.

BB: Destroy you? How? I don't understand.

NINA: He hates my husband.

BB: I hardly think so. Avoid him if you must.

NINA: But I don't know Bryusov.

BB: Then how can he be trying to destroy you?

NINA: I feel him—God, I am a hateful woman...(Suddenly shrieking): I am a talentless whore! He is punishing me...my spiteful...I don't..I...

(She bursts into sobs and runs to the couch. BB puts his arms around her shoulders and tries to comfort her.)

BB: Ah, Nina Ivanovna, what demons haunt your soul? How can I help you?

NINA: (Between sobs): Save me! God, save me, I am in Hell.

BB: Nina, Nina, please...

NINA: (Whispering): Save me, oh save me...

(BB sits there with his arms around her. After some time she ceases her sobbing, and looks up with an angelic smile on her face and speaks in a voice filled with almost childlike wonder.)

NINA: Do you hear it?

BB (Puzzled): No, what?

NINA: Singing. Beautiful singing.

BB: From the church? (He gets up and goes to the window, listens.) No, I don't hear anything, Nina Ivanovna.

NINA (Standing): How wonderful! I cannot imagine anything more beautiful. Listen to it!

BB (Gravely): There is nothing, Nina Ivanovna, nothing at all.

NINA: It's so fine, like a chorus of angels...a whole universe of light!

(As we hear music from the Prokofiev Violin Concerto No 1, first movement [7:55], BB watches her for a few moments, but she pays no attention to him as she gazes upward. He gathers his coat and exits as the stage darkens and is filled with shimmering. )

## Scene II

The next day. Bryusov's office at Scorpio Publishers. BRYUSOV is at the desk, working. Enter BB, haggard and weary, smoking a cigarette. BRYUSOV, catching sight of him, stands and ushers him in. The Passacaglia from Shostakovich's Violin Concerto No. 1 is heard, at the violin entrance [1:57].

BRYUS: Boris Nikolaevich, what has happened?

BB (Shaking his head): It's Nina Ivanovna, you remember her? Krechetov's wife.

BRYUS: Of course.

BB: I don't know what to do; I am at a complete loss. (He collects his

thoughts.) How is it possible that this poor girl, this girl who lays her arm under her head and curls up on the divan like a little ball, who dreams for hours of good and ordinary things—how is it possible that suddenly and without warning...

BRYUS: Suddenly and without warning what?

BB: I can hardly describe it. One minute she is in tears, the next...rapture... Last night she heard singing...

BRYUS: Really? Did you?

BB (To himself): I'm exhausted.

BRYUS: My advice, Boris Nikolaevich, is to avoid her. Here, I have some submissions for you to look over, from Gippius.

BB: I can't. I can't avoid her. She needs me.

BRYUS: Are you certain?

BB: I can help her, I am sure of it. I am leading her to Christ.

BRYUS: To Christ? Because she changes moods at the snap of a finger? Women are like that, or haven't you noticed at your tender age?

BB: Valery Yakovlevich, you don't understand. This is...not ordinary. Her soul is torn to shreds. I so pity her.

BRYUS: Pity? I don't believe in unrequited pity. What do you want her for?

BB: I fail to take your meaning, Valery Yakovlevich. My motives are pure. She

needs me. Beyond all *that*, she is good, I know it, I feel it. She deserves me.

BRYUS: Deserves the light, the new prophet.

(BB remains silent.)

Boris Nikolaevich, I was hardly exaggerating that evening when I introduced you as the most interesting man in Russia. No one admires you more than I. I learn your poems by heart. As this year has rushed by I find myself looking forward to our meetings with eager anticipation. You have become indispensable to me...

BB: I'm grateful for those sentiments, Valery Yakovlevich, and be sure, they are reciprocated.

BRYUS: But take care that the prophet of light does not stumble into darkness...*Also* [German], we must send the first issue of *Libra* over to the censor. Can you do that?

BB (A little distractedly): Yes, yes, of course.

BRYUS: Good. Ah, I nearly forgot, Gippius wants you to contribute to the first issue of her *New Way*. Perhaps your thoughts about new gods and new religions. Are you interested?

BB (Still unfocused): Of course, Valery Yakovlevich, I can start immediately.

BRYUS: She can't pay a kopek.

BB: She pays all in honor...I'll take the proofs over now to the censor's office...I



may be not be back today; I should stop by Nina Ivanova's and see that she is all right. (He turns to the door then halts.) Valery Yakovlevich, do you think it possible for a person to be so carried away on the winds of the age that...

BRYUS: That?

BB: She loses herself, somehow, somewhere.

BRYUS: Lost souls are lost in any age.

BB: I suppose that is true.

BRYUS (To himself): Lost and damned.

(BB opens the door and brushes past BALMONT, who is just about to enter.

BALMONT, dressed in a coat, puts a suitcase down by the door.)

BB (Distractedly): Excuse me, Konstantin Dmitrievich.

BAL (Grabbing him, seriously): What's your hurry, Nikolai'ich?

BRYUS: Ah, Mont, come in. Young Bugaev here has decided to save Nina Petrovskaya. She has become his disciple.

BAL (With barely detectable skepticism): Ah.

BRYUS: Is something wrong, Mont? You're dressed to travel.

BAL (Dead-panning): I've been riding the first tram in Moscow. A marvel of technology. The future is here.

BRYUS: Mont.

BAL (He pauses.): They've revoked my residency permit.

BB (Now focused): What!

BRYUS: So, finally, it comes.

BAL (Without exaggeration): In the name of the Emperor, Tsar of all the Russias etcetera etcetera, the subversive poet Konstantin Dmitrievich Balmont is banned from the capitals for two years. He has come to say *au revoir*.

BB: You can't mean it!

BAL: Don't take it so seriously, Boris Nikolaevich. I've been longing for Paris anyway. I intend to get drunk, wildly drunk, and the two of you are going to get drunk with me.

BRYUS (Nodding): Excellent idea, we'll put Bugaev out of his misery.

(He takes a black cloak from the wall and adorns it, then ushers the others out.)

BAL: By the way, have you heard? The Minister of Education has been assassinated.

BRYUS (With more surprise than interest): Really?

(Exit.)

### Scene III

The cafe. PROKOFIEV is standing and the WAITER is studying the novel.

Enter the older NINA, dressed as she was earlier. As before PROKOFIEV tips his hat

without recognition. Exit NINA.

WAITER: Do you know who she is, M Prokofiev?

PROK: No, she lives in the area, that's all—a neighbor. I see her from time to time.

WAITER: I wonder what happened to her. She seems in bad shape, too old for her years...somehow...

PROK: Yes?

WAITER: ...of the wrong time. Her clothes, they are at least ten years out of fashion.

PROK: *Vraiment*, that hat with its berries looks a bit ridiculous.

(The WAITER shrugs and turns back to the libretto.)

WAITER: Well, I must tell you, M Prokofiev, I have not understood the purpose of the fortune-telling scene earlier.

PROK: No?

WAITER: *Non*. Enroute to Cologne to find Count Heinrich, *L'Ange de Feu*, Renata and Ruprecht stop at a village fortune teller's. The scene is not relevant to the story, plainly an author's detour. Why not cut it?

(PROKOFIEV considers the suggestion seriously. Then finally, almost gravely):

PROK: It may not be relevant, but it is theatrical.

(The lights begin to fade up on an inn in Dusseldorf. RUPRECHT(N) and RENATA(N) are sitting at a table, surrounded by a few other guests. )

WAITER: True, but would it not be better to include Ruprecht's growing infatuation

with his companion? He is falling in love with her and she spurns him in a manner worthy of the Snow Queen. All that from the novel is gone.

PROK (After some thought): The most difficult part of writing a libretto is deciding what to leave out.

(Lights on the cafe fade out, and fully up on the inn. The guests are listening with open mouths as RUPRECHT regales them with tales of his travels.)

RUP: ...In the New World I climbed great Mayan temples with giant, carved masks of hideous gods, and I looked out upon vast cities of the dead, abandoned mysteriously ages ago. Ay, I saw cactuses so large that a horseman might sleep comfortably within—

REN: Is it possible you have not bored yourself talking such nonsense? Ruprecht, farewell.

(She stands and walks into another room. RUPRECHT makes quick apologies to the others and follows her. He finds her sitting alone on a chair in a corner, motionless, staring out the window. He sits down nearby on the floor and watches her, mournfully. After a long silence he speaks. )

RUP: Perhaps you have tired, noble lady, and desire to rest. I'll go.

(RENATA slowly turns to him and answers, quietly, without intonation, as if someone else is speaking.)

REN: No Ruprecht, you must not leave. I am terrified to stay alone.

(She pauses for a long time.)

But she said that where we were going, we should go. There our desires would be fulfilled. Then in Cologne we will find Heinrich. I knew that.

The old woman only read my thoughts.

RUP: Milady, why should your Heinrich be in Cologne when his lands are on the Danube?

REN (Suddenly excited): *My* Count Heinrich? *Mine*? Can it be that what is mine is mine alone and not yours, Ruprecht? Is there truly between us a border, a line that separates my being from yours? Are we truly not one? Does not my pain penetrate your heart?

(RUPRECHT is stunned but does not answer.)

REN: Can it be that you do not love *him*, Ruprecht? Is it possible not to love him? He is divine, he is the One.

(Again RUPRECHT is speechless. RENATA gets up, gazes out the window, then gets down on her knees next to RUPRECHT, putting her palms together, as in prayer. She speaks in a low voice. Simultaneously, RENATA(O) and RUPRECHT(O) appear upstage in the same position.)

REN: Allow me to see his eyes anew, his eyes blue like the heavens, his eyelashes, sharp like needles.

(RUPRECHT remains motionless as upstage RENATA(O) sings the equivalent line at

Track 3, 3:40 in the recording. RENATA(N) forces RUPRECHT(N)'s hands together.)

REN: Answer, "Allow me to see!"

(RUPRECHT still remains motionless. She shakes him until he complies.)

RUP (Muttering): Allow me to see anew!

REN: Let me again hear his voice, tender, soft, the crystalline bell of a faraway,  
sunken temple.

RUP: Let me hear again!

REN: Allow me to kiss his white hands, white as mountain snow, and his lips,  
not brilliant, but dark rubies under a transparent veil!

RUP: Allow me to kiss!

REN: Allow me to press my naked breast to his breast, to feel his heart stand still  
and then beat faster, faster!

RUP: Allow me to press!

(RENATA turns to RUPRECHT with religious fervor in her eyes.)

REN: And now, Ruprecht, say, "He is more perfect than all. He is an angel."  
Say, "You will see him again, Renata, you will caress him again and he  
you."

RUP (Hopelessly): He is an angel. You will see him again and he will caress  
you.

(A shaft of moonlight illuminates the room and RENATA's face. Suddenly RUPRECHT

turns to her and grabs her shoulders.)

RUP: Milady, enough of grief and mourning. Wouldn't you rather return to a more cheerful and pleasant way of spending our time?

(RUPRECHT attempts to kiss RENATA but she pushes him away.)

REN: Ruprecht! A demon has possessed you!

RUP: No, there is no demon in me, but you play with me in vain, for I am not the simpleton you make me out to be.

(At this point RUPRECHT(O) and RENATA(O) take over, to the dynamic orchestral interlude at Track 4, 0:40. The two lines above may be sung. Again RUPRECHT attempts to seize her. RENATA resists. He wrestles her to the floor. She bites his arm. He releases her with disgust. She begins sobbing inconsolably. The action shifts back to RUPRECHT(N) and RENATA(N).)

RUP(N): Forgive me, noble lady, a demon did possess me and blinded my feelings. I swear on pain of eternal damnation, that nothing of the like shall ever happen again. Take me once more as your faithful servant.

(RENATA ceases sobbing, looks at him first in disbelief, then with increasing tenderness, almost like a child. Finally she stands up and strokes his cheek.)

REN(N): Ruprecht, sweet Ruprecht! You must not anger at me and must not demand from me what cannot be given. I have given all to my heavenly friend, and for earthly mortals I have no more kisses, no more passionate

words. I am an empty vase, from which another has plucked all the flowers and fruit, but you must carry me, this vase, because our fates have been united long ago in the Book of Destiny.

(RUPRECHT drops to his knees. The lights fade out.)

#### Scene IV

Nina's apartment. NINA is wearing a proper turn-of-the-century white blouse with a high collar and long skirt. She is putting things in order in obvious expectation of someone. A knock at the door. She answers. BRYUSOV is at the door wearing his black cape. He steps in, not overly dramatically but somberly. NINA steps back in silent awe. Eventually she whispers with eyes aglow.

NINA: Bravo, Valery Yakovlevich, bravo!

BRYUSOV: You approve, Nina Ivanovna?

(NINA, circling him, nods.)

I bought it just a week ago. I can hardly explain why. I caught sight of it in a shop window and felt a sudden...need...

NINA (Still whispering): It suits you perfectly...perfectly! (She steps up and adjusts the collar.)

BRYUSOV: Me or the role I have been given?

(NINA cocks her head. They regard each other as if trying to answer the question.)



BRYUSOV pulls a sheet of paper out of his pocket.)

BRYUS: I got this from Bely today. He's dedicated it to me. (He reads):

I am caught in the vortex of ancient streams,  
which swirling about me, rend my jet-black cape.

I call to people, searching for prophets,  
who cry out the secrets of heaven.

With quick steps, I hasten forward  
And there—the cliff; on it you stand,

(NINA joins in):

crowned with stars, the stubborn Mag,  
gazing outward with a prophetic smile.

(BRYUSOV is surprised and curious, but not angry. He begins to circle her.)

BRYUS: How did you know the last line, Nina Ivanovna?

(NINA smiles cryptically, stepping backwards.)

Ah, Bugaev must have shown it to you.

NINA: You're mistaken, Valery Yakovlevich, I haven't seen him—

BRYUS: Surely.

NINA: No, he hasn't been here, but I would have written exactly the same about  
you. Each line, every word.

(NINA picks up a glass of wine from the table, offers it to BRYUSOV, who is still circling, then retracts it and drinks heavily.)

BRYUSOV: Is such a thing possible? Sometimes I feel you do gaze into my very soul—.

No, we have met quite recently.

NINA (Smiling): We have been acquainted far longer than you think, Valery Yakovlevich.

BRYUSOV: Truly?

NINA: (She laughs.) Yes, we met at the theatre this past winter. Boris Nikolaevich and I went together. (In a kind of ecstasy): \*

I remember the evening perfectly. I was overwhelmed by happiness. Everything around me was transformed; everything took on a new and special meaning. Snowflakes whirled about the streetlamps like tiny, bright stars. Garlands of white flowers, so rare I had never seen them before, hung from the trees along the boulevards. Even the coachman somehow became dear to me; his sorrowfully bent back from Chekov's timeless story. And here he was driving us to the very first performance of *The Cherry Orchard* itself! The Art Theatre foyer was lit brilliantly, so brilliantly set aglow by tradition that one hardly noticed the chandeliers

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\*The music from the Prokofiev Violin Concerto No 1 is played beneath this monologue, [first movement, 7:55]).

and diamonds. It was as if all literary Moscow, all Russia had come out for a holiday of the soul, which would never be repeated.

