



# *The Venetian Mask*

romantic drama in five acts

*after Gaston Leroux' novel*

by Christian Lanciai (2003)

*The Characters :*

Poligny, resigning theatre director

Moncharmin, his successor

Richard, his colleague

Garnier, architect

Christine Stendhal, singer

Linda, her friend

Count Raoul de Chagny

Madame Carlotta, opera diva

Erik  
Nadir, Persian  
Jules Bernard, theatre worker  
a servant  
a doctor

The action is in Paris, mainly at the Opera,  
during the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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### *The Venetian Mask*

Act I scene 1. The office of the theatre director

*Poligny* It's a terrible mistake. They can't imagine the risks they are taking. But how could I convince them? If only Garnier was here with me.

*(opens the door and enters the office)*

*Moncharmin* So you dared to show up here after all, my dear Poligny!

*Poligny* I must warn you. Your course of action could have unpredictable consequences.

*Richard* Security has to come first. We can't allow any folly in the most serious opera of the world.

*Poligny* Folly! What is opera if not folly!

*Moncharmin* It's business, Poligny. We have to make profits. Art can not afford losing money.

*Poligny* But there is much more at stake than just money! It's the entire inner life of the opera and the very soul of the whole edifice!

*Richard* You are old, Poligny, and therefore so metaphysical. We must think of debit and credit in a practical organization! Everything must work perfectly or not at all!

*Poligny* Then you trample down music itself!

*Moncharmin* What do you mean?

*Poligny* Music is not just perfection. It is so much more and anything but that. Music is the soul that makes the artists dance and sing and play. If you reduce the music and the whole opera to just perfection, you will have no more than a robot puppet theatre, which the audience only can loathe!

*Richard* Poligny, you speak as an old experienced opera director, and we have full respect for your experience. But we find superstition behind stage harmful, and to pay a phantom and to reserve a permanent box for him is absurd. Ghosts don't send bills.

*Poligny* He is more than a ghost.

*Moncharmin* What do you really know about him? Does he exist?

*Poligny* Garnier knew him.

*Richard* We have actually sent for Garnier in this matter. He should turn up any moment. It will do no harm to discuss the matter between all four of us.

*Poligny* Garnier regards both of you as hopeless limited opportunists.

*Moncharmin* Everyone has had difficulties working with Garnier.

*Poligny* All except one.

*Richard* Who?

*Poligny* The one you wish to remove from the opera, like you removed Garnier.

*Moncharmin (with scorn)* My dear Poligny, how do you remove a ghost? Either it does not exist, and then there is nothing to remove, or it really does exist, and then you can't get rid of it whatever you do.

*Poligny* Precisely. And then it is only stupid to fight it.

*Richard* But so far we never had it confirmed that any ghost has existed.

*(enter Garnier.)*

*Poligny* Here is Garnier.

*Garnier* Gentlemen, why have you asked me here? Haven't you humiliated me enough?

*Moncharmin* We have not asked you here to humiliate you.

*Garnier* Gentlemen, just to be urged to appear in your presence is more than a humiliation.

*Richard* Explain what you mean.

*Garnier* You are typical representatives of the new young generation, who are only concerned with cultivating your egoism. Your lonely interest in life is money and your career, and for that you will sacrifice anything and anyone.

*Moncharmin* Monsieur Garnier, was it not for money and for your own career that you constructed this opera?

*Garnier* It was built with love, and I was not alone.

*Richard* Were you not the architect?

*Garnier* I had another architect above me. He was my unknown master, and it was on the basis of his plans that the opera was constructed.

*Moncharmin* But you got all the honour.

*Garnier* My master declined. It was in his interest to remain anonymous, which I respected. His example made me suffer all the humiliations, to constantly be cheated of my salary, to constantly have my work sabotaged, to constantly be forced to compromises and worse problem solutions to bring down the costs, and for the first night to be offered a hidden place with my wife in a corner on the top gallery at an insulting price. I was not even invited for the first night!

*Richard* Who was your master?

*Garnier* That he does not want me to reveal.

*Poligny* It's that person whom you don't believe exist and wish to delete all memories of in the theatre.

*Moncharmin* The ghost?

*Poligny* Yes, the so called ghost.

*Richard* You seem both to be complete victims to this legend. Who invented the myth?

*Garnier* Myths are not invented. They appear by themselves since they never are unfounded, and therefore they can never cease to exist.

*Moncharmin* Come on, Garnier and Poligny! Everybody knows that the ghost was invented to attract more people to the opera by an extra mystical attraction!

*Poligny* You were not here at the time. No one knows anything about that time but we who were here.

*Richard* The age of myths is past, Poligny. Our time is about realism. If this ghost really exists, then bring him here and let us meet him, and if he really has some function to fill at the opera, we will be pleased to discuss a relevant salary for him. If not, then like you, Poligny, he must leave.

*Poligny* What you want to do, gentlemen, is to bereave the opera its inmost magic. You wish to bereave art of its soul by realism for an excuse, but cold realism and materialism is as naked and ugly and revolting as you would be yourselves, gentlemen, without clothes. Your fat would be obvious, your floppy bellies would strike the eye, your flaccid flesh would stink, and you would only be good for being enthroned on your toilet stools. That is realism, gentlemen. Replace the magic of the opera with realism, and you will only be disgusted!

*Garnier* Let the fools do what they want, Poligny. They still have the power. They will eventually see for themselves what their folly will lead to.

*Moncharmin* You make it seem like a challenge.