We had gotten terrible seats off to the side. Suddenly, a sharp draught blew in from somewhere, an icy chill; my heart froze.

(The same happens in the apartment and the lights flicker.)

It was a premonition. Some misfortune approached, I was certain. At that moment Boris Nikolaevich exclaimed, "Look, look! Do you see? It's him! *Him!*"

BRYUS: And I lowered my opera glasses and we bowed ceremoniously to one another. (He chuckles.) Did you think I was casting an Evil Eye on you?

NINA: From that moment I knew I would see you again. It was fated, Valery Yakovlevich, fated from the moment of our births.

BRYUS (With only slight irony): As far back as that?

NINA: Do you believe in destiny?

BRYUS: I believe we make our own.

NINA: I have been damned.

BRYUS: That is harsh. Why do you say so, Nina Ivanovna?

(She takes a long drink and sits.)

NINA: Because it is true.

BRYUS (With a hint of jealousy): Bugaev has not succeeded in saving you?

(NINA smiles and again becomes ecstatic. We hear the Fiery Angel theme.)

NINA: He is an angel, a genuine angel. No one is so beautiful, so gentle, so kind.

He is radiant, sun-like. "The golden ether illuminates all, shining in ecstasy, and the sea is covered by the sun's shimmering shield."

BRYUS: Yes, all the world is gold and azure to Bugaev.

(The stage becomes azure blue, filled with golden stars.)

NINA (Ignoring him): He is the new Christ. He is sent to save the world, to rescue all its lost souls.

BRYUS: I'm sure he would agree with you, Nina Ivanovna.

NINA (Standing): How dare you take that tone! He is perfect. Without him I would perish. Do you think you compare in any way with him, Valery Yakovlevich? If you ever speak again about him like that in my home, you'll find yourself on the street!

(BRYUSOV is more intrigued than offended. He cocks his head at her in curiosity.)

BRYUS: My apologies, Nina Ivanovna, it will not happen again...Bugaev is very dear to me. I consider him the leading talent in Russia today, far more important than Blok. He is the great hope of our literature...

NINA (Laughing derisively): For him you are madness strapped in a frock coat.

BRYUS (He considers whether to be offended, decides not to be and snorts):

Humph, I sometimes appear that way, I'm sure....(Changing the subject):

I've brought the stories you gave me. (He produces a shaft of paper.) I believe you have real talent, Nina Ivanovna; you must develop it. Some of these are unfinished.

(NINA looks at them, perplexed.)

NINA: I have difficulty completing things...They just...break off.

BRYUS: Finish them, Nina Ivanovna.

NINA: I shall. But I have been so busy at Gryphon (Suddenly): Speak to me of your own work, Valery Yakovlevich. What are you writing? Tell me!

BRYUS: I've been at work on a poem, "The Pale Horse."

NINA: Show it to me! Do you have it with you? I must see it!

(He hands her a few sheets of paper. She reads quickly.)

NINA: The street was like a hurricane. Crowds swirled,  
As if pursued by a fate inexorable.  
Automobiles, cabs, omnibuses hurtled by...

(She mutters a few lines.)

And suddenly—above this hellish tumult,  
Rang out an unearthly clatter,  
Silencing the clamor of voices, carriages and trams.  
At the city gates a fiery horseman,  
charging headlong on his steed with eyes ablaze.

...Death!

(She scans further.)

...Of the terrified crowd, only one woman,  
who had come to sell her beauty,  
threw herself in ecstasy at the horse,  
crying and kissing its hooves, hands stretched forth to the  
spark-throwing shoes.

(She looks up.)

Why, it's wonderful, Valery Yakovlevich. The images are so—

BRYUS: Apocalyptic? I confess Bely's influence. I told you he was dear to me. But  
Bryusov is always grounded to this impure, defiled earth.

NINA (Still reading): "The madman shouted to the crowd, 'You do not recognize  
the right hand of God!'" Extraordinary. (She looks up.) And what of the  
novel, Valery Yakovlevich? Your great novel about sorcery, witchcraft?

BRYUS (Shaking his head): No, it yet lies beyond a dark glass. To write that novel  
I will have to travel to places I have not yet seen, to places I may not want  
to go.

NINA (Darkly): But you must go. You must go wherever art takes you, as far as it  
takes you: to any length, to any height, to any depth.

BRYUS: At some point the artist always stops. He is unable to go further; he does

not wish to go further.

NINA: No! The true artist knows no limits. None! Not in art...(She hurls her glass into the fireplace.) Not in life!

(She turns to BRYUSOV with a fiery gaze in her eye. BRYUSOV dons his cape and kisses her hand.)

BRYUS: Good-night, Nina Ivanovna, as always it has been a pleasure.

(BRYUSOV leaves the apartment. NINA shuts the door behind him. Outside he gazes upward and recites, as if composing a poem.)

BRYUS: I accepted my inexorable fate,  
From all temptations I turned  
And set off obedient, submissive,  
After the star, guiding me from heaven,  
Like an eastern Mag.

(The lights fade out.)

### Scene V

The stage is divided between Nina's apartment and the offices of Scorpio.

In her apartment NINA is dressed like a turn-of-the-century prostitute and rouging her lips at a mirror. She opens the door to leave. Just at that moment, BB enters.

BB: Nina Ivanovna, where are you going?

NINA: Out.

(BB stops short to regard her.)

BB: Out? How is it possible? You're dressed like a common...prostitute.

NINA (With fire in her eyes): Exactly, Boris Nikolaevich, exactly! (She attempts to leave.)

BB: Exactly!?! (He grabs her.) Nina Ivanovna! Stop! I forbid it!

NINA: Leave me alone! You have no right! Let me go!

(He wrestles her against the wall. Eventually she calms down and attempts to embrace him. He pushes her away, gently.)

BB: No. (He turns away, nearly in tears.) Nina Ivanovna, why do you behave this way? You are so good, so kind...Why do you want to ruin yourself?

(NINA looks at him curiously, and speaks softly, but intensely.)

NINA I must ruin myself. These women, how can you condemn them? Where are they to turn in this inhuman society? They are blameless.

BB: No one condemns, Nina Ivanovna...

NINA: I must join them.

BB: For the love of God, Nina, think of what you're saying. You'd be cast out— of literature, of society. Your life would end—

NINA: Yes.

BB (Imploring her): Please stop, stop, I beg you. W...where did you get such



an idea?

NINA (Sharply, then with an almost evil intensity): I don't know. It...flared up in me, like a brightness and I knew at once I was destined...

BB: Oh, Nina Ivanovna, fight against such thoughts.

NINA (Haughtily): Fight? Boris Nikolaevich, I remember perfectly the night we met. Did you not declare, "We must sing our lives"? This is my song, Boris Nikolaevich.

BB (Beside himself): Lord in Heaven, have mercy! How could you take my words so literally?

NINA (Fiercely): You didn't mean them?

BB (Grasping his head): Yes, yes, of course, but there are other songs...brighter songs.

(NINA has stopped listening and is staring fixedly at the corner.)

Nina Ivanovna? What is wrong?

NINA: Nothing, stay away. (To the wall): Again, you...

BB (With alarm): Nina—?

(She jumps away like a spider. BB steps back, horrified.)

For God's sake, Nina! Tell me...!

NINA (Hissing like a cobra): Bryuss...

BB: What?

NINA: Bryusov!

BB: I don't understand! How Brysuov? Why?

NINA: Bryusov — again him.

BB: Again?! You've only been introduced.

NINA: He's disturbing me; he's interfering with my thoughts. He's been trying to hypnotize me.

BB (With exasperation): Nina Ivanovna, stop talking nonsense. You're dreaming all this.

NINA (Turning on him): Nonsense? What do you mean? You know he hates you.

BB: Please...

NINA (She laughs, shrilly): Everyone knows it, you haven't heard? He is planning to poison you, he is so envious...

BB: Nina Ivanovna, do you hear me?

NINA (Turning sharply, with condescension): Of course I hear you.

BB: Can you feel me near you?

NINA (A little calmer, puzzled): Yes, Boris Nikolaevich.

BB: Can you feel the presence of Christ, the beauty of the world in which we find ourselves?

(NINA nods.)

Can you feel that we are not orphans in a desert, that you are surrounded by friends, that the Woman Clothed With the Sun infuses your spirit with hers? That she stands among the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, who are around us, who are in us, who beckon us?

(NINA nods. BB puts her hands on her shoulders.)

You can find peace, Nina Ivanovna, I know it.

(He embraces her.)

NINA: You are such a comfort, Boris Nikolaevich, such a comfort.

(BB kisses her on the forehead, then exits and walks to the Scorpio offices. NINA walks to the writing desk, where discarded attempts at writing lie. She gazes at them emptily, picks one up, looks at it, lets it fall.)

NINA: Where have they come from, these scraps? A few lines here, there...always broken? (She tears a piece of paper in half and begins to sob, desperately.) God, what is happening to me? These pitiful verses, is that all that is to be left of Nina? The poem of my life, how pathetic. Can't someone, anyone feel it? No... scattered...discarded.

He won't let me perish. (She gradually dries her tears.) I hear him. He said our spirits are like lost Eurydices. Orpheus is calling her, me, his Eurydice. How radiant he is, how splendid! He sees you everywhere, Lord, in the sunset, in the flowers, in the earth. "Enough of suffering! Don

your armor of sun-woven cloth!" O Lord, I have stood on my knees for days with him praying to you. I will serve as his high priestess if he wishes. (A little more harshly): I'll lash myself.

(Suddenly): God, what am I doing in these clothes, like a common prostitute? (She begins to cry and laugh hysterically at the same time.) Yes, why not? My poem is for the Devil. The Devil will listen to this fornicating bitch. You slut, fit only for the gutter, walking around with your dress hiked up so every dog smells your cunt. Spread your legs so that they can all poke their tools into you! (She sinks against the wall to the floor, running her hands over her body. Faintly): God, what is happening to me? O God, God, please...please don't let me go unfinished....

(The lights fade out on NINA, up on BB. He putters around the office, attempts to write, gives up, pounds his fist on the table, stands, attempts to read a manuscript, tosses it angrily aside. At that moment enter BRYUSOV, dressed in his cape.)

BRYUS: I can tell without a word—Nina Ivanovna. What is it this time?

BB (Shaking his head): She is getting better, I feel it.

BRYUS: Can you not don wings and fly away?

BB: (Staring at him): I said she is getting better. I will cure her.

BRYUS: Well, a little work will help clear your mind. Tell me what you think of these poems by Vyacheslav Ivanov.

(He slides a sheaf of paper toward BB, who stares at it momentarily, then pour himself a glass of water.)

BRYUS (Raising his hand): Ah, has it been boiled?

BB: I beg your pardon?

BRYUS: The water. Cholera season, remember? We wouldn't want to see you fall ill, would we?

(BB peers at the glass and puts it down. With a glance at BRYUSOV, he sits down to work, gives up, then returns to Nina's apartment. He finds NINA staring at a portrait on the wall, with her hand raised toward it. BB gently guides her to the couch. She speaks in a strange, detached monotone.)

NINA: I saw it in the darkness.

BB: What did you see?

NINA: It was there.

BB: I am here, Nina.

NINA (Turning to BB with wide eyes): Thank you, would you like some tea?

BB: Please.

(She goes to the samovar, pours two cups of tea and laughs gaily. She now speaks in a lively manner.)

NINA: I am so glad you are here, Boris Nikolai'ich. Today I feel completely alive!  
As if nothing on Earth could interfere with my happiness!

(She opens the drapes, then serves the tea.) Would you like to go out?

BB (Pleasantly startled): Why yes, that would be fine.

NINA: I think first a stroll along the boulevard.

BB: *Dogovorilis'*. [or: Wonderful.]

NINA: Then, the World of Art exhibit. Just think, there will be forty of Vrubel's paintings!

BB (With growing enthusiasm): No artist alive possesses a greater imagination! Excellent!

(Vrubel's "Demon Downcast" flashes downward across the stage, preferably animated.)

NINA (Kneeling and grabbing his arms): This evening, the theatre!

BB: Why not? Or a concert!

NINA: Oh, this will be a splendid day! Every day should be so splendid, don't you think?

BB: Each day can be full of magic, Nina Ivanovna, I've told you many times.

(NINA puts on her coat. They prepare to leave.)

NINA: I have heard that Bryusov practices magic.

BB: He has an interest in such things, indeed, the interest of a scientist.  
Practice? He's a dabbler.

NINA: He is an evil man who carries amulets. If there is such a thing as an Evil Eye, he will put it on you, Boris Nikolaevich, and sign his name to your

works.

BB: Nina, please...

(They exit. The lights momentarily go down. When they come up, NINA is once again in the apartment, staring at the wall. Enter BRYUSOV.)

BRYUS: Good-day, Nina Ivanovna.

NINA: Good-day, Valery Yakovlevich. Do you see the lotus petals?

BRYUS: Those on the wall? Yes. (He walks up closer.)

NINA: Do you see how they're growing?

BRYUS (Glancing at her): That's very interesting. What do you see?

NINA; The lotuses are growing, as if over the surface of a pond, choking it with their beauty, their terrible beauty.

BRYUS: Has Batiushkov been here?

NINA: Stop making things up, Valery Yakovlevich. Of course not.

BRYUS: Hmm. Nina Ivanovna, may I show you something? (He takes his pocket watch out of his jacket and dangles it in front of her.)

Nina Ivanovna, do you hear me?

NINA: Yes.

BRYUS: Do you see lotuses growing on the wall?

NINA: Yes.

BRYUS: Are you not quoting Batiushkov's poem?

NINA: No.

BRYUS: Have you been drinking today?

(NINA doesn't answer, but suddenly goes into violent convulsions. BRYUSOV watches for a moment with curiosity, then alarm, then helps her to the couch.)

BRYUS: Nina Ivanovna!

(She begins to sob.)

Nina, Nina, my sincerest apologies, I did not mean...

NINA (Through sobs): I must end this.

BRYUS: End what, Nina?

NINA (Looking up): Everything. Life. Get me a revolver.

BRYUS: Nina, stop this instant! People care for you. I care. You are my (with great hesitancy): ...muse.

NINA (Suddenly): What makes you think I feel anything for you, Yakovlevich, anything at all? If I found your corpse lying on the street, do you think I would stop to look at it? No! I would not even bother to lift the cape to be certain it was you. (She laughs shrilly.) I would not even walk around it; I would merely step over it as if it weren't there.

BRYUS (With some anger): Nina Ivanovna, how dare you speak to me in such a manner? I will not have it. I have been a friend to you.

NINA: You mean nothing to me, Yakovlevich, nothing. Only He means



something to me, he with the azure eyes. Forget me, there is nothing for you here.

(BRYUSOV abruptly gets to his feet, throws on his cape and storms out. Still agitated, he enters the Scorpio offices, where BB is working.)

BB: *Dobroe utro*, Valery Yakovlevich, has something happened?

BRYUS: No, nothing, nothing at all. Has the first issue gone out to the printer?

BB: I was this minute putting on the final corrections. Next week the fruits of your heroic labors will bloom over Russia.

BRYUS: Like lotus petals.

BB: Valery Yakovlevich?

BRUYS: I hope the fruits are not poisonous, that's all...How are things with your Petrovskaya?

BB: I told you, she is improving. With each day there is a little more of life in her and less of death.

BRYUS (Staring at him intently): Are you certain?

BB: Yes. She is ascending from Hell.

BRYUS (Sharply, still staring): Why are you so fascinated by her?

(BB stares at him.)

BRYUS: "Fascinated." Latin for "bewitched."

BB (Carefully): She is a friend in need, nothing more.

BRYUS: You have no further intentions towards her?

BB: No, I have told you already.

BRYUS (Turning his attention to the desk): I have heard of a snake in India whose eye so fixated a hawk, that despite all the hawk's efforts to get away, it could not do so. It shrieked, fluttered, flapped its wings, but as strong as its eye was, the snake's eye was stronger. For forty minutes the bird sat motionless as the cobra covered him in slime, then coiled around him, then crushed every bone in his body...(Fixing his eye again): Do you believe such a story?

(BB merely stares at him.)

I have been meaning to ask, your Argonauts, do they share your beliefs about magic, the Woman Clothed With the Sun?

BB: They believe in the magic of words, their ability to transform, yes, that they believe.

BRYUS: Do they regard you as their spiritual leader?

BB: I believe so yes.

BRYUS: Is this a secret society, or might anyone join?

BB: Excuse me, Valery Yakovlevich, I must take the proofs over to the printer.

(Exit BB. For a moment he stands by the wall and breathes deeply, then rushes off with the proofs. The lights momentarily dim. They come up on Nina's apartment, where

NINA is dressed in a revealing gown, reading a book. A knock. She answers. Enter BB who takes a long look at her.)

BB: You are ravishing tonight, Nina Ivanovna, splendid! What is the occasion?

NINA: The occasion is your very presence, my teacher in life. I am so happy. I have not felt so happy in months! It is as if the stars are aligned for happiness, the Milky Way is shining and the dreams past recall are coming alive. With each twinkling star a dream...I feel so alive tonight, Boris Nikolaevich! Will you read me something, something new?

BB: Of course. (He takes off his coat, noticing the book on the couch, and picks it up.) "*The Evil Eye; Origins of Superstitions.*" Where did you get this, Nina Ivanovna?

NINA (From the kitchen): Do you know, Boris Nikolaevich, that in ancient Egypt, libra, the scales, were used to judge men's souls? On amulets the scales are always shown balanced, the soul on one side, the goddess of Truth on the other.

BB (Calling): No, I had not heard of that. This is the sort of thing that fascinates Bryusov...He has been acting very strangely in recent weeks... (Almost to himself): I think he is trying to hypnotize me, like a cobra.

(NINA returns from the kitchen holding out a glass of wine to BB.)

NINA: From what I have heard of Bryusov, I should not be surprised. You must

fight darkness with light, Boris Nikolaevich.

(She pirouettes and their eyes lock.)

BB: Tonight you are truly ravishing, Nina, in both body and spirit.

(He raises his hand toward her hair. She nuzzles his hand.)

Nina, Nina. You are the dearest person in the world to me, but no, this is not...

NINA (Kissing him): Boris Nikolaevich, you are my Orpheus; I am your Eurydice, you told me, you have been calling me.

BB (Succumbing): Nina, no, that is not what I meant, not at all...

(She kisses him. He returns the kiss. They embrace eagerly and begin to undress each other, moving to the couch. They fall onto the couch together. The lights fade out.)

End Act II

Act III

Scene I

The salon. Numerous GUESTS are present, including the ARGONAUTS.

GIPPIUS is speaking to BRYUSOV, who is dressed in his cape and crosses his arms high above his chest. (Note: Due to the quickening tempo of scene changes and increasingly surreal nature of the scenes, the sets may get sparser and sparser as the act progresses, until Scene VII is played out on a bare stage.)

GIPPIUS: You will be pleased to know, Valery Yakovlevich, that the authorities have agreed to permit meetings of our Religious-Philosophical Society.

BRYUS (Bowing slightly): I never doubted that your unrelenting onslaught would bring them to their knees.

GIPPIUS: They are so suspicious of our innocent ideas that we must send every issue of *The New Way* to a special censor — after we've dealt with the ordinary one.

BRYUS: That is a nuisance, though I imagine a good censor could be more useful than a good editor.

GIPPIUS (Laughing): So, Valery Yakovlevich, chief censor of *Libra*, the first issue is a triumph. With it your ironclad grip on the artistic world of Russia is tightened.

BRYUS: Thank you, Zina. How many articles did you contribute?

GIPPIUS: As many as pseudonyms allowed. Between the two of us, I do worry how long we can persist. With the assassination of the Interior Minister—

BRYUS: Plehve has been killed?

GIPPIUS: A bomb. (She blows a cloud of smoke): Valery Yakovlevich, there's talk of revolution.

(Enter NINA, frantically, searching for BB. She approaches ALYOSHA. The GUESTS watch curiously. [Music: Prokofiev Toccata Op. 11, development].)

NINA: Where is he, Alyosha, tell me!

ALYOSHA: He's gone, Nina.

NINA (Shaking him): I've searched all Moscow. No one has seen him at home, anywhere. Tell me!

ALYOSHA: He is not in Moscow, Nina.

(She turns to KOLYA.)

NINA: Kolya, help me, please! I need him. I'll kill myself without him...

KOLYA (Blocking her way): Nina, stop. We can't help. He gave explicit orders not to tell you where he has gone.

NINA: Orders? Orders! He gave you *orders*?

KOLYA (Flustered): It was a request—

(NINA turns from KOLYA to ALYOSHA.)

NINA: You call yourself Argonauts! (She laughs shrilly.) You're more like galley

slaves! (She turns away, speaking to herself): I hear him calling.

GIPPIUS (Taking a drag on her cigarette holder): If they are the Argonauts, she is the Medusa.

BRYUS (Taking a drag on his cigarette): The Gryphoness is the most interesting among them.

(GIPPIUS raises an eyebrow. NINA approaches BRYUSOV and grabs him by the lapels.)

NINA: Valery Yakovlevich, please help me. You must know where he has gone. He works with you...

BRYUS: Actually not, Nina Ivanovna. Bugaev has vanished completely, like a puff of smoke.

NINA (Suddenly, with renewed intensity): Valery Yakovlevich, you will help me find him, won't you? Won't you?

BRYUS: I am sure he will turn up eventually, Nina Ivanovna.

NINA: Now! I cannot wait another minute. He is calling me now!

(She begins to run, but is blocked by the ARGONAUTS.)

BRYUS: Nina Ivanovna, you are in no state. Allow me to escort you home.

(He takes her firmly by the arm and escorts her out.)

GIPPIUS (To the ARGONAUTS, gravely): I would not hesitate to exile myself to Siberia.

Scene II

Immediately after the previous. The street before Nina's apartment. It is night and deserted. Enter NINA and BRYUSOV.

NINA: How can we find him, Valery Yakovlevich?

BRYUS: Nina Ivanovna, I told you, he has vanished without trace—

NINA: You can force those *Argonauts*. Cast a spell on them—

BRYUS: Better forbearance than a curse. He has duties at Scorpio. He must return.

NINA: I love him, I cannot live without him, without Christ.

BRYUS: Patience.

NINA: Patience? Can *you* live without him?

BRYUS: What on earth do you mean?

NINA: Do you not love him as I do, Valery Yakovlevich?

BRYUS: No—

NINA: Do you not worship the ground he walks on—?

BRYUS: Nina—

NINA: Do you not bask in the glow of his fiery hair and azure eyes?

(She gets to her knees.)

Lord, allow me to see his eyes again, blue like the sky.

BRYUS (Grabbing her arm): This is absurd. Nina Ivanovna, stand up.



NINA: Allow me to hear his voice again, clear like a bell....

BRYUS: Nina Ivanovna, I told you—stand up.

NINA: Pray with me, Valery Yakovlevich! Pray with me!

BRYUS: I shall not!

NINA: Pray with me. You must love him as I do.

BRYUS: I do not love him as you do.

NINA: Pray!

BRYUS: I refuse!

(NINA grabs his cape.)

NINA: If you ever wish to see me again, Valery Yakovlevich, you'll pray!

(Slowly, against his will, BRYUSOV gets to his knees. NINA takes his hand.)

NINA: O Lord, Creator of all that is good and holy on this earth, answer our prayers. Return Boris Bugaev to us as soon as possible, in good health.

He loves me, I miss him so...

(She starts crying, then breaks off.)

Valery Yakovlevich, will you come upstairs?

BRYUS: Why, Nina Ivanovna?

(NINA holds out a glass vial to him.)

What is this?

NINA: Something to calm my nerves. Something you will also enjoy.

(He examines it.)

You will see further.

(BRYUSOV nods. Exit.)

### Scene III

Scorpio. BRYUSOV is hard at work. Enter BB, wearily, with a cigarette. At first BRYUSOV doesn't notice. He raises his eyes, then quickly pushes back his chair and stands.

BRYUS (Dryly): The Lord has risen.

BB (Softly): I've been away.

BRYUS: (With some contempt): Away! For a solid month all Moscow has been asking what happened to Andrei Bely.

(BB nods.)

Well?

BB: I went to Nízhni Nóvgorod.

BRYUS: Halfway to Siberia!

BB: I needed to get away from...*her*.

BRYUS: Word has it that she's looking for you.

BB (With some alarm): She must not learn of my return. I never want to see that Gryphoness again.

BRYUS: Sooner or later she'll find you. You cannot hide forever.

BB (Angrily): She has destroyed my life...I thought I was leading her to Christ, teaching her to experience Mystery, when all the time—

BRYUS: —a common romance.

(BB nods.)

From the ethereal to the earthbound. Earth is where we live.

BB: This is not the life I intended.

BRYUS: You are unarmed against the falling of shadows.

(BB looks up sharply.)

What are your plans?

BB: To work, to forget her, to try to resurrect myself.

BRYUS: Good. Let her go to the Devil. I look forward to seeing your tomb empty.

(BB looks at him strangely.)

Are you ready to get down to it?

BB: If you have any manuscripts for me to read, I'll take them home.

(BRYUSOV hands him a few manuscripts. Exit BB. Enter NINA.)

NINA: Where is he? I know he is back.

BRYUS: I haven't seen him, Nina Ivanovna.

NINA: He must come here. I'll wait forever.

BRYUS (Grabbing her): Nina, forget him. Don't you see, your fate lies with me.

NINA: With you! How many times must I say it? You mean nothing, nothing to me! Why are you interfering in my life?

BRYUS: I have the pistol you asked for.

(NINA freezes.)

NINA: Where is it? Give it to me!

BRYUS: I am in the mood for the needle.

(Exit.)

#### Scene IV

A well-appointed room in a 16th-century guest house. There is a bed and a cross on the wall. Enter RUPRECHT(N) and RENATA(N). RENATA speaks politely but coldly.

REN: Now I want to thank you, sir knight. You have done me great service, bringing me here to Cologne. Be off now on your way. I have lodging and am able to fend for myself. Farewell and God preserve you.

RUP: But Milady, we have not found Count Heinrich—

REN: Why are you interfering in my life? I have thanked you for your trouble and your help and I am no more in need of them.

RUP: I swore an oath not to leave you until the Count is found—

REN: You are not my father, not my brother and not my husband! You have no

right to bind me near you. If you think that, having wasted several guldens on our travels, you have bought my body, then you have deluded yourself. I am not a woman from a public house. I go where I wish, and your threats do nothing to make me enjoy your company, which I find repugnant. If you refuse to leave I shall call the city guards!

(RUPRECHT turns away, clearly hurt. )

RUP (Aside): What a strange hold this woman has over me! How have I allowed it? (To REN): Noble lady! My knightly vows do not permit me to abandon a lady alone at twilight in a strange city not bereft of danger, where robbers and brigands roam the streets and can be encountered at any moment. Under no circumstances will I agree to leave you now. If tomorrow morning you still wish me to leave, then I swear by all that is holy that I shall depart without a glance and never see you again.

REN: Very well Ruprecht! Tomorrow we must find Count Heinrich. I cannot wait another moment! Tonight you will sleep on the floor outside my room and do not dare to enter unless I call!

(RUPRECHT nods, then turns away and mutters to himself as the lights dim.)

RUP: As you wish, Noble lady. But if you ever yield to me, I shall repay you, coin for coin.

(The lights go down and immediately up on Nina's apartment, where NINA has just

thrown on a cloak and is preparing to leave. ALYOSHA and KOLYA are standing at the door.)

NINA: Alyosha! Kolya! What are you doing here?

(They step into the apartment.)

ALYOSHA: Nina Ivanovna! We know you are searching for Boris Nikolaevich. You must not approach him.

NINA: This is none of your affair!

KOLYA: It is, Nina Ivanovna; it is everyone's affair. You have defiled the prophet, turned the knight away from the Woman Clothed With The Sun.

(The Blessed Damoiselle falls to earth.)

NINA (Alarmed, she pauses, then suddenly): If that is my role, so be it!

(She attempts to force her way past them. They block her.)

ALYOSHA: It is a dark role, Nina Ivanovna. The Beast from the abyss has inspired you. Do not allow yourself to become an instrument of darkness!

(NINA shoves them violently aside and runs out. ALYOSHA and KOLYA give chase.

The lights go down and immediately up on the 16th-century guest house. RENATA(N) whirls in, followed by a weary RUPRECHT(N).)

REN: A whole day! We searched every street, every house in Cologne and still no sign of my Heinrich!

RUP: I must say, Milady, that I am strong man, accustomed to long marches or

to chase for two days without respite a fleeing enemy. But I have never seen one such as you. Hour after hour, a street, an alley, a second a third, another, never pausing, not once showing any weariness. It's as if you were possessed by some insane quest.

REN:           Insane—?

(Suddenly, there is a sharp knock on the wall above them. RUPRECHT starts;

RENATA looks up more calmly.)