*Poligny* I give you a last warning. Don't provoke the ghost. All you will get for it is scandals.

*Richard* With all respect, Poligny, our honoured predecessor, but we can't allow ourselves to be daunted by an undefined person who dares to threaten us with vague efforts at extortion. Our responsibility for the opera forbids us to get hiccups of fright for nothing.

*Poligny* I have warned you. That is all I can do.

*Garnier* Let us depart, Poligny, and leave these esthetic illiterates to their destiny. If they are blind we can't give them eyes.

*Poligny* The back way of repentance always remains open to you, gentlemen, until it is too late.

*Garnier* Come, Poligny. (*Poligny and Garnier leave.*)

*Moncharmin* They don't get tired of bringing broken cues.

*Richard* All we can do is to ignore them at least until the legend is manifested in reality, which it never has done so far, it seems.

*Moncharmin* We have done right, Richard, and there is nothing to be afraid of.

*Poligny (with Garnier, outside)* What do you think, Garnier? Is there any hope for them?

*Garnier* No, there is no hope for them. They are lost.

*Poligny* Can we do anything about it? Can we ask Erik to spare them?

*Garnier* No, there is nothing we can do about it. They have taken the initiative to bring out the worst sides of Erik, and they will face the consequences. They have themselves chosen their stupidity, and even the gods themselves fight stupidity in vain.

*Poligny* Should we have explained Erik to them?

*Garnier* If we had he would never have forgiven us. Let Erik explain himself to them. Then there will be no doubts.

*Poligny* I am afraid we will be facing a period of scandals.

*Garnier* Why afraid? On the contrary! I almost think it will be fun.

*Richard (observes a piece of paper)* But what the deuce is this?

*Moncharmin* What is it, Richard?

*Richard* Who has left this?

*Moncharmin* What is it?

*Richard (takes the paper and reads it)* "I am not the one to have declared war on you, but you are the ones who have declared war on me. Yours is the responsibility for the consequences. The ghost."

*Moncharmin* Another letter of threats and extortion.

*Richard* It must have been Garnier or Poligny who left it here.

*Moncharmin* Call them back at once!

*Richard (opens the door, calling)* Garnier! Poligny! *(They have just been on the point of getting away.)*

*Poligny* What is it now?

*Richard* Come back at once!

*Garnier (to Poligny)* He seems enraged.

*Poligny* Something must have happened. *(They return to the office.)*

*Richard* What is this supposed to mean? *(shows them the paper)*

*Poligny (returns the paper)* I can only draw one conclusion.

*Moncharmin* Well?

*Poligny* The "ghost" must have overheard our conversation and taken a position.

*Moncharmin* And you, Garnier? What have you to say?

*Garnier* Nothing.

*Moncharmin* Well, my good sirs Poligny and Garnier, there is only one possible solution to this. Someone of you must have written this note before you pleased to withdraw.

*Garnier* That is absurd, Moncharmin.

*Richard* He is right. No one else could have heard our conversation, written the note in stealth and left it here.

*Poligny* Gentlemen, you are mistaken. You don't know the ghost. You deny him without being able to prove that he does not exist. He could have written the note and left it here before any of the four of us entered the room.

*Garnier* So you accuse one of us to be the "ghost"?

*Poligny* They don't understand that "ghosts" really can exist. Out of plain fear they are ready to implement any absurdity.

*Richard* You are pulling our legs, gentlemen.

*Garnier* Not at all. You are pulling ours. You have written the note yourselves.

*Moncharmin* Your innuendos are beyond all reason.

*Garnier* Speak for yourself, Moncharmin! You accused us first! We claim that the "ghost" actually wrote this note himself. With the same right as you accuse us for having written it, we can accuse you for the same thing. Don't make yourselves more absurd and ridiculous than usual!

*Moncharmin* Who is making himself absurd and ridiculous here?

*Poligny* Gentlemen, we are all losing control. Let's view the matter objectively. No one can deny the possibility that the ghost actually wrote this note himself before we got here, and that you didn't observe it until just now, or what?

*Richard* He is right, Moncharmin. This matter cannot be cleared.

*Moncharmin* At least not now.

*Garnier* Accept the ghost, tolerate him, follow his advice, satisfy his whims, and all will be well for the opera and for you. That is my advice.

*Poligny* A good piece of advice. The only wise one.

*Moncharmin* We can't accept threats and efforts at blackmail.

*Poligny* Take it more as some artistic guidance. A director has to be allowed to direct.

*Moncharmin* And who is then the director? You or Garnier?

*Poligny* Garnier is just an architect. I was just a theatre manager like you. The artist you will find elsewhere.

*Moncharmin* And where? On the moon?

*Garnier* Rather in the underworld.

*Moncharmin* I understand. You just keep pulling our legs. Goodbye, gentlemen. Your services will never again be required.

*Richard* Moncharmin.

*Garnier* He kicks us out, Poligny. He discards us after our long and faithful work.

*Poligny* That will be their own share one day, Garnier. The theatre is like that. We can but resign.

*Garnier* Erik will avenge himself. I am sure of it.

*Poligny* Quiet!

*Richard* Who is Erik? It is the first time I hear this name.

*Poligny* Let's go, Garnier. We are finished here. *(leaves with Garnier)*

*Moncharmin* So the ghost really has a name?

*Richard* Something tells me, my dear colleague, that we are dealing with something here which we really have no business with.

*Moncharmin* You mean that we should comply and accept it?

*Richard* Dare we risk a war within the opera, which is the "ghost's" threat?