RUP:           Do you hear that? What could it be?

REN:           It's nothing—just the little ones.

RUP:           Little ones?

REN:           Little demons. Perhaps they can help us find Heinrich. (To the wall): If you are a friend, knock thrice.

(Three knocks ring out.)

(Upstage, lights go up on RENATA(O) and RUPRECHT(O), where the same lines from the opera are sung, [CD1, track 8, 2:34]. They continue singing until 2:50 or 3:20. Then back to the novel. However, the “demon” music [Symphony No. 3, third movement, 0:25], picks up.)

REN(N):       Is this Elimir? Knock thrice.

(Three knocks. RUPRECHT looks up in wonder.

RENATA grabs his hand.)

Do you know where Count Heinrich is?

(Three knocks.)

Will he return? Will I see him again?

(Three knocks. She turns to RUPRECHT.)

Hah! I told you I would see him here! I knew and felt it because I had come to the limits of suffering and my heart could no longer withstand such longing!

(She extends her hand for RUPRECHT to kiss.

The demon music continues in the background.)

RUP: Noble lady! I must now confess to you openly what you have already guessed. It is more than my knightly duties that have held me near you, a feeling no man or woman need be ashamed of. Having come to know you, I will never desire to be with another woman. I say this despite what you have revealed about your love for Heinrich, and I ask only to be allowed to accompany you on your journeys and to kiss your sleeve from time to time.

REN: Do not dare think such thoughts, Ruprecht! You are the last shadow of this period of my life, too full of shadows. I am returning to light and you should disappear like the gloom of night at the first rays of the sun. Truly, do you think when I am with Heinrich I could look at you, knowing that



you had kissed my hand and lain in one bed beside me? The moment he crosses the threshold, Ruprecht, you should be out the other door, and you should swear on the cross of Our Savior that you will do so!

RUP: And if, in the morning, coming out of the house, you catch sight of my corpse on the doorstep, what will you say to your Heinrich?

REN: I will say that it's probably some drunken passer-by and will be happy when the city guards take away the body!

RUP (Angrily): Then take your damnèd oath! I swear on the Cross!

(He takes the cross from the wall and kisses it.)

(At that moment there is another knock on the wall. The demon music become prominent again.)

REN: Heinrich is near, I feel it!

(Three knocks.)

Is he coming here?

(Three knocks.)

Is he coming up the stairs?

(Three knocks.)

Ruprecht leave this instant and never come back!

(Here, or even above if it is clear enough, the opera characters can take over [track 9, which has the same demon music]. The knocks gradually die out and no one appears.

RENATA faints and RUPRECHT carries her to the bed, then exits. )

Scene V

Without pause the lights come up on the cafe. It is evening, gloomy. Gaslights or candles are lit. A chess game is in progress and PROKOFIEV is studying the board. The WAITER, though, has been reading the novel. He stands and begins closing up shop, blowing out the lights.

WAITER (Reflectively): Peculiar, wouldn't you say, that they should abandon the hunt by sensible means and so quickly resort to black magic?

PROK: I asked the same question myself, but magic is what the novel is about; magic is what the opera must be about.

WAITER: Must it? (Pause.) The course of art is strange, is it not? Though I sense that Ruprecht's heart was the author's own, somehow this poet's great erudition interfered; he was carried away by alchemy over emotion. It makes me sad, these failings, so innate, so beyond us.

PROK: It is true. Every artist find his limits.

WAITER: Long suffering Ruprecht! For all your inhibitions, you manage to express your love for Renata. But, M Prokofiev, permit me, your libretto has transformed the learned knight into an oaf; his declaration of love pales: "Having got to know you, I realize perfectly I will never again want to be

with another woman." Perhaps you could add some flesh to these bones;  
better, some passion to the blood.

PROK (Demurring): I needed to get on with the demons. Wait until you hear the  
music I've written for it.

WAITER: Surely that could be effective, but if demons are what interest you, why  
have you struck out the most stunning scene in the novel...?

(The lights fade out on the cafe and up on Nina's apartment, where NINA and  
BRYUSOV are sitting on the floor surrounded by candles, several large tomes on  
sorcery and a pentagram. She appears and moves as one who is slowly becoming  
addicted to morphine. She takes a branch with petals, strips off the petals one by one  
and throws them over her shoulder.)

BRYUS: Nina, I beg you, give him up. For you he is dead. How much do you  
expect me to endure?

NINA: Dead? Orpheus is immortal, no? But if he cannot hear my cries through  
God, another will make certain he never leaves Hell.

BRYUS (With some irony): Some would consider this forfeiture of your eternal  
soul, Nina.

NINA: Do you?

BRYUS: You know my view of such things.

NINA: Then help Eurydice! You, Mag, have nothing to fear. You have studied

these...black...arts. (She takes a knife and wraps a string around its hilt.)

BRYUS (With slight irony): Happy is he who knows the incantations! Give me the needle and I'll help you.

(She hands BRYUSOV a syringe and he shoots himself up. As he nods off, the lights come up on RENATA(N) and RUPRECHT(N), who stand upstage in a similar pentagram, surrounded by candles. RUPRECHT is stripped to the waist.)

RUP: Renata, if I undertake this journey my immortal soul shall be forfeit and I will burn in Hell for everlasting and everlasting.

REN (In ecstasy): Ruprecht, what is the salvation of your soul next to your love for me? Isn't love higher than all, and should not everything be sacrificed to it, even the bliss of Heaven? If you do this, after Heinrich you will for me be the first person on this earth. And, who is to say? perhaps the Judge of Judges will not condemn you to eternal damnation, but only to the cleansing tortures of Purgatory.

RUP: (Aside, with some resignation): Perhaps there is no sin here, merely foolishness, and by this foolishness I gain Renata. (To RENATA): Very well, Renata, let us get on with it.

REN: Ruprecht, if in you is even one drop of hesitation, refuse this undertaking! I'll take back my request and release you from your oath!

RUP: I said, let us get on with it!

(RENATA takes a salve and smears it all over RUPRECHT's torso. RUPRECHT stiffens to the burning sensation.)

REN:           Farewell! I go to pray for you!

(Exit RENATA. As mists rise about RUPRECHT's feet, he suddenly finds himself flying through the air atop a black goat. Eventually he lands on a field in the middle of which there is a large, gnarled tree. In the distance bonfires are burning. Around the tree, naked witches and warlocks are dancing and eating. Under the tree, on a large wooden throne, sits a giant creature—from the waist up a man with a long beard and goat's horns, from the waist down a goat. He is MASTER LEONARD. An attractive witch, SARRASKA, takes RUPRECHT's hand and leads him to LEONARD. The music throughout is eerily electronic [Xenakis, *Occident-Orient*, first 3 minutes. The section at 1:45 or 2:05 would be especially good for the round dance, below.]

SARR:           A new one, Master Leonard, a new one!

(LEONARD motions for her to bring RUPRECHT forward.)

LEO:           Welcome my son.

(RUPRECHT bows.)

Tell us, have you come to us of your own free will?

RUP:           I have, Master.

LEO:           Have you renounced your faith in the Lord God, creator of the world?

RUP:           I have, Master.

LEO: In Jesus Christ and the Blessed Mother?

RUP: I have, Master.

LEO: In all hope of eternal salvation?

RUP: Yes, Master, I have.

LEO (Extending his hand): Come.

(RUPRECHT approaches. LEONARD gives him his hand to kiss. RUPRECHT obeys.

Then LEONARD stands up, turns around, raises his tail and presents his ass for

RUPRECHT to kiss. RUPRECHT follows through. LEONARD sits down.)

LEO: Rejoice my son, beloved, receive our mark on your body and carry it  
forever and ever. Amin.

(He tilts forward and, with his horn, pricks RUPRECHT's  
chest above the left nipple until blood flows. The  
WITCHES shout and cheer.)

Now, Ruprecht, ask anything you wish, and We shall fulfill your first  
desire.

RUP: I should like to know, Master, how to find Count Heinrich von Otterheim.

LEO (Angrily): Fool! Do you think that We do not see through your  
simpleminded duplicity? Beware, knight, of playing with forces beyond  
your comprehension! Go! and perhaps later you will receive a reply to  
your brazen question!

(RUPRECHT is about to reply, but SARRASKA pulls him away as the WITCHES begin a round dance. Fire springs up, but it does not burn. Some break off to caress snakes, etc. Demons with bat wings serve food. SARRASKA offers him some meat from a plate. RUPRECHT bites into it, nodding approval.)

SARR (Gleefully): The flesh of infants!

(She takes his hand and they run off to the side.)

RUP: Will Master Leonard answer my question?

SARR: He said his servant had already given you the answer: "Where you are going, go!"

(She pulls him down to the ground, where they begin to copulate. Enter RENATA, naked. She stands above RUPRECHT, gazing down on him. When RUPRECHT catches sight of her, he pushes SARRASKA aside.)

RUP: Renata! What are you doing here?

(RENATA disappears in a cloud of mist. As RUPRECHT holds his head in his hands, the entire scene becomes shrouded in haze as the music and lights fade out.)

## Scene VI

Scorpio. Both BRYUSOV and BB are in the office, working. BRYUSOV, at his desk smoking, appears somewhat disheveled and drawn. He glances up and stares at BB intently.

BB: Are you well, Valery Yakovlevich?

BRYUS: Never better. *Libra* is flourishing, decadence is on the rise, I write a poem a day...Tell me, Boris Nikolaevich, have you ever considered dying young?

BB: Valery Yakovlevich?

BRYUS: It is good for a poet to die young, don't you think? You haven't written yourself out, you live on. You don't see yourself on the decline. For you, now is the perfect time.

BB (Trying to make light of it): Valery Yakovlevich, please give me at least another two years.

BRYUS (Levelly): All right, two years then.

(Puzzled, BB goes back to work. After a moment, BRYUSOV addresses him again.)

BRYUS: And you? Your *Gold in Azure* has been a success among the starry-eyed. What are you writing now?

BB (A beat.):*Ashes.*

BRYUS: Ah. The gold has tarnished, the azure dulled. I presume soot is the color of the new coming age.

(BB stares at him. BRYUSOV holds out his hand.)

Let's have one.

(BB hesitantly hands him a piece of paper. BRYUSOV recites.)



“I am condemned to live in a torture chamber—”

Tell me, what do you know about sixteenth-century torture? Have you studied methods of the Inquisition? The Question, as they called it, your legs smashed between planks until the marrow oozed. Is life so bad, Nikolai'ich?

BB: What has gotten into you, Valery Yakovlevich? I think I'd better leave...

(BB prepares to leave but at that moment, enter ALYOSHA.)

ALYOSHA: Forgive me, Borya, she insisted...she threatened.

(He hands a message to BB, who reads it with curiosity and alarm.)

BB: Damn it to Hell!

(He rushes out of the room to Nina's apartment, where he finds NINA on the couch, not only drunk but in a morphine-induced stupor.)

BB: Nina, where is it? (He looks around frantically, under books and papers, opening drawers. He takes the glass out of her hand. He shakes her.) Nina Ivanovna, where is it?

NINA (Vaguely): What? Where is what?

BB: The poison! You sent me this note—you were going to poison yourself.

(NINA begins to laugh distantly, euphorically.)

Aah! (He tears at his hair. Then he shakes her again.) Nina Ivanovna, do you hear me?

(NINA nods limply.)

Listen: I cannot take any more of this. I never want to see you again. Do not try to contact me. If you send any more of these notes, I shall confine them to the fire without a glance.

(BB hurls down the note and exits. The lights go up in the 16th-century guest house.

RUPRECHT is sitting glumly. Enter RENATA, tearfully. RUPRECHT stands, RENATA presses herself to his shoulder.)

REN: Ruprecht, he's here!

RUP: Who is here?

REN: Heinrich! I have seen him, I have spoken with him.

RUP: Are you certain, Renata, that you are not mistaken?

REN: As certain as I am of the sun and the stars. (Agitatedly): Yesterday, at the hour of the evening service, I was sitting by the window, grieving. Suddenly, I heard a voice, quiet, but so clear, as if an angel were whispering to me: "He is here! He is here at the cathedral!" (Ecstatically): I rushed down to the square and there, surrounded by his friends, was Heinrich! I followed him home and stood watch throughout the night. An eternity passed, then this morning, with the sun—he appeared.

(Frantically): I threw myself on my knees before him, in the dirt, declaring my love, asking him to kill me then and there, because to die from his blow

would be to die in bliss...to die like a saint. (In tears): He replied, "I will not see you, I will not speak to you, I have not even the right to forgive you."

RUP (Holding out his hand): Renata...

REN: How he insulted me! I was the evil genius of his life! "You destroyed my fate. You turned me from Heaven. You are an instrument of the Devil!" He declared that our love was filth, sinful, that I seduced him by deceitful lies and tricks. "I spit on your love!" (She bursts into tears.)

RUP: How is it possible, Renata that *you* turned him from Heaven? Did not Heinrich himself carry you off to the castle to live as man and wife?

(RENATA drops to her knees.)

REN: Ruprecht, Ruprecht! I have hidden from you the most important of all! Heinrich never searched for earthly love! He vowed in this life never to touch a woman. It was I, I who forced him to forswear his oath! It was Renata who turned him from heaven, who destroyed his greatest dreams; for that he hates and despises me!

RUP: Renata, I cannot fathom this. Why such an oath? What dreams have you destroyed?

REN: You don't understand. He was a member of a secret order sworn to a vow of chastity. They wanted to rule the Christian world more powerfully than

the Emperor or the Holy Father. Heinrich dreamed to become Grand Master of this order and he called me only as his acolyte in his experience of a new, heavenly magic.

RUP: And you?

REN: I thought he was my Madiel, my Fiery Angel, and I only wanted to possess him.

RUP: Renata, if you, *you* destroyed his dreams, if *you* took away the sacred goal of his life, how can you be surprised that he despises you?

(RENATA gets to her feet. She stiffens and addresses RUPRECHT haughtily.)

REN: I, perhaps, am not surprised in the least. I, perhaps, am happy that Heinrich hates me. I am crying not for him, but for myself. That I could love him, give myself so completely to him. I hate him myself! Now I see exactly what I guessed long ago. Heinrich deceived me! He is only a man, only the Count von Otterheim and I, in a flight of madness, took him for an angel. But my Madiel, my Fiery Angel, *he* is in the heavens, always clean, always perfect, forever unattainable.

RUP: Renata! If his love and yours has died, remember that another is near whose heart holds more gold than the coffers of the kingdom. If, with a calm and peaceful soul, you are willing to give me a vow of faith, I shall receive it like a miserable beggar receives the Queen's mercy. Renata, I am

on my knees before you! Say yes, and we will consign this horrible past to an evil dream that fades with the sun.

(RENATA places a hand on RUPRECHT's shoulder and speaks coldly.)

REN: I will be your wife if you kill him.

(RUPRECHT takes a step backwards in disbelief.)

You must kill him! He dare not live having pretended to be another, a being higher. Kill him, and I shall be yours, through life, through eternal fire.

RUP: Renata, I am not a hired assassin! I cannot step out of a dark corner and knife him in the back. Honor forbids it!

REN: Can you not find a pretext to challenge him to a duel? Go to him, insult him, as if men have ever needed reasons to kill each other.

(Exit RENATA. Lights fade out on RUPRECHT. )

## Scene VII

The stage is bare. Enter BB with ALYOSHA from one wing and BRYUSOV from the other. The lighting is fantastic, surreal, giving the impression of no place and no time. During the entire scene, BB and BRYUSOV circle each other from afar, alternately closing in and retreating. BB reads from a sheet of paper.

BB: The prophetess sadly became still,

Having brushed aside her ashen curl.

And the prophet laid upon her brow

A crown of palest lilies.

(To ALYOSHA):

Take it.

(ALYOSHA carried poem to BRYUSOV, who reads it and replies.)

BRYUS: And the shadow, having neared, spread forth,

The Magician brushed aside her curl,

And quietly took from her brow

The crown of palest lilies

(Handing a paper to ALYOSHA):

Give it to him.

(ALYOSHA carries it to BB. BB becomes more agitated and dictates to ALYOSHA, as they pace the stage.)

BB: My doppelgänger stalks me.

A glance over my shoulder,

There, on the fence, the fugitive glimmer;

Behind me, a ghostly spectre

Sliding along the frozen bridge.

I turn; the shadow lengthens and suddenly – melts.\*

(Upstage, enter both RUPRECHTS from novel and opera. Oppositely enter two HEINRICHS, with fiery, shoulder-length hair, and azure-blue costumes. Both RUPRECHTS slap both HEINRICHS with gloves. )

RUP(N): You have insulted a woman's honor!

(Both pairs unsheathe their swords. The dueling music from the opera begins [CD 2, track 4, opera; the same music is incorporated into the Third Symphony, first movement at, eg, 7:23]. The antagonists begin dueling. As BRYUSOV and BB recite, thunder is heard and the imagery from their poems is seen. Lightning flashes from their fingers. )

BRYUS: Radiant Balder! Sunlike,

You have raised your face against me.

How can I repulse you rays?

BB: I was in an abyss. The mountain demon,

---

\* Alt to 5th line: Sliding through the freezing vapor,

A more literal translation:

My double chases after me,

On the fence, a fugitive glimmer,

The phantasm slides along the frozen bridge,

Approaching, lengthening; suddenly – he melts.

flapped his wings and eclipsed the light.

He threatened me with a stubborn battle,

I knew: in battle show no mercy.

I raised my hand. A white cloud

Carried me into the azure, into the azure.

Again to the ether, free, bold,

Cleansed by the tenderness of dew!

BRYUS: I am the fallen one,

Who will ascend the snow-clad escarpment;

You laugh from on high.

I will be carried up by purple storm clouds;

While you shine like a star!

BB: You soar upward past me,

Like a wild eagle,

But overthrown by a rain of hail,

You fall, senseless, to the cliff.

(He calls forth a rain of hail. Vrubel's *Demon Downcast* is briefly seen.)

BRYUS: I tumble downward into my secret lair,

To tender, scarlet lips;



You loose an arrow against me—and then!

I, quivering, clench my gaping wounds.

But against you, golden-haired,

The enchanted bow is aimed.

BB: You rise, dust encrusted,

But dust and soot have been fire-singed.

Thunder, in protest growling, dissipates.

No, you shall not fly; flap vainly your tattered wings.

BRYUS: The arrow is loosed toward your heavenly form,

You shall fall into endless sleep,

While laughing madly, I chain your body,

And nail it to a cross.

BB: My armor blazes like a fire.

My lance is lightning, the sun my shield,

Dare not approach; my furious wrath

Shall burn you til ashes and nothing more remain.

BRYUS: No! After me, fire gods, to break the might of heaven!

Light rules not the world!

The final Tsar is darkness! Darkness, everlasting, everlasting!

(BRYUSOV disappears into darkness.)

BB:           Light shall triumph over the Tsar of darkness,  
                  Thou shalt scream from burning pain!

(Upstage, the lights briefly go up on BRYUSOV, who awakes screaming from a bed at night with NINA beside him. BB vanishes in a burst of light. The swordfighting has continued. Enter both RENATAS.)

REN(N):     Ruprecht, you must not kill him!

(The RUPRECHTS are distracted; the HEINRICHS run them through. Both RUPRECHTS fall.)

REN(O)     (Singing): Ruprecht!

(Both RENATAS runs to their RUPRECHTS and kneel. The lights fade out.)

### Scene VIII

The lights come up at Scorpio. BRYUSOV is pacing exhaustedly, agitatedly, somberly.

BRYUS:     Which of us triumphed? I cannot say.  
                  It must be thou, son of light, thou,  
                  While I reconcile myself to hopeless dreams.  
                  To her, for whom the battle was raised,  
                  I have fallen, headlong into darkness,

Have chased myself to the lower depths.

But in the horror of my fall,

In the abyss of blackness and despair,

Your rays dissipate the shadows,

And we into the heavens gaze.

(He stands.)

I love you, Boris Bugaev, my enemy-friend.

(He begins to cry and thrash about. Then he suddenly  
stops.)

No, we are hardly finished. I shall not be defeated by you, your fiery hair,  
your azure eyes. Our struggle must be fulfilled, not in the ether, but here  
on earth. Not symbolically—empirically.

(Enter BB with a shaft of paper. )

BRYUS: (Stiffly, almost as a threat): Thus, Boris Nikolaevich, once again.

BB (As if to explain his presence): I have been staying in Petersburg with  
Gippius and Merezhkovsky. Here are the articles they promised.

(He hands them tensely to BRYUSOV, who tosses them aside, then suddenly erupts.)

BRYUS: Merezhkovsky! Talentless swine who steals money from the women he  
sleeps with! Uses it to his publish pseudo-religious ideas in his worthless  
journal. Thief! He and his wife are a disgrace to literature and to Russia!

BB: Valery Yakovlevich! Everyone knows you slander *everyone* sooner or later. When you slander *me* I pay no heed; that is just the way you are. But how dare you use such vile and contemptible language about the Merezhkovskies? They are the dearest people on earth they have opened my eyes to the most important things in life. My philosophy has been completed through them. I warn you, I do not permit this, but retract your words here and now and I shall forgive you!

BRYUS: Sir! You will take responsibility for these words, which you allow yourself to address to me.

BB: Me—you—what are you saying?

BRYUS: You will retract your words in writing.

BB: This is hardly cause for a dispute between us.

BRYUS: In that case, I shall expect your seconds in the morning.

BB: Valery Yakovlevich—

(BB stops short, speechless, then stalks off. Blackout.)

End Act III

Act IV

Scene I

The Fiery Angel theme from the opera comes on [opening Act 5; CD 2, track 9]. Upstage, enter RUPRECHT(N) and HEINRICH(N). They clasp each other's hands in solemn friendship, then exit oppositely.\* Downstage, the cafe, with chessboard.

PROKOFIEV is standing.

PROK: Dearest Miaskovsky, still no word from you and I begin to despair of ever hearing from you again. The only news from Russia is of starving infants and aristocrats who sell their jewels for potatoes. I can only trust that you are still alive in that kingdom of frozen tears, somehow, somewhere.

From this side, when my *Three Oranges* finally premiered in Chicago, the critics tore my trousers to shreds. "There are only a few passages that bear any relationship to what has hitherto been recognized as music."

I have abandoned any thought of travel to that land of savages and instead go to a little village in Germany to work on my *Fiery Angel*. The libretto has been finished quickly and I am quite tickled by it. The music, though,

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\* Alternate to opening of Act: The lights come up on the cafe. The WAITER addresses an empty chair as RUPRECHT(N) and HEINRICH(N) enter upstage.

WAITER: And in your libretto, M Prokofiev, there is something else missing... (RUPRECHT and HEINRICH clasp each other's hands in solemn friendship, then exit oppositely. Enter PROKOFIEV, who begins his monologue.)

comes slowly, strange for me, but I intend that it shall create a world unlike anything else I have written.

WAITER: M, before you depart, when all mankind has heard Puccini and Verdi and finally listens to Prokofiev, what will they hear?

PROK (After a little thought): His love of fairy tales. His ability to conjure up the fantastic.

WAITER: Fair enough. Yet you did exclude the witches' sabbath from the *Fiery Angel*. Surely that is the most fantastic scene in Bryusov's novel.

PROK (Shrugging): Yes, but even if the scene is stageable, it would never be staged. Bryusov descended into pornography there and Prokofiev, for one, does not intend to follow. (PROKOFIEV begins to gather up his papers.)  
Well, I shall see you before too long, I'm sure.

WAITER: I wish you a pleasant trip.

(PROKOFIEV moves off. Lights down.)

## Scene II

As the lights fade out on the cafe, sporadic gunfire is heard in the background over the gloomy, foreboding opening of Shostakovich's 11th Symphony ("1905"), which pervades the remainder of the act. The lights go up on BRYUSOV, who stands before at a desk in an apartment. The room is lit by candles. Next to the window behind him is a

large sheet of paper tacked to the wall with about 100 tally marks drawn on it. He speaks agitatedly but somberly.

BRYUS: To cut the torment from my heart,  
Like a dagger, poisoned, death-laden,  
I joyfully raised against him,  
my fratricidal hand.

(He raises his hand, pauses, then address himself as if another  
person.)

Follow me into the turbulent vortex of insanity.

(BRYUSOV turns sharply, as if hearing someone else.)

Follow me so that you may cry about yourself.

(Again BRYUSOV turns. Again no answer. He steadies himself  
and eventually resumes reciting.)

Onto the embers of doubt,  
I tossed my hatred with evil intent.  
But a chain, link by link forged of secrets,  
Has shackled us together for everlasting  
...and everlasting.

Bely!

(BRYUSOV pounds the table with his fist, knocks the lamp off, then begins to cry. He

sits down and eventually composes himself, then walks to the window and gazes outward. A cannon shot is heard. Slowly, BRYUSOV puts a new tally mark on the paper. Enter NINA, dressed in a coat; she holds a bottle of vodka and a cigarette, joins him at the window and speaks with slightly dazed puzzlement.)

NINA: They're cutting down telegraph poles.

BRYUSOV (Wiping a tear with a handkerchief): Yes, for barricades. It is an uprising.

NINA (With a little wonder): The revolution.

BRYUSOV: Hardly. It will fail, I'm certain. The leaders speak poor Russian...

NINA: Are you well?

BRYUSOV: Yes, Nina, well...I haven't seen you for days. Have you been...with him?

(Softly): Mont, I never fought him. He declined the challenge; I could not raise my hand. And now...everywhere I turn...Bely!

NINA: What is it, *dorogoi*? What about Bely?

BRYUSOV: Nothing, a mild case of nerves, that's all.

(He turns to the desk and hands her a slender volume.)

Here, I wanted to give you this, my newest collection of poems. Most of them I dedicated to you....They are my best, I think.

(NINA opens the book.)

NINA: Thank you, darling...Oh, I have never been so happy! All *that* seems to be fading from my life...like a horrible dream. Bely! How could you think...?



(She throws herself on him and kisses him passionately.)

I loved you from the beginning, my Magician, you, your terrible secrets,  
only you, no one else, do you believe me?

BRYUS: I...believe you, Nina.

(NINA breaks off and begins rummaging around the room,  
searching for something.)

What are you looking for?

NINA: You know...(She notices a large manuscript on the desk and attempts to  
pick up a page.) And this?

BRYUS (Staying her hand): The novel.

NINA (A pause): You have found your story!

BRYUS (Somberly): Yes. (Aside): Rather I should say, it found me. (After a pause,  
to NINA): I decided on a romance set in the sixteenth century—something  
along the lines of Walter Scott. With luck I can start running it in *Libra*  
before the year is out.

NINA (With excitement): You must let me read it, this instant!

BRYUS: Patience, *golúbchik*. Rome was not built in a day; neither, I fear, the  
Inquisition.

NINA: Let me read it!

(She ravenously attempts to push her way past BRYUSOV, who first tries to restrain

her, then relents. )

BRYUS: Nina, all right, all right...read it.

(She sits at the desk and begins to read. BRYUSOV stands a candle near her.)

You'll need this. There's no electricity.

(He then takes the needle out of a cabinet. As he exits):

This woman will be the death of me.

(Exit. The lights fade until only the candle is visible as NINA reads the novel. We hear BRYUSOV's voice, not loud, almost mournfully.)

BRYUS: Bely.

(The candle goes dark.)

### Scene III

The sixteenth-century guest house. Enter RUPRECHT(N) to discover RENATA(N) lying on the floor, senseless. As he watches, she slowly gets up, as if entirely possessed, unaware of her surroundings.

REN (In ecstasy): Madiel!

(Enter MADIEL, who performs a somber dance upstage to the Shostakovich or without music altogether. RENATA backs into a corner in terror, crossing herself. MADIEL approaches her lovingly and kisses RENATA on her lips, but when she extends her

hand, he disappears. RUPRECHT, who watches her in awe, is unable to see MADIEL.)

RUP:           Renata, what do you see?

(She ignores him and speaks in a terrified, hushed voice, as if repeating to herself what MADIEL has told her.)

REN:           By the weight of my sins, my soul is already half engulfed in the fires of Hell. It no longer befits me to dream of the halo of saints, but only to pray for the crown of martyrdom, which will cleanse by blood my transgressions, my horrible transgressions.

(She falls to her knees in prayer. RUPRECHT approaches her.)

RUP:           Renata!

REN:           No, Ruprecht! I am well. Let me be. No more sorcery, no more black magic. I must pray, pray to the all merciful God that he will strengthen me against my trials to come.

(The lights fade out.)

#### Scene IV

At Novodevichy convent, as in Act I, Scene III. Light snow and leaves cover the ground. A few people are scurrying this way and that. Sporadic gunfire is heard in the distance, as above. The Shostakovich is prominent. Enter NINA in a cloak reminiscent of Renata's. She runs her hands over the monastery walls, peers into the passageways, etc., as if exploring. She briefly kneels before an icon over the gate and crosses herself.

Enter KOLYA reading a volume of poetry. NINA turns around, startled, and crosses herself.

KOLYA: Ah, Nina, what a...surprise. We haven't seen you in some time...

NINA: Some time, yes...

KOLYA: Do you come here often?

NINA: Nearly every day. I love these sad, haunted places, where you can feel the spirits of the past surrounding you. Where the wind sighs with their lamentations.