*Moncharmin* I don't know, Richard. I don't know.

*Richard* Neither do I. *(both are left sitting with their hands to their fronts.)*

Scene 2. Christine's dressing room. She enters with her friend.

*Linda* This is the dressing room no one wanted. It's called the haunted lounge. How did you happen to get it?

*Christine* It happened so many strange things in whatever dressing room I got. Cans with cold water fell over me, I found my clothes torn asunder in the wardrobe, I found horrible messages written on the mirror with a lipstick...

*Linda* So every dressing room you got was haunted except this one?

*Christine* Yes, but....

*Linda* And everyone else found this dressing room haunted but none other.

*Christine* But also this one is haunted but in an agreeable way.

*Linda* How could any haunting be agreeable?

*Christine (intimately)* The spirit of music has visited me.

*Linda* How?

*Christine* He speaks to me through the mirror.

*Linda* This one? (*goes up to the great mirror and regards it*)

*Christine* Yes.

*Linda* An ordinary mirror. It's in every dressing room. What does he say then?

*Christine* He gives me singing lessons and good advice. He has chosen me.

*Linda* You were always weird, Christine, and we have all noticed how much you have improved lately, as if you had found an inspirer. You were never like the rest of us. You always wandered like in a dream, and to me you were a sleeping beauty just waiting for the right prince to heed his calling...

*Christine* And he is the one I have found, or rather, he is the one who have found me.

*Linda* What does he look like?

*Christine* I have never seen him, only heard him.

*Linda* And he speaks to you through the mirror?

*Christine* Yes.

*Linda* Anyone would say, Christine, that you are imagining things, and anyone would call you deranged and a mental case, but we artists hear what has happened to you, and whatever it is, it has made you an artist. Therefore no one here in the theatre will wonder about what happens to you, as long as you only get better.

*Christine* So you don't believe in the ghost and that he has chosen me?

*Linda* I don't believe anything, Christine, except what I see; and here in the mirror I only see my own image, like you see yours. And whatever you hear, I can't hear it.

*Christine* He only speaks when I am alone with him.

*Linda* So does the conscience.

*Christine* But he is human and has a voice.

*Linda* So you have someone to speak with when you are alone. So you are two people. Good for you, as long as it serves you. I leave you alone with your mirror. I hope at least you will not have your dresses torn or threats by a lipstick on the mirror here. (*leaves*)

*Christine* She doesn't understand or doesn't want to understand. Am I really going mad? Am I really imagining all that is happening to me?

*Mirror* No, Christine, nothing of what human fantasy may imagine is ever unreal.

*Christine* Again this enigmatic pleasant voice talking to me through the mirror. Who are you, ghost?

*Mirror* Forget who I am. I can only help you as long as I remain unknown and unseen.

*Christine* You are the prince of my dreams although I have never seen you.

*Mirror* And so I can only remain as long as you never see me.

*Christine* You have helped me much to the only price of your own self-effacement.

*Mirror* It's my own choice. You have the right kind of soul, Christine, and the right feeling to become the best of singers. I have only experienced anything similar in Jenny Lind. You are her only possible successor. But music is mostly only discipline and work, the soul must be realized by infinite patience and indefatigability; but all that I am prepared to offer you, which you never can find in anyone else.

*Christine* I am poor and without means. Therefore I could never take singing lessons.

*Mirror* That stresses the importance of my support.

*Christine* Mirror, mirror on the wall, just because I can't see you I can love you the more. Just because you are invisible and untouchable you appear the more beautiful to my idealising endeavour. Your voice is all I have to follow, which to me is more lovely than the very essence of music. As long as you speak to me, ghost, I will be eternally loyal to you and entirely submit to your will.

*Mirror* That's all I ask for. In return you will have everything.

*Christine* (*goes up to the mirror to embrace it*) Just don't harm anyone.

*Mirror* (*gently*) I will try not to.

*Christine* Your voice sounds so young, as if you were still a quite young and handsome, inexperienced man, but at the same time I find such maturity in you, as if you were the oldest of all.

*Mirror* I am timelessness in person.

*Christine* I believe you, but at the same time your voice is animated by such a deep and painful melancholy, as if it could burst into tears at any moment, and as if you were all too well aware of your own mortality.

*Mirror* I have lived next to death all my life. Death is a part of me.

*Christine* I believe you, melancholy ghost, but whence then is your youth?

(*Moncharmin and Richard enter suddenly.*)

*Richard* Are you speaking with the mirror, Christine?

*Moncharmin* Or are you a ventriloquist speaking with yourself?

*Christine (dismayed, tries like instinctively to cover the mirror, as if it was a lover)*

You usually knock before entering.

*Richard* Pardon us, mademoiselle Christine, but we didn't think you were alone.

*Moncharmin* We were surprised to find you talking with the mirror.

*Christine* What do you want?

*Richard (sighs and takes a seat)* We find ourselves in an impossible situation, miss Christine. Do you know anything about the matter?

*Christine* What matter?

*Moncharmin* Our primadonna Carlotta is suddenly hoarse like a magpie. And her replacement Madeleine Moreau has suddenly broken her leg.

*Christine* How terrible!

*Moncharmin* Do you mean it? Do you know what it means?

*Christine* No, what?

*Richard* She is as innocent as a novice, Moncharmin. She knows nothing.

*Christine* What is it I don't know?

*Moncharmin* We happen to know that you know the entire part of Margaret in Faust. There is no one else who can sing it but you.

*Richard* So we are obliged to ask you to accept that main part for the first night, which cannot be postponed, at least until Madame Carlotta has regained her voice.

*Christine (worried)* But how do you know that I know that part?

*Moncharmin* Anonymous information. (*shows Christine a note*)

*Christine (reads)* "Since both Carlotta and Madeleine are out of order I suggest the young Christine as Margaret, since she knows the entire role by heart. The opera ghost." (*forgets herself*) My ghost! He lives!

*Richard* Do you know him?

*Christine (dismayed)* Who?

*Moncharmin* The ghost!

*Christine* No, I have never seen him. I have only heard of him.

*Richard* She speaks the truth. No one has seen him.

*Moncharmin* What do you know about him?

*Christine (assertive)* Nothing!

*Richard* You must know something, since he is helping you.

*Christine* I promise! I know nothing! I only heard the legends!

*Moncharmin (severely)* What legends?

*Christine* The legends of his power, how he decides the repertoire, how he forces insufficient musicians to resign, how he makes life difficult for singers who sing out of tune, and above all how he never has been seen by anyone.

*Richard* She knows no more than we.

*Moncharmin* It doesn't look any better. Do you accept the leading part, Christine?

*Christine* It is more than I ever asked for or dared to hope for.

*Richard* Do you accept it?

*Christine* Do I have any choice?

*Moncharmin* No, you don't have any choice. The ghost seems to have decided it.

*Richard* So it is settled. We trust you. Thank you, Christine. (*offers his hand*)

*Moncharmin* We make changes in your contract tomorrow. Goodnight, Christine.  
(*The gentlemen leave. Christine turns with hesitation to the mirror.*)

*Christine* Do you know anything about this?

*Mirror* I know everything.

*Christine* Are you behind it?

*Mirror* It was inevitable. Both Carlotta and Madeleine were doomed to fail. They can't sing in tune. There was only you left.

*Christine* Don't speak any more about it. Just never let me down.

*Mirror* I will never let you down, Christine, as long as you don't fail me.

*Christine* How could I ever fail you?

*Mirror* You could only fail me by failing the music.

*Christine* Who can fail the music who once has given it her soul?

*Mirror* You are on the right way, girl. Just sing, and music will lead you on.

*Christine* I will do my best.

*Raoul (enters suddenly)* With whom were you talking?

*Christine* Raoul! You should knock!

*Raoul* I heard you speak with somebody. Who is he?

*Christine* I am all alone! I didn't speak with anybody but myself!

*Raoul* I clearly heard a younger male voice than my own. Who is he?

*Christine* Raoul, I have no lover!

*Raoul* Are you hiding something from me, Christine?

*Christine* I have nothing to hide for you except the secrets of my profession!

*Raoul* Do you have a secret teacher then?

*Christine* Raoul, I can't bear with your unfounded jealousy! You don't own me! No one owns me except the music!

*Raoul* I am sorry, Christine, the last thing I wish, is to come between you and your music, but I love you so much. Are you sure no one is here?

*Christine* Absolutely sure.

*Raoul* Then I must believe you.

*Christine (hugs him)* I am sorry, Raoul, but I can't stand arguments and hard words! I can't endure dissonances and false notes, as little in reality as in music!

*Raoul* I am the one who must ask forgiveness of you. I just want to love you, but I am never allowed to, and that drives me mad.

*Christine* Music drives us all mad, but it is a sweet insanity.

*Raoul* Don't say so, Christine. No one can be possessed by music. Beauty can never be an insanity.

*Christine* But I fear, Raoul, that you are obsessed with me.

*Raoul* You might be right.

*Christine* It is dangerous, since you never can trust me, since I belong to the music.

*Raoul* Your untouchability only makes you the more attractive and desirable.

*Christine* I wish it was the contrary. You had better leave, Raoul, before someone finds you here. The audience is forbidden to make visits in the dressing rooms of the artists.

*Raoul* But I am a count!

*Christine* That only makes it worse, especially now, when I have been given the leading part in Faust.

*Raoul* Christine! It will be your breakthrough! I knew it!

*Christine* So now I must live entirely only for my music. It has demands, and no one can compromise with its discipline. So I must ask you to leave and leave me to my music.

*Raoul* As long as I may own you after the performances I am satisfied.

*Christine* No one must own me.

*Raoul* Is it so definite?

*Christine* I am already owned, and I must not fail my pledge.

*Raoul* Music is only abstract. What is love, if it isn't practical?

*Christine* What is love if it isn't abstract? Only ugliness and humiliation.

*Raoul* Who teaches you such nonsense?

*Christine* My teacher.

*Raoul* Who is that?

*Christine* Music. Who else? Leave now, please.

*Raoul* I am leaving, Christine, if only you let me keep my hopes.

*Christine* Hope is the last thing to die in man. Already the ancient Greeks knew that after the infestation of Pandora.

*Raoul* It wasn't her. It was her box.

*Christine* Is any woman ever innocent of what she causes?

*Raoul* Always, Christine, for the men always accept the blame by the folly of their hopeless love.

*Christine* Leave now, Raoul, before it gets worse.

*Raoul* It will always get worse. I am leaving. (*leaves*)

*Christine* Whew! No more unexpected visits now, if you please!

*Mirror* It wasn't my fault.

*Christine* And neither was it my own. You must know that.

*Mirror* But that Raoul could become dangerous.

*Christine* He alrerady is. He distracts me from the music and ruins my concentration.

*Mirror* I am sure we'll manage him.

*Christine* Just don't do him any harm.

*Mirror* My dear apprentice, how could I ever do any harm to someone you love?