KOLYA: Haunted, the perfect word. To think that tsars were crowned right here. It *is* a place full of sadness, one of the few places you can take refuge from all *that*. (He indicated gunfire.)

NINA: Refuge. Do you think the nuns cloistered within are truly God's servants, or have they merely fled...?

(KOLYA cocks his head, puzzled.)

He and I often walk these grounds.

KOLYA: He? Oh, you and Bryusov.

(NINA nods.)

How are things, Nina?

NINA: There is in him such sadness, such hidden agitation, always about to burst forth. (Suddenly): Yes, Kolya, I have never felt better in my entire life. It is

as if...as if I have finally found a meaning in this senselessness. Kolya, I have finished a few stories. They're to be published in *Libra*.

KOIYA: I am truly glad to hear that. Tell me, where did you get your cloak? It's rather...extraordinary.

NINA: It is a secret.

KOLYA: A secret?

NINA: Yes, a secret known only to me and God. (She crosses herself.)

KOLYA: I see. Nina, I want to express my sincere apologies for all *that* that is going on between you and Boris Nikolai'ich and—

NINA: Boris Nikolai'ich? He is just a man. He is not my Fiery Angel.

KOLYA: Pardon? Fiery Angel?

NINA: That will be the title of the novel.

KOLYA: Ah, of course. Everyone's heard Bryusov is working on one. When can we expect it?

NINA: No, Heinrich is just a man, as despicable as all men. How could I have trusted him? Don't you think he should fight Bely? Am I not worth dying for?

KOLYA (Confused): W...without a doubt, Nina Ivanovna, without a doubt...

NINA: I must free myself from dark powers. (She crosses herself again.)

(Enter BRYUSOV. NINA steps forth decisively and in full sight of him kisses KOLYA

passionately.)

BRYUS: Nina, there you are!

(NINA doesn't attempt to hide; she merely smiles  
triumphantly.)

Nina, don't you understand it is dangerous to be out on the streets?

KOLYA: Forgive me, Valery Yakovlevich, I did not—

BRYUS: You're one of Bely's Argonauts, aren't you?

(KOLYA nods.)

Is he here?

KOLYA: No...

(BRYUSOV suddenly turns around, peering in the nearest passageway. He catches sight of a gravestone and falls into contemplation, picking up a piece of vine, forming a wreath and laying it on the stone. KOLYA quietly exits. BRYUSOV looks up to see NINA, who watches him intently.)

BRYUS: Nina, *dorogaya*. I must speak to him, do you understand? I am unable to bear the torment any longer. I challenged him, he declined...I feel my sanity slipping away. We have warred side by side for literature, we have dedicated poetry to each other. How is it conceivable that his words should have offended me?

NINA: You will betray me for him? The one who deceived me!

BRYUS: Nina, I will never betray you.

(She begins to sob. He embraces her. They begin kissing each other feverishly. The background fades from Novodevichy to the apartment where they stand before a bed with a nightstand. They begin undressing each other. Suddenly, NINA renews her sobbing and breaks away, sitting down on the bed. She grabs a large Bible from the nightstand and begins reading it, fending off BRYUSOV as he attempts to embrace her.)

NINA (Between sobs, crossing herself): O Lord, rebuke me not in thine anger...

(When BRYUSOV persists, she grabs a doily from the nightstand, overturning a lamp, and covers her head with the cloth as she continues sobbing. BRYUSOV attempts to console her without success, then finally begins to thrash about helplessly, knocking over a piece of furniture. He takes out the needle, pauses, then throws it down.)

BRYUSOV: I will speak to him, do you understand me?

(He storms out. NINA gradually calms down, picks up the needle and injects herself. She stands, staggers across the room and collapses. The lights go down.)

### Scene V

The salon. Chairs are set up for a lecture. GUESTS are entering, including BRYUSOV with NINA, who wears the same cape and a muff. They take their seats. BB stands near a podium in front of the room, smoking, speaking with ALYOSHA.

ALYOSHA: Look who deigns to grace us with his presence. Have you seen him since

his outrageous challenge?

BB: No, not at all. I quit *Libra* you know, broke off all contact with him. I am hardly able to bear his presence....But Alyosha, a duel between the two of us would have been as ridiculous as...

ALYOSHA (Seriously): ...centaurs?

(BB nods heavily.)

Nevertheless, how dare he publish *that novel*. Half of Moscow is gossiping about you, him...*her*.

BB (Mournfully): Gossip, it seems, is less taxing than revolutions, and I hope less permanent...At least now I understand his strange behavior toward me all last year, those interrogations, the stares...

ALYOSHA: Bryusov is a despicable man...

BB: I miss him terribly.

(With a glance at BB, ALYOSHA rings for everyone's attention and motions BB to begin.\* GUESTS still standing sit down. BB steps up to the podium. )

BB: Until recently we thought the world was understood. All depth had vanished from the horizon. Spreading forth from our feet was a great flatness. No longer did there remain the eternal values that might open

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\* Alt: ALYOSHA: Ladies, gentlemen, I bring you someone you all know, one of our greatest writers, one of our deepest thinkers – Andrei Bely.



new vistas. Everything was cheapened, bankrupt. But the quest for far horizons had not disappeared from our hearts. Our hearts beat for new vistas. They pleaded for eternal values.

In our times, a yawning abyss has opened between mind and feeling. A tragic horror of disorder has grown from the depths—

(Suddenly, NINA stands up and pulls a revolver from her muff. Amid screams from the GUESTS, she first aims the gun at BB, holding it there long enough to give the impression that she may have tried to fire. She then swings the gun to BRYUSOV and pulls the trigger. It misfires. Without flinching, BRYUSOV grabs her arm, seizes the gun and puts it in pocket. He then escorts NINA to the door, turning her over to some other GUESTS. The salon empties. BRYUSOV returns to BB, who is now sitting on a chair, and sits down beside him. )

BRYUS: I apologize for the interruption, Boris Nikolai'ich.

BB: They told me she was improving under your tutelage.

(BB offers BRYUSOV a cigarette. BRYUSOV accepts.)

BRYUS: Yes. No. Some days I thank the stars I met her; in my life I have never experienced such ecstasy. The passion consumes us. Other days, the torture is unbearable. She is constantly threatening...the worst. I do not think I can stand it much longer. I am growing weary.

BB: The book is finished.

BRYUS: Nikolai'ich?

BB: I have been reading *The Fiery Angel* in *Libra*. Has the response been favorable?

BRYUS: Thus far, yes.

BB: My acquaintances have taken to calling me Madiel.

BRYUS: You of course are not offended.

BB: Not in the least. You did what a writer must do. You crawled through the desert.

BRYUS (Standing): I wish you would come back to work for *Libra*, Boris Nikolai'ich.

BB: Nothing would give me greater pleasure. It has already been too long.

BRYUS: Then we shall see you soon?

BB: Soon enough, I think.

(BRYUSOV offers his hand. BB takes it. Exit BRYUSOV. BB stares after him.)

## Scene VI

The 16th century guest house. RUPRECHT and RENATA are sitting side by side, reading the Bible.

RENATA: Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice; let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications...

(RUPRECHT leans over to her, smells her hair and attempts to put his arm around her.

She jumps to her feet.)

REN: Ruprecht, again!

(He attempts to pull her toward him.)

RUP: Renata, come, enough of these religious exercises. I love you too much.

REN: Liar! Ignoble hypocrite! The Devil is in you! You are Satan! Lord God, Jesus, save me from this person!

RUP: Renata, I love you.

REN: Hah! I know the only thing you want from me. Why me? Go to a whore house. For a few coins you'll find a wife who will serve you every night. You only want to tempt me because you know that I have given over my body and spirit to the Lord.

RUP (Aside): As God is my witness, I have had enough of this woman. Why did I not throw her over months ago? (He turns to her and extends his hands.) Renata, we cannot continue like this.

REN: Away from me! It was madness to say I loved you. I was full of madness and despair; I had nothing else. But each time you embraced me I flinched in revulsion. I hate you, damned one!

RUP: Renata, for what do you indict me? Have I forced on you anything against your will?

(RENATA seizes a knife from the table.)

REN: Watch how Christ taught us to resist temptation!

(She begins to stab herself around the shoulders and chest. Blood flows onto her dress.

RUPRECHT makes an attempt to seize the knife; RENATA attempts to stab him. He steps aside, she misses. She picks the books lying on the floor and begins to hurl them at him.)

REN: Leave! I do not want to feel your touch, ever! I never want to set eyes on you again!

(After a hesitation, exit RUPRECHT to RENATA's hysterical laughter. Lights out.

(Optional: During previous, the corresponding scene in the opera [end Act IV, Scene 1] may be mimed upstage. After RUPRECHT(N) exits, music up as RENATA(O) sings, "Get away, accursed one!" at about 4:20. Exit RENATA(O). RUPRECHT(O) runs after her. )

## Scene VII

The cafe. PROKOFIEV is poised to leave, as at the end of Scene I.

WAITER: M Prokofiev, before you go....In your scenario, Heinrich never speaks a word, and once Ruprecht's health is restored, Renata runs off yet again, so as not to be led into temptation. But for Bryusov...The noble Heinrich helps nurse the wounded knight back to health and then Ruprecht and

Renata live together for a time as man and wife. \* Somehow, M Prokofiev, I must say your story appears to be...disintegrating.

PROK (Sternly): Eh, you must learn, in opera no one cares about the story; the music is the thing—the only thing.

(Exit PROKOFIEV.)

### Scene VIII

The lights immediately go up on train station, where BRYUSOV sits on a bench with his head in his hands. It is actually several years later. Enter BB dressed to travel.

BB: Valery Yakovlevich?

(BRYUSOV looks up.)

Is something wrong?

BRYUS: At last the torment is over.

(BB sits down next to him.)

She has finally left. We have been sitting on the train for hours with a bottle of champagne between us on the floor, tears flooding...These last years...I told her I no longer wanted to have anything to do with her, but I could not break free...She hurls books as if they are missiles; she smashes furniture. One month ago—a morphine overdose. She nearly died,

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\* Alt [if tableau not used]: he and Renata consummate their passion, living together for a time as man and wife.

vomiting her innards over the floor; we rushed her to the hospital. And yet... there have been periods of lucid tranquility. She managed to write....somehow...We are demons, she and I...What is there left for her here, with the circumstances...? (He begins to sob.) I...I shall not see her again.

(BB attempts to put his arm around BRYUSOV, but BRYUSOV stands up.)

BB:           Where has she gone?

BRYUS:       Rome...

(He composes himself.)

BB:           Do not mourn her. Her job was done. Was the novel finally a success?

BRYUS:       You wrote a favorable review: "History speaks directly to us. We see Bryusov nowhere among its pages." (He chuckles somberly.) *The Fiery Angel* sold a few thousand copies. What will happen to them I don't know. I doubt anyone will remember it. The times...

BB:           Yes, the times.

BRYUS:       Russia's future does not look bright at present. God knows where we are drifting. *Libra* shut down...What are your plans?

BB:           As you see, I am also off—to Switzerland. I plan to help Doctor Steiner build his city devoted to anthroposophy.\*

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\* Alt: devoted exclusively to his philosophy.

BRYUS: Rudolf Steiner. Are you serious?

BB (With increasing fervor): Perfectly. I have recently met him. I tell you, he understands the goals we must set for ourselves in this new century. He perceives the great mysteries. When he speaks he fills the room with light, with the brilliance of unfolding wings. With each glance he says, "You are." He passed by me and in a single instant gazed straight into the center of my heart, setting it ablaze...He grasped my spirit and shook it with such force that he tore my soul from my body, cleansing it with a pure love for all mankind. Can you understand?

(BRYUSOV remains silent.)

No, I suppose not. I intend to devote my life to this new mission. My destiny shall at last be fulfilled.

(BRYUSOV continues to remain silent.)

And you, Valery Yakovlevich, what will you do now?

BRYUS: Go back to my wife. She has been waiting for me six years...seven.

BB: Then let us wish each other the best of luck.

(They shake. Exit. Lights.)

End Act IV

## Act V

### Scene I

The entire act takes place in Paris during the mid 1920s. For the principals about twenty years have passed since the end of previous act, and for PROKOFIEV and the WAITER about five years. The clarinet solo from the finale of Miaskovsky's 6th Symphony, which leads into the *Dies Irae*, begins [4th movement, 5:55]. The lights go up on PROKOFIEV and the WAITER at the cafe,

PROK: Ah, Miaskovsky, seven years, more, have gone by since I have had any word from you, but news of your Sixth Symphony's triumphant march across America has reached me. No symphony of our time has matched its scope and tragedy. In it I hear the War, the revolution, the wind rattling over the corpses of loved ones; I hear every misfortune that has befallen Russia in the past two decades, which have held enough horrors for a century.

[The first four notes of the *Dies Irae* here.]

I have returned to my *Fiery Angel* after putting it aside for several years. I am incapable of understanding why no one shows any interest in it. Bruno Walter offered a production in Berlin but the swine reneged on his promise. In Paris, Rome, Milan the story is the same; they find the *Angel* too unwieldy and too incomprehensible, and the lead role too demanding.



It seems my Renata is the longest operatic role on record and no living prima donna has the stamina to attempt her.

The opera has become the greatest disappointment of my life and I am at a loss as to what to do with it. I shall finish the orchestration, yet again, then consign it to the fire.

(Enter BALMONT, now in his fifties and a bit heavier than in the old days, still bearded, with wild hair and wearing a dusty suit. He sits down at the cafe doing his best to remain dignified. The WAITER approaches him, which catches PROKOFIEV's attention. PROKOFIEV peers at him.)

PROK: Is it Konstantin Balmont?

(BALMONT stares back.)

BAL: Prokofiev?

(PROKOFIEV nods. They stand, shake and sit. PROKOFIEV signals the WAITER to bring them drinks.)

PROK: I thought I recognized you. What brings you to Paris?

BAL: You ask. There are a million of us here. Paris has become the capital of Russia.

PROK: Not yet: we haven't imported our wonderful climate—

BAL: The mud, don't forget the mud. (He laughs.)

PROK: Paris suits you then.

BAL (With a tint of false bravado): Absolutely. Have never felt better, veritably experiencing my second youth. (With a hint of sad expectation): And you, Prokofiev?

PROK: I can't complain. The scoundrels running the orchestras never pay me enough but Paris is the only place for a musician. Are you still writing?

BAL (Improvising): Prokofiev! Music and youth in bloom.  
In you, the orchestra yearns for forgotten summer sounds,  
And the invincible Scythian beats on the tamtam of the sun.

(PROKOFIEV nods amusedly.)

As you see, the knight charges gallantly on, lance eternally sharp.

(The WAITER sets down two glasses. PROKOFIEV and BALMONT clink them.)