*Christine* You ruined the voice of Carlotta.

*Mirror* No, she did that herself.

*Christine* You broke Madeleine's leg.

*Mirror* How do you know?

*Christine* I feel more than I know.

*Mirror* That's right, Christine. Feel your way through life. Sensitivity is everything. Over-sensitivity is always genius and over-qualification, and nothing is more dangerous, sweet and divine. There you also have the inmost strings of music, which only can sound right by your sensitivity. I will leave you now, Christine. Dream of Margaret, and enter her character. Sensitivity is also empathy, and nothing is more important for an actor, if the role is to be well characterised and convincing. There is no female part more tragic than Margaret. Beware of her, but ascend by her sensitivity. Good night, Christine.

*Christine* Good night, my tutor. (*Christine goes to sleep herself on a sofa.*)

Act II scen 1. The office.

(*Carlotta comfortably in an armchair. The directors behind the desk.*)

*Carlotta* Gentlemen, I promise you will regret it whatever you do.

*Moncharmin* But my dear Carlotta, I assure you, that there is nothing we can do!

*Carlotta* You cannot do this to me. I will sue you for breach of contract, I will create scandals, I will denounce you to the press, I will spread rumours, I will do anything!

*Richard* Madame Carlotta, no one regrets the situation more than we.

*Carlotta* But you are responsible!

*Richard* We are not responsible for the whims of eccentric artists. We are only victims to them.

*Carlotta* Don't pretend innocence!

*Moncharmin* Carlotta, try to be just a little factual and fair. Was it our fault that you suddenly became indisposed just before the first night? We restored you in the lead as soon as you recovered and tried to ignore the new nightingale for your sake...

*Carlotta* The new nightingale! She is a cuckoo! I will cut the tongue out of her cursed throat!

*Moncharmin* Carlotta, control yourself, or you will have no chance in court! Was it finally our fault that you completely lost your voice in the middle of a performance?

*Carlotta* Someone had put something in my juice!

*Moncharmin* Prove it!

*Richard* You don't even know what it was in that case. Such things could happen to any singer. The voice is the most delicate of all organs...

*Carlotta* Don't speak to me about any organ, you dirty sots!

*Richard* Madame Carlotta, we ask you on our knees to be a bit reasonable and objective and not all the time compromise yourself in devastating emotional outbursts, that only could harm your own career!

*Carlotta* It's you who are sabotaging my career and on purpose!

(*suddenly enter Raoul.*)

*Richard and Moncharmin (rising)* Count de Chagny!

*Raoul* Gentlemen, excuse me for breaking in so suddenly, but I have to discuss an important matter with you. Christine Stendhal is ill.

*Carlotta* Serves her right! Lock her up! Commit her to the hospital!

*Raoul (does not recognize Carlotta)* Who is this?

*Richard* La Carlotta unmasked.

*Raoul* Oh, of course.

*Moncharmin* What ails Christine, my count? Has she lost her voice?

*Raoul* No, but I am very worried about her.

*Carlotta* Her success has gone to her head.

*Raoul* No, she is naturally elated, but she has not crossed the line, although she is constantly swaying on it...

*Moncharmin* Is there a risk of a nervous breakdown?

*Raoul* That is what I don't know. She is talking with her own mirror, she says she has a teacher although there isn't any, she doesn't want to go out with me because of a bad conscience for the sake of music...

*Richard* Be clear about it, count. You have failed in seducing her, you can't admit it to yourself, and so you blame her.

*Raoul* No, it's not that simple. She really loves me, but it is as if she all the time had another lover who still only exists in her own imagination...

*Carlotta (triumphant)* She is insane! I knew it!

*Raoul* Shut up, witch! She is an artist contrary to you, who are only an opportunist!

*Carlotta* How dare you, insolent churl!

*Richard* Madame Carlotta, I think you had better leave in the meantime.

*Carlotta* Never! I stay here! I was here first!

*Richard* My count, I don't think there is any reason to worry about her yet. She is a subtle and over-sensitive being but has so far proved herself to keep her balance more than well. She has for instance parried all Madame Carlotta's assaults and efforts at sabotage most honourably.

*Carlotta* She ignores me, that slut!

*Moncharmin* While our dear Carlotta hasn't managed her part of the cooperation equally well.

*Carlotta* You dod!

*Richard* Christine was exposed to sabotage and unpleasantness in whatever dressing room she had until she had the notorious haunted lounge, which no one ever willingly settled in. In contrast to all the others she was there left alone. This fact alone testifies to Christine having a special form of talent.

*Raoul* The haunted lounge? Is it haunted?

*Moncharmin* We have ourselves seen her conversing with her own mirror.

*Raoul* Is it then a talking mirror?

*Richard* We don't know. It certainly doesn't speak with us.

*Carlotta* She is insane. That's the whole case.

*Moncharmin* Quiet, Carlotta. In brief, my count, as long as she sings in tune and makes a success there is no reason for any worry whatever happens.

*Raoul* I am still worried.

*Carlotta* I will gladly assist you in giving her a nervous breakdown, so that you then can save her and bring her out of here and marry her, count, so you can have her entirely for yourself, for that is I suppose the only thing you want?

*Richard* Madame Carlotta, one more word, and out you go!

*Raoul* I only want what is best for her, Madame Carlotta, and it is obvious that my necessary mission must include protecting her against such intolerable monsters as you.

*Carlotta (rising)* I will not fight any men, count, only female competitors, for only they are dangerous. Men and their meanness are beyond my dignity. *(leaves)*

*Richard* You succeeded in ousting her. We could never do that. How did you do it?

*Raoul* I insulted her.

*Moncharmin* We never could do that either.

*Raoul* But let's get back to the problem. Could such a dressing room be healthy for her?

*Richard* All others were worse. Only the worst was good enough for her.

*Moncharmin* It's the only dressing room she has been able to endure, and she does not want to leave it.

*Raoul* I fear that chamber will only make her symptoms worse.

*Richard* As long as she goes on improving it is entirely to our interest.

*Moncharmin* May she go mad as much as she pleases, if she only carries on filling the house.

*Raoul (rising)* It is obvious, gentlemen, that your interest is not compatible with mine for her own good.

*Moncharmin* We must think first of what's good for the opera and not for her. That's what we are paid for.

*Raoul* Farewell, gentlemen. *(leaves)*

*Moncharmin* Do you think he could do anything stupid?

*Richard* No, he is as powerless as we are against her success, and he would never try to abduct her.

*Moncharmin* I hope no one else will try that either.

## Scen 2. Christine's lounge.

*Christine (clinging to the mirror)* My angel and saviour, I can't bear it any longer. Everyone wants to do me harm except you. Take me away from here and show me your world, bring me into your wonderful madness, be consistent and liberate me from the mundane monstrous world!

*Mirror* Be not afraid, Christine. I am always with you, and as long as I am here nothing can harm you.

*Christine* How could I believe you when I never even have been able to see you? How do I know that you are not just my own imagination?

*Mirror* But you are hearing my voice.

*Christine* Hearing hallucinations are not at all uncommon.

*Carlotta (breaking in)* So here you stand loving yourself in front of the mirror, you worthless bitch!

*Christine* What are you doing here, Carlotta? You have no right to be here. This is my private room. Do I have to keep my door locked?

*Carlotta* You know very well that is prohibited by the fire authorities. No one has any right of a private life here at the opera and least of all anyone in the lead like you. Everyone has the right to harass you, and especially someone who has become such a victim to your success as I.

*Christine* You are only jealous and sick of maliciousness.

*Carlotta* Yes, and with every right! You have ruined my career! You have ruined my life!

*Christine* I have only been singing.

*Carlotta* No, you have intrigued! You are manipulative! You have been manipulating by unknown friends, you have poisoned my drink to make me lose my voice, you have cajoled the directors to make them further you, you have driven us all out of our minds!

*Christine* Don't speak with me of madness, Carlotta. Don't make life more difficult for me than it already is.

*Carlotta* It gladdens me to be able to do so, Christine! It pleases me to put pressure on you! Nothing could bring me greater joy than to drive you out of your mind! If I could I would confine you for life in a mental hospital, the only right place where you belong!

*Linda (outside)* Hurry on, monsieur count! I am afraid Carlotta is in with Christine.

*Raoul* Christine! (*opens the door, enters*) What are you doing here, Carlotta?

*Carlotta* What are you doing here yourself, baron?

*Raoul* You have no right to be here.

*Carlotta* Neither have you.

*Raoul* Yes, for I only wish Christine well.

*Carlotta* No, you don't. You only want to seduce her and liberate her from her artistic life. You are welcome. Take her away from here, to make good riddance of her.

*Raoul* As long as she pleases to sing she has every right to do so without harassment from you. And no one sings purer and more beautiful.

*Carlotta* That is why she is so dangerous. Therefore no one of us can stand her. You had better take her away from here before something bad happens to her.

*Raoul* You had better get out of here before I make something bad happen to you.

*Christine (to the mirror)* Take me out of here!

*Carlotta* You hear how she pleads. She is begging for an abduction.  
*Raoul* You are deliberately driving her out of her mind! Get out!  
*Carlotta* No need. She was insane from the very beginning.  
*Raoul* Enough is enough! (*grabs her to start carrying her out*)  
*Carlotta* Let me go, wicked churl!  
*Raoul* I could murder you for the way you persecute Christine!  
*Carlotta* Let me just murder her first, who has ruined my life and career!  
 (*Raoul drives Carlotta out, and they continue quarrelling outside*)  
*Raoul* You are shaming the opera!  
*Carlotta* Your parents shall learn that you wish to marry a singer!  
*Raoul* Good! Then our engagement will be announced!  
*Carlotta* Lout!  
*Raoul* Witch!  
*Carlotta* (*hits him*)  
*Raoul* Thanks for that! Then I can return your compliment! (*knocks her down*)  
*Carlotta* The board shall know about this!  
*Raoul* The board will laugh!  
*Carlotta* Behave, man! (*They vanish out, quarrelling.*)  
*Christine* I can't bear this any more! I can't take arguments and hard words! It hurts as much as false notes in music! If you don't show yourself, dear ghost, the risk is that I will cross the line.  
 (*The mirror suddenly opens, and the ghost appears in a black silk cape and white mask to his face.*)  
*Erik* Let us then cross the line together.  
*Christine* You are alive!  
*Erik* How could you ever doubt me?  
*Christine* (*faints. Erik carries her out through the mirror, which closes up after them.*)  
 (*enter Raoul again.*)  
*Raoul* I will have your security guaranteed, Christine! She shall never enter here again! But where are you? (*searches among the clothes*) Gone! Vanished without a trace! (*opens the door*) Christine! Where are you? (*runs out on a wild hunt. Enter Linda.*)  
*Linda* Well done, Christine. Don't come back for a while, and you will manage. Let the whole opera start worrying about where you are. Make yourself indispensable, and you will become immortal. Good luck, Christine. (*leaves*)

Scene 3. Erik's fantastic quarter, an underground dream palace, extravagantly decorated in flamboyant romanticism and with a mighty pipe organ.