BAL: To acquaintanceship. (He knocks back his drink, then closes in on himself.)  
Where do we belong, Prokofiev? We can't go back; here we are useless.  
God, how debased it's all become! No one knows who I am; no one cares...Eh, my apologies. This is an old has-been talking; I'm the first to admit it. After the Great War, the Bolsheviks, the Civil War, who can read about fairies, about the sun?

PROK: Balmont was born to see the sun, do you remember?

BAL: (After a silence): I remember tearing up wooden fences for firewood and eating wheat porridge for a solid year. (He rises.) Forgive me. There is

nothing more pathetic than an old man mourning times gone by.

(He extends his hand. PROKOFIEV takes it.)

PROK: Write some poems. I'll set them to music.

BAL: Done.

(He waves cheerfully good-by and exits. The WAITER approaches PROKOFIEV.)

WAITER: Who was that, Monsieur?

PROK (With a little surprise): That? Twenty years ago that was the most famous poet in Russia. Women swooned at his feet; you could follow his exploits in the papers. The people fashioned his poetry into revolutionary banners and for that he was banished by the Tsar. Now—he wears a shabby suit. Konstantin Balmont.

(The lights go down on the cafe.)

## Scene II

A 16th-century palace room. RUPRECHT(N) is attending the COUNT von VELLEN.

COUNT: Ruprecht, with your interest in sorcery and dark matters such, you will want to know that the convent to which we escorted the Inquisitor has recently been the site of miraculous events. Not long ago a young novice

appeared who is in the constant presence of an angel or a demon, no one can be certain.

(RUPRECHT recoils.)

The convent is divided, I would say at war with itself. Half the sisters are convinced she is a saint. Sometimes this novice does penance throughout the night, kneeling on the cold stones—

(Again RUPRECHT recoils.)

They say in the darkness of the church you can see a light, a true nimbus, gracing her head, and that when she prays a soft voice from unseen lips fills the choir with sacred canticles. Villagers claim that she makes the sick whole with one touch of her fingers; her fame is spreading throughout the countryside.

RUP (In agitation): The very convent our retinue visited this morning?

COUNT: The same, St. Olaf's. Half the sisters swear she is possessed by the Devil.

RUP: Count von Vellen, it has been some months since I entered your service and you have no reason not to trust me. Grant me leave to go to St. Olaf's.

COUNT: You know this woman, don't you?

RUP: There is no one in the entire world dearer to me. Most respected Count, believe me, that poor creature has not, could never of her own free will enter into any pact with the Devil. I must save her before it is too late.

COUNT (Putting his arm on RUPRECHT's shoulder): In all haste then; the  
Inquisitor is preparing his questions.

(They exit together.)

### Scene III

A soirée at the well-appointed Paris apartment of GIPPIUS and her husband  
DMITRI MEREZHKOVSKY. GIPPIUS' long hair has grayed somewhat but she remains  
quite striking. She doesn't see very well, fiddles with her lorgnette and gives the  
impression of being somewhat absent-minded. She still smokes through a cigarette  
holder and is dressed in a way that is reminiscent of her at the turn of the century.  
MEREZHKOVSKY is about ten years her senior and bearded. A number of GUESTS  
are present, including LIZA of the old ARGONAUTS. She is looking through the books  
and takes down an issue of *The New Way*.

LIZA: You have done well for yourself in Paris, Zinaida Nikolaevna.

GIPPIUS (Peering at LIZA): Yes, darling, when we arrived in 1920 we opened the  
door and everything was exactly as we had left it from our stay here nearly  
fifteen years earlier: books, kitchenware, everything. It was as if time had  
frozen life.

LIZA (Holding up the journal): Your journal, *The New Way*, stops in 1905. What  
happened to it? And the Religious Philosophical Society that you worked

so hard for?

GIPPIUS: What happened? Nothing in that country changes. While we struggled to find our Third Way, the authorities shut it down. We were growing weary of the affair anyway, weren't we dear? During the upheavals of 1905, you know, my husband and I tried to find a religious alternative to communism. (Taking a drag on her cigarette.) I don't think we were entirely successful. The only thing to do was come to Paris.

(A knock on the door. Enter BALMONT carrying flowers.)

BAL: We shall be like the sun!

(The younger GUESTS look at him strangely. He ignores them and hands the flowers to GIPPIUS, kissing her on the cheek.)

GIPPIUS: Each time I see you, Balmont, your sun appears closer to the horizon.

BAL: While your star, Zinochka, remains at its zenith. (Turning to GUESTS): To plunge ever farther.

(He shakes hands with MEREZHKOVSKY, then speaks to both him and GIPPIUS.)

BAL: The two of you will want to know, Valery Bryusov has died.

GIPPIUS (Apparently misunderstanding): That is certain. He's become a communist censor, a mad, ugly fanatic who writes odes on the death of Lenin.

BAL: Zina, he really has died.

GIPPIUS: So much the better. "March forward, Red Army soldier! March, the word

is a prayer!" Now he can march forever in the Workers' Paradise, praying to the Bolshevik god of cement.

BAL: Zinaida Nikolaevna! He was the best friend of my youth. We locked arms together and swore brotherhood, brotherhood do you understand? What prodigies he performed for the cause of literature—!

GIPPIUS: True, and for literature he would sell his brother and his brother's soul. Well, now the Devil has his due.

BAL (Waving his arm in disgust): Aah!

(He turns to leave, but is stopped by LIZA.)

MEREZ: Zinochka, he was indispensable in getting our journal and *The World of Art* off the ground.

BAL: There! Without him, Russian art and literature would have taken a very different path.

GIPPIUS: Don't deceive yourself. What remains of that childish self-indulgence? Not an echo. (Waving her hand): It is gone, all completely gone.

BAL: Who are you to say? It is not given to a man to write his own epitaph.

MEREZ: I suppose that is true. How many people read us nowadays, Zinochka? Time is harsh, and the most capricious governess.

(They fall briefly into silence, then GIPPIUS starts to reminisce.)

GIPPIUS: There was one hour I remember when Bryusov appeared at our apartment

in Petersburg. It was twilight, the streetlamps had been lit. I can see even now the glow of that evening. Bryusov walked in with such an expression on his face—do you remember, darling?

MEREZ: How could one forget?

GIPPIUS: Mitya and I knew immediately that something had happened. This was not the ordinary Bryusov. Before us stood a real, living person, a person in the deepest despair.

MEREZ: After that business with—what was her name?—Nina...he had taken up with another young poetess and turned her to thoughts of death. That would have been like him. She shot herself with a pistol he'd given her.

GIPPIUS: I never saw him before or since as he was on that day. He was run through by remorse. She had loved him, believed in his love...

MEREZ: Bryusov himself told her he didn't love her. He didn't believe her suicide threat, didn't answer her call. He saw her only after she was dead.

GIPPIUS: Enough. That was the single hour of my life I felt close to Bryusov. The next time I saw him—a few months later—he was the old, eternal Valery Yakovlevich. There he stood, nervously lighting cigarette after cigarette and becoming annoyed with everything and everyone around him.

MEREZ: I wonder where he got the pistol.

(There is a long silence. BALMONT makes another move to leave but LIZA again stops



him.)

LIZA: Please, don't go, M Balmont.

BAL: I do not think I have had the pleasure, Madame.

LIZA: Oh, we exchanged a few words many years ago, perhaps in 1903. I was one of your legion of anonymous, adoring admirers, that's all.

(BALMONT kisses her hand.)

BAL: I am grateful you remember.

(He pours himself a drink from the nearest bottle.)

LIZA: How you inspired us! An entire generation. And you have changed so little. There is something still boyish in you, rakish...like the sun you so often write about.

BAL: Madame, if you persist in talking so, I shall be forced to carry you off to my castle!

LIZA: How did you ever become so free in soul, in spirit? You have traveled the world more than all other poets combined. I look at you, as I did twenty years ago, and say to myself, this is a man who has cast aside all shackles.

(BALMONT stares morosely into his glass.)

BAL: Madame, let me tell you something few have heard. When I was young, all of twenty-two, and tortured to delirium by my first wife, in a fit of terrible despondency I threw myself out of a third-story window, from the very

hotel in which we lived. With that rashest and most lucid of all actions I intended to end my life, but somehow I succeeded only in breaking every bone in my body. I was chained to a hospital bed for nearly a year. During that long year, lying in bed, never daring to hope that I would someday walk again, I learned from the dawn twittering of the swallows outside my window; I learned from the moonbeams streaming into my room and with every tenderness striking my face; I learned from the chirping of crickets, from all the words reaching my ears of this great tale of life. I came to understand life's sacred inviolability. And when I finally stood, my soul had become as free as the wind over the field, no longer ruled by anyone or anything, except the will to create, and from that day on, my creations blossomed like unruly flowers.

(LIZA begins to cry.)

Please, my dear, I did not mean to upset you.

LIZA: No, thank you, I shall never forget what you have just told me. I hope only that I am worthy of it.

(She turns away. There is a knock on the door.)

BAL: Ah, it must be Bely. He has come to Paris from Berlin and I told him to drop by.

(GIPPIUS opens the door. Crouched below the doorknob is BB, now about forty-five

and almost entirely bald. The remaining hair around his temples is grey. He is wearing a long, loose coat and springs up like a great frog. He smiles continually with a huge grin painted on his face. )

BB: *Zdravstoyute*, Zinaida Nikolaevna, trax-trax-trax!

GIPPIUS: Borya Bugaev? Is it really you?

BB: I have risen from the dead! Look at me!

GIPPIUS (Peering at him through her lorgnette): It really is you.

BB: I am Michelangelo!

GIPPIUS: Come in then, Michelangelo. The cardinals are waiting.

(BB enters, almost dancing, and catches sight of BALMONT.)

BB: Balmont, thanks for your call!

BAL: Borya, welcome!

(They embrace. BB turns to the GUESTS and begins to fly around the room, gesticulating wildly. He stops before the GUESTS, one after the other, and grins.)

BB: In Berlin, I fly by tram along the Kurfürstendamm. I see a little dog near a hydrant—he looks a bit like you—who has lifted his leg, contemplating serenely. (To LIZA): Suddenly a lady puts her foot on one of my galoshes. “Madame, whom do you take me for?” She: “I have known you for a long time; I see you in my secret dreams. When will I create a wonderful fairy tale with you?” (Whirling to another GUEST): I fled, hopping along—hop,

hop, hop—and German dwarfs ran after me. But I elbowed my way through the crowd, seeking that little dog under the cigar ad. The dwarfs continued to follow me but Berlin streets possess one indubitable quality: they transform passers-by into shadows. (To GIPPIUS): And so I reached Paris safely. My dear, a drink if you don't mind, and if you can find one, a pickle.

(He sits down on the floor. Some GUESTS laugh and applaud; others are perplexed. GIPPIUS hands him a drink. He drinks it practically in one gulp, gets up and finds another.)

BAL: There is something I should tell you Borya, about Valery Bryusov.

(BB pays no attention and addresses the GUESTS.)

BB: Balmont—this very Balmont—between snores and vodka: “The two of us will scatter petals together; the poet calls forth the poet.” I: “Those sing-song rhymes of yours *are* petals for scattering; true verses do not wither the instant they fall from the lips.” The decadents ruined him, forcing him by fire and sword to cut through new paths, but his sword was broken....

BAL (Grabbing him): Bugaev, enough.

BB: I 'm sorry.

GIPPIUS: Are you well?

BB: They crushed him they lashed him, they put a towel on his head.

BAL: You need one. (He turns away,)

BB: Pity me!

(BB is momentarily left alone. MEREZHKOVSKEY approaches him and takes his hand. )

MEREZ: Borya, you must be tired, coming in from Berlin. Do you need a rest?

(BB does not respond.)

It has been many years. We haven't seen you since you went off after Doctor Steiner to build his great cathedral in—where was it?—Dornach.

BB: Yes, and I was buried alive in its foundations.

MEREZ: Then you have been resurrected.

BB: Yes, yes! Resurrected! We hammered and hammered at those gigantic, faceted columns, columns that stood around us in two great druidic semi-circles dedicated to Mars and Venus. Suddenly, one day, I felt the sun rise within me, that I had become the light of the world. I knew it was not "I" in me, but Christ who through me was illuminating mankind. (He breaks off and peers at MEREZ.)

But, Dmitri Sergeevich, for me the spiritual world is the same as a sturgeon filet. Most men enter the other world only as guests and observers. I dine there.

(LIZA who has been watching the previous with some agitation speaks to a GUEST.)

LIZA: Strange. His *Petersburg* is simply the great novel of the century, so

revolutionary, the first truly modern novel.

GUEST: I tried to read it—ten years ago?—but...I couldn't make anything of it.

LIZA: I am convinced he will be numbered among the immortals of literature. To see him this way is incomprehensible. This is not the old Bely.

GUEST: Ah, but it is.

(BB, having gotten another drink, prances over to LIZA, peering at her.)

BB: I know you. Raphael's Madonna! Love me! Kiss me! I will take you where no one else ever will!

LIZA: Please, you mistake me, Boris Nikolaevich, I am hardly Raphael's Madonna. Elizaveta Fyodorovna, that's all, one of your Argonauts from those wild years, years that seem to have had no precedent...and no consequence—

BB: The Argonauts who sailed after the Golden Fleece and were swept away into the blue vortex of debauchery, materialism and amnesia?

(LIZA reluctantly nods.)

I curse you, women of my youth! Intellectuals, decadents, hysterics! You are contrary to all that is natural and decent in life!

LIZA (Taken aback): I...I am sorry. Please, if you can understand, just let me tell you how highly I regard your novel *Petersburg*.

BB: Trax-trax-trax.

LIZA (Faltering, turning away): N...nothing compares to it. I would hope for another.

BB: No, it is impossible, the fate of Europe depends on me. But when you write my biography, remember: Andrei Bely never had a single woman worthy of him. From women he received only slaps.

(He turns to the gathering, picks up a full glass and downs it, fills it again and spreads his arms.)

I want all of you to raise your goblets to Andrei Bely, for he has come here tonight to tell you, to announce that he is returning to Russia to be crucified. For the salvation of Russian literature he will be hoisted onto a cross and nailed there, and his blood shall flow.

BAL (Angrily): Not a drop for my sake!

BB (Pointing a finger at BALMONT): You...you...

(He suddenly turns and rushes toward the door. LIZA extends her hand but he only brushes past her and exits. She puts her hands to her face and the lights go down.)

#### Scene IV

Enter RUPRECHT and COUNT von VELLEN. They stop before a secluded portal in a monastery wall.

COUNT: The Prioress here is not well disposed to the Inquisitor and believes in your

Renata's innocence. With God's help, you will have your beloved in your arms before the night is out.

(The COUNT raps on the door with the hilt of his sword. A FEMALE VOICE answers.)