*Christine* (*wakes up on a divan*) Where am I? This dream is all too true to be credible. But I remember. My prince carried me away in his dream, and here I am now, awakened in a dream. And still I am not dead but only the more alive. My prince, where are you?

*Erik (still in black silk cape and white mask)* Don't be afraid, Christine. You are in perfect safety here.

*Christine* I don't doubt that for a moment. I never felt safer or more tranquil of mind. I presume we are here out of reach from mean primadonnas and greedy theatre directors?

*Erik* Absolutely. You needed a vacancy with relaxation and beautiful dreams.

*Christine* So you are my prince, you masked mysterious hero.

*Erik* Only thanks to your singing so pure and soulfully.

*Christine* I never dreamed of anyone like you. I imagined you as a timeless fairy tale prince of eternal youth and beauty but with the wisdom of an old man. And the only reality you offer me is a disguise concealing everything.

*Erik* For that you should be grateful. That's all I have to offer you, except of course this my environment with its perfect security.

*Christine* But where are we? Are we still in Paris?

*Erik* No, we are way beyond the mundane world. All you find here is a theatre, only magnificent curtains and illusions, as dream world outside reality but still real and invulnerable to the stupidity and blind barbarity of the cruel reality of only iniquity.

*Christine* May I remain here?

*Erik* As long as you like.

*Christine* May I see you behind the mask, my sweet prince and teacher?

*Erik* No, my nightingale, anything but that.

*Christine* Why?

*Erik* That you must never know.

*Christine* You cover yourself in mystery and secrets. What a wonderful talent you must be, who thus can create your own life and personality of only dreams and beauty.

*Erik* The dreams vanish like mists, but beauty is always imperishable like a Phoenix.

*Christine* You are like a Phoenix yourself. I don't think you can perish.

*Erik* No, I am only a survivor, who can't boast of anything more than that I managed so far. But as long as my existence may continue, my dreams will last.

*Christine* Of more good than evil.

*Erik* Of only good and no evil. All evil is excluded from my world, which may only consist of beauty, for that is the only meaning of it.

*Christine* So you are the very essence and personification of beauty.

*Erik* If only that would be the case.

*Christine* You are sad.

*Erik* Christine, the inmost secret of beauty is its tragedy. It is pathetic, and its secret is death.

*Christine* I love pathos.

*Erik* Yes, you should, for that is the only real element of opera. What would Bach be without his tragic Passion of Saint Matthew? What would Beethoven be

without his deafness? What would Schumann be without his insanity? What would Chopin be without his tuberculosis? What would Schubert be without his early untimely death? What would the theatre be without tragedies?

*Christine* You sound like Victor Hugo.

*Erik* What would I be without Victor Hugo? I am the ultimate manifestation of the essence of his romanticism, the loving deaf Quasimodo with his hunchback, the life convict Jean Valjean with his absolute honesty, the unknown despised fisherman Gilliatt with his self-consuming love, the grotesque clown Gwynplaine with his horrible tragedy effused in the sincerest love – I am all his creations and more. Therefore you may never see me, for that would destroy you.

*Christine (cautiously)* Do you mean that you are ugly?

*Erik* Terribly ugly.

*Christine* And you want to spare me from that. It is very thoughtful of you. So you love me.

*Erik* More than I dare to admit to myself.

*Christine* Then you have never loved before.

*Erik* No.

*Christine* I can't love a mask.

*Erik* That's why I spare you from my love. Therefore you need not be afraid of me. Therefore I give you more than my soul. Your love is reserved for count Raoul de Charny.

*Christine* You know him?

*Erik* I know all about you, Christine. But your soul belongs to me as long as you serve and belong to music.

*Christine* But I will always wish to do that.

*Erik* And as long as you do I will serve you.

*Christine* So you are my teacher and benefactor and spiritual lover.

*Erik* And protector, but only as long as you belong to music.

*Christine* I only belong to music. I was born out of music. So I am yours, and I know, that I could never have a better lover.

*Erik* My soul is yours, Christine, but only in the service of music. You will never see me in reality.

*Christine* I accept my destiny with open arms. Never abandon me, I pray you, oh you my music!

*Erik* I will never abandon you as music until you abandon me.

*Christine* May something like that never happen!

*Erik* Be it as you will. Go to sleep now, lovely angel, for you need to rest before all the work ahead of you.

*(Christine sinks comfortably back in the divan and closes her eyes. Erik removes his black cloak and covers her tenderly with it and then leaves. After his departure quiet organ music starts sounding in the background, like Bach's Passacaglia.)*

Scene 4. The office.

*Richard* This situation is impossible, Moncharmin. We cannot accept it.

*Moncharmin* But what can we do?

*Richard* We have done all that we can do. We have contacted the police who just stand practically at a loss all the time, we have meticulously searched the entire opera without finding a trace, but we can't keep on soothing the public by the evasive explanation that she because of an indisposition has been compelled to some vacation. The public can't be fooled by such smokescreens, and the journalists just drivell and lick their mouths in the avid expectancy of vultures. We must get some help from above. Therefore I have asked Poligny here.

*Moncharmin* Why not Garnier as well?

*Richard* He would just laugh us to scorn. I could never bear his jeering malicious joy.