VOICE: Who goes?

COUNT: The land of the traitor is not less than the province of the Jews.

(The door opens.)

VOICE: Come! Quickly, quickly! We may already be too late!

(We see the glow of torches being lit. They fade out in the distance.)

#### Scene V

The apartment of GIPPIUS, where GIPPIUS and MEREZHKOVSKY are now alone, reading at the kitchen table. There is a knock.

MEREZHKOVSKY: We aren't expecting any guests today, are we darling?

GIPPIUS: No, thank God.

(She goes to the door and opens it. Before her stands NINA, appearing much as she has on the occasions when she crossed paths with PROKOFIEV. She has put on weight since the last encounter, her face is covered with moles. She wears the same décolleté dress and has the look of someone who has been addicted to morphine for a long time.)

NINA: Zinaida Nikolaevna.

GIPPIUS: Yes?



(They regard each other for a long time.)

You seem familiar to me, from long ago, as though through a haze...

NINA: My name is Renata.

GIPPIUS: I don't know any Renata. (She nearly closes the door.)

...My God, you're Nina...Petrovskaya, aren't you, Bryusov's...mistress.

NINA: Help me.

GIPPIUS (Somewhat reluctantly): Yes, well, come in then, Nina...?

(NINA doesn't respond but walks in.)

I'll bring some tea.

(She goes to the table and pours a cup of water from a samovar and prepares a cup of tea. Throughout, NINA speaks as if somewhere else.)

NINA (Sitting): Renata is my name now.

GIPPIUS: (Whispering to MEREZ): Do you know who that is?

(MEREZ shakes his head.)

That is Bryusov's Renata, the woman with whom half the poets in Moscow were smitten.

MEREZ: Surely it can't be. I assumed she must have been a great beauty.

GIPPIUS: It is she; I barely remember her. She reeks of vodka and tobacco. What should we do?

(MEREZ shrugs helplessly. GIPPIUS brings NINA the tea.)

GIPPIUS: Here you are, *dorogaya*.

(NINA takes the tea without looking up.)

NINA: I changed my name in the secret book at St. Peter's. No one knows but me.

GIPPIUS: You were in Rome?

NINA: Here, there...I saw the great empire that buried so many souls, now itself in ruins.

GIPPIUS: Then you managed as a writer?

NINA: I...I managed...any way I could manage.

GIPPIUS: I shouldn't have asked, forgive me. (Casting about): Do you know, Boris Bugaev was here recently. He decided to go back to Russia. He's sided with the communists.

NINA: God be with him. After all, I killed him that time at the lecture....(She puts down her tea and begins stabbing at herself with a hat pin or her fingernails.) Sometimes I couldn't manage. Finally I died, but I was walking as if still alive. I decided to stop walking, pretending that I was a living being, and I threw myself out of the window. It was in Paris anyway. I broke my hip; it never set right, you see I still limp, like a hieratic, broken bird.

(The silhouette of a woman hurling herself out of a lighted window into the darkness flashes across the set.)

GIPPIUS: I am so sorry.

NINA: I have written to him. He will invite me back to Moscow.

GIPPIUS: Him? Bryusov?

NINA: Yes. I am certain he will write, ask me back and it will be like it was; he will create another novel about me, we will live it out just like we lived out everything before.

GIPPIUS: Nina, Renata...I do not think he will be able to write you.

NINA: Oh he will, I am certain of it. I belong to him and he to me—forever. At the *Metropole* we always ate at eleven at night. I remember the conductor of the Neapolitan orchestra with his fishlike tails, and the blue haze of the restaurant. He wrote about those nights you know,

As if in a fiery haze, those faces and jewels...

How good, before the flames, the crystal surrounding us...

From beyond your shoulder wafts an ominous sign...

(She smiles to herself.)

GIPPIUS (With slight skepticism): You remember him fondly.

NINA You do not remember! You have forgotten!

Ah! I remember every instant!

Not even the tomb can dim your face for me!

Eurydice! Eurydice...!

(NINA pauses.)

How can I not? It was the tragedy that made life worth living. I have not lived a large life like other people, no one cares whether I live or die. I should have died back then when the poem was complete; I would have been spared the rest. He cares, he will write. Can you help me find work? Anything, anything at all. Gorky knows me; he will recommend me...

GIPPIUS: Are you able to work, Renata?

NINA: I will do anything. Do you have codeine? A doctor's prescription? I can get it filled.

GIPPIUS (With a helpless glance at MEREZ): Perhaps you would be better off at a home. The church runs one...

NINA: The orthodox church? I am Catholic now. I converted then, when I took my secret name...

GIPPIUS (Rising): Nina, I am afraid we can't help. We have so little ourselves. Wait, Balmont lives in Paris, I have his address. I'll give it to you.

(She goes to the table and scribble an address on a piece of paper.)

NINA: Balmont...The road rises ever higher...

(GIPPIUS hands the paper. to NINA, who takes it without looking.)

Thank you.

(She rises slowly and GIPPIUS escorts her to the door. Exit NINA. With a glance at her husband, GIPPIUS closes the door. The lights go down.)

Scene VI

Upstage, the door to Balmont's apartment. Downstage, the cafe, evening.

PROKOFIEV is writing at one of the tables. Enter WAITER.

WAITER: Some wine, M Prokofiev?

(PROKOFIEV shakes his head.)

You are working on something new, it seems. What is it?

PROK: I finally heard from my friend Miaskovsky. I sent him the score to my *Fiery Angel* and he suggests reworking the music into a symphony. He's absolutely right. It works perfectly. I'll do the job, then, as I said, consign the opera to the flames.

WAITER: You can hardly be serious!

PROK: Why not? After torturing myself for seven, eight years, what do I have to show for it? Nothing. The Met in New York has just turned it down. (He tosses the WAITER a letter.) No tunes operagoers can whistle, its subject matter is unsuitable for the stage, the lead role too difficult...I'll salvage what I can.

(MEPHISTOPHELES, FAUST and RUPRECHT(O) carouse across the stage in the

background.)

WAITER (Picking up letter): I'm sure they are all idiots. The last two acts are too difficult to follow, though. In your scenario, after Renata runs off to a convent, Ruprecht merely wanders around with Faust and Mephistopheles until for no reason at all they end up at the monastery just as the Inquisition gets underway. It makes no sense.

PROK: I know! I know! But why rewrite it now? It will never be staged.

(He gathers up the score to the opera and readies to dump it in a trash can.)

WAITER (Grabbing the score): Don't you dare! M Prokofiev, who is to say what will become of this? You must not despair.

PROK: Very well. (He motions for the WAITER to give him the score.)

WAITER: You will not consign it to the flames.

PROK: My word.

(They shake and the WAITER gives the score back.)

But I will put an end to it.

WAITER: You do not believe that everything finds its way into the stream?

(PROKOFIEV shakes his head, chuckling somberly. Enter NINA. The clarinet solo from the Miaskovsky is heard.)

PROK: There is that strange woman again.

(As before, PROKOFIEV tips his hat and the WAITER salutes. Exit NINA. )

WAITER: You never found out who she was?

PROK: No. She seems hardly more than a beggar. (He gathers up his papers.)

Well, I'm off on tour—again. I'll see you the next time.

WAITER: *Au revoir*, Monsieur Prokofiev.

(Exit PROKOFIEV. The WAITER begins closing up for the night as the lights go down.)

### Scene VII

The Miaskovsky continues. BALMONT is sitting at the bench next to his apartment, writing poetry in a slim volume. Enter NINA. She walks past him to the door, without noticing his presence, and knocks.

BAL: If you are looking for Konstantin Dmitrievich Balmont, you will find him not inside, but before you, on the street.

(NINA turns slowly, barely aware of him.)

May I be of assistance, Madame?

NINA: Konstantin Dmitrievich, codeine, I need codeine.

BAL: Alas, Madame, in that realm I am utterly powerless.

NINA: You loved me once...

BAL (Graciously): I am certain it could not have been otherwise, Madame.

NINA: ...all the men in Moscow loved me...

BAL: Those *were* the days of hot pursuits. Everyone loved then, before war and revolution...

NINA: We strolled the boulevards, reciting poetry like two hieratic birds. I love the tree raised by fairy tales, on which nightingales sang...

BAL: ...And under the tree, the sown field of corn, the ears rustling, the music of the streams...

NINA: The Woman Clothed With the Sun lit up the world.

BAL: She did.

NINA: Christ walked with us on the boulevard, at the convent, and told us how she would sit with him and together rule the world in peace for one thousand years, and you told me how you were Orpheus and I your Eurydice...

BAL: Every Orpheus must sing for his Eurydice.

NINA: Konstantin Dmitrievich, some money, a place to stay. I need...  
a place to stay.

BAL: Madame, my companion and I occupy a one-room flat in this pathetic excuse for a building, and I fear that we shall soon be evicted to the poor house. But I gladly give you all I own.

(He hands her the book of poems he is writing and plucks a rose from the garden, handing it to her.)



NINA: Thank you, Konstantin Dmitrievich.

(She walks on. BALMONT stares after her and the lights go down.)

Scene VIII

A church within a 16th century convent. NUNS, MONKS and CHURCH

OFFICIALS are gathered there. In the center of the floor on her knees is RENATA(N), dressed in a novice's habit. Enter the INQUISITOR, carrying a crozier. He walks over to RENATA and makes the sign of the cross over her, then lays his hand on her head.

(The strategy here is to segue from the novel to the opera. Music from Act 5 of the opera can be woven into the dialogue, especially the many screams and cries of the NUNS.)

INQ: *Benedicat te omnipotens Deus, Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus.*

NUNS: Amin!

INQ: Sister Maria, do you understand of what you have been accused?

REN: Holy Father, I came here to search for peace, for my spirit has been tortured. But I have prayed only to the All Mighty God. If my enemies intend to destroy me, I do not have the strength to fight against them.

INQ: Have you seen demons?

REN: I have always turned from them!

INQ: Do you believe in the existence of evil spirits?

REN: I believe in the word of Our Lord God. Holy Father! I do not know from where I receive my visions, but they speak to me only of God and of goodness and they turn me away from sin. How can I not believe them?

INQ: Brothers and sisters! The sprit of darkness often takes the form of an angel in order to seduce and destroy a weak soul. But we have been given the sword of God by which to cut off the Evil One's accursed snout and we shall banish those dark spirits from our daughter forever!

(RENATA(O), offstage, answers by singing [CD2, track 10, 1:40-2:10]. As she finishes, sharp knocks are suddenly heard throughout the hall. The NUNS and MONKS start, looking around them. The INQUISITOR bangs his crozier on the floor. Demon music from the opera begins [Track 11, :00-:20, or 3rd movement symphony]. Medieval images of demons fly through the church.)

INQ: Who are you, shadowy ones? Answer!

REN: Father! They are mine enemies!

INQ (Raising his crozier): Father of lies, destroyer of truth! accursed one, who refuses to bend to the will of our Creator! By trickery and deceit you assault innocent souls and attempt to seduce them, but today, O rotting creation, we call forth against you the word of the Holy Spirit! Ancient serpent, we pronounce anathema on you, we banish you; flee to your horrible kingdom, to your barren desert, to your unearthly Hell, where you

will wallow in filth and gnaw at the bridle of your own pride, where you shall await eon past eon until that terrible day of the Last Judgment!

Away, in the name of Our Savior Jesus Christ, away!

(The supernatural noises increase. The NUNS huddle together. RENATA stands alone, like a statue. Suddenly one of the NUNS breaks loose and begins to beat herself on the floor, as if possessed. RENATA runs to help her; the NUN gets up with a swollen stomach, as if pregnant. [Nuns' cries, Track 11]. The INQUISITOR orders MONKS to bind the NUN with sacerdotal cords.)

INQ: Are you here, cursed sower of discord?

NUN<sub>1</sub> (In a strange, amplified voice): I am here!

INQ: In the name of the living God, answer: are you an evil spirit?

NUN<sub>1</sub>: Yes!

INQ: Are you the same who has seduced Sister Maria under the guise of an angel?

NUN<sub>1</sub>: No, for we are many! (She laughs.)

(Suddenly another NUN breaks loose from the crowd and launches into strange contortions.)

NUN<sub>2</sub>: He is in my breasts! He is in my arms! He is in my fingers!

(The INQUISITOR orders the MONKS to bind the NUN, but suddenly all the NUNS begin writhing, screaming and the situation goes out of control.)

NUNS (Various): He is in me!

I feel him!

Enter me! Enter me!

etcetera

INQ: *Per Christum Dominum, per eum, qui venturus est iudicare, vivos et mortuos, obtemperare! Spiriti maligni, damnati, interdicti, exterminati, extorsi, jam vobis impero et praecipio, in nomine et virtute Dei Omnipotentis et Iusti! In icti oculi discredite omnes qui operamini iniquitatem!*

(The uproar continues around him and the INQUISITOR orders RENATA bound. The Monks do so and she is dragged off to the fore of the stage where she is thrown into a cell filled with instruments of torture, including a rack. The chaos continues outside as the lights go down on RENATA. Enter RUPRECHT(N) and COUNT von VELLEN, carrying torches. The lights go up on RENATA, who is lying on the floor, having been tortured. RUPRECHT kneels by her side and lifts her head.)

RUP: Renata!

REN (Opening her eyes): Go, Ruprecht, I forgive you everything.

RUP: My beloved Renata, come with me, you must leave this place.

REN: No, I will not follow you Ruprecht. You almost destroyed me once, seduced me with darkness, but I freed myself from your hands. Go!

RUP: Renata, try to understand, you are in prison; they have tortured you. If you

do not leave this cell you will die.

REN: I want fire and torture. Now I have seen my Madiel, all fiery with blue eyes, with hair as if spun from fine golden thread. He has promised me eternal life in his embrace. I forgive you and Heinrich for everything you have done to me. Go and do not return.

RUP (Through tears): Renata, I swear by the All Mighty that I love you, that I will save you against your own will.

REN (Faintly): Madiel! Protect me! Save me!

(She dies. RUPRECHT gently lowers her body to the ground and kisses her. The lights now go up on the finale of the opera, as at the beginning of the play, where the orgy is continuing. The NUNS and the INQUISITOR now sing their roles according to the libretto. Enter RUPRECHT(O), FAUST and MEPHISTOPHELES, who merely look on. As before, RENATA(O) is hoisted onto a cross as the music reaches a climax. This time, however, as the lights fade out on the opera, the quiet coda of the Miaskovsky Sixth Symphony fades in [Track 4, 15:00 for chorus, 18:35 after]. The lights come up on NINA as she limps into a Salvation Army flophouse. She gazes at the rose Balmont gave her, lays it down on a table, closes all the windows and turns on a gas fixture. Then she sits down on a chair and dies.)

Curtain