*Moncharmin* Neither could I. *(There is a knock.)*

*Richard* Come in! *(Poligny shows up.)*

*Moncharmin* *(meets him cordially)* Come in, my dear Poligny! How we have missed you!

*Poligny* I understand you are in an awkward situation.

*Richard* It is more than awkward, Poligny. It is painful. And the worst of all: it is beginning to cost us dearly.

*Poligny* How long is it since she disappeared?

*Richard* Three weeks now.

*Moncharmin* The public is losing their patience, and the journalists wait impatiently for the scandal to burst open.

*Richard* Poligny, we have done everything. The police can't do anything more. She is wanted all over the country, but discreetly of course. No one knows anything. There is not a trace of her. She is like gone to earth.

*Poligny* Peculiar.

*Moncharmin* Is that all you have to say?

*Poligny* Gentlemen, I can't help you. Whatever has happened, I don't think it is some deliberate scheme against you. It has never happened before that a young singer debutante who won the hearts of the audience have disappeared over night and for such a long time. Something extremely remarkable must have happened.

*Moncharmin* Do you have no better enlightenment with your long experience?

*Poligny* I understand that Christine has been subject to gross harassment and encroachment by the soprano Carlotta. Are you certain that her warmest admirer the count de Charny has not carried her away in order to protect her?

*Richard* He knows as little and is just as much in despair as we.

*Poligny* Then there is only one explanation.

*Richard and Moncharmin* Well?

*Poligny* Gentlemen, we must be very careful.

*Moncharmin* Poligny, you are making fools of us. We can't have you scoffing us under these painful circumstances.

*Poligny* My friend, I ask you to open the door to a person standing outside waiting. He is perhaps the only one who can help us.

*Moncharmin* Who is it? The ghost?

*Poligny* No, but someone who knows what it is all about.

*(Moncharmin opens the door for Nadir, who enters.)*

Gentlemen, allow me to present to you Monsieur Nadir, former chief chamberlain to the Shah of Iran.

*Moncharmin (to Richard)* He is just pulling our legs. He is getting old.

*Richard* I am not so sure. Give him a chance, - Welcome, Monsieur Nadir. I hope you will be able to help us.

*Poligny* Nadir, have you heard our conversation?

*Nadir* Every word.

*Poligny* Can you help the gentlemen out?

*Nadir* I know what is the matter.

*Moncharmin* What the hell is the matter then?

*Poligny* Moncharmin, please, some discretion.

*Moncharmin* You don't seem to realize the administration of the opera is facing ruin!

*Poligny* Don't think only of yourselves. We have to think of Christine first of all.

*Nadir* I think she is in safe hands.

*Poligny* Could you find her?

*Nadir* I can only try. If I find him I will try to negotiate.

*Moncharmin* It's not a man you are to find for us, it is a woman.

*(to Poligny)* Where the devil did you dig up this oriental charlatan?

*Nadir* Gentlemen, you don't know what you are talking about. You don't know with whom you are dealing.

*Moncharmin* Inform us! Whom are we dealing with?

*Nadir* Possibly the most superior genius of this century.

*Moncharmin* Is that supposed to be you?

*Nadir* No. His name is Erik.

*Poligny* Say no more, Nadir.

*Nadir* Very well. I will keep quiet.

*Moncharmin* No! Tell us more! You seem to know more than we do!

*Nadir* I will try to help you out of your predicament. That is all I can do for you.

*Richard* If you succeed you are worth more than gold having saved the future for ourselves and the opera!

*Nadir (bows courteously)* I will do my best.

*Poligny* I think he could succeed. Only Nadir knows Erik.

*Moncharmin* Who the devil is this Erik?

*Nadir* Now you are the one who has said too much, Poligny.

*Poligny* Of course. I am sorry.

*Nadir* We had better leave. Excuse us, gentlemen. (*bows politely and leaves with Poligny*)

*Moncharmin* Do you think they could make it?

*Richard* They have to. Or else we are lost. All our hopes are with Poligny, who has deeper contacts than any of us.

*Moncharmin* Yes, apparently in direct contact with the underground.

Act III scene 1. Erik's quarters.

(*Erik sits at the organ in the middle of Bach's Passacaglia.*

*Christine is seen to enter, hesitate, listening with admiration, regard him with love, then she starts stealing up to him, he does not notice and just plays on, then she makes an effort to tear his mask off his face, which fails: the music is abruptly interrupted, and he rises in fury against her.)*

*Erik (furious)* You don't know what you are doing!

*Christine (flinching, trembling)* Forgive me!

*Erik* I have given you all imaginable freedom here, I have given you access to all my books and music, I have initiated you in the inmost secrets of all the arts and devotedly tutored you all days and nights, I have given you all that was mine and only forbidden you this one thing: to try to unmask me. And then that's the very thing you try to do and by ambush! Are you such a child, Christine, after everything I taught you?

*Christine* I want you to love me, since I love you! Your mask is the only thing that separates us!

*Erik* And you should be glad for that.

*Christine* How could I be glad for something that I don't know what it is?

*Erik* Listen, Christine. Listen carefully. Art is nought but illusions, but without that world of illusions man cannot live. Beauty is just a dream, but without that dream man cannot live. Nothing is more important in life than the illusion, it is even more important than food and drink, for you can survive anything, but you can't live without a soul. The soul is the utmost and inmost illusion, it is just an illusion, but it is real, and it is vital. No illusion is purer than music, for music demands purity more than any other art, purity is its ultimate life condition, and therefore music ennobles and purifies more than any other art and is more enduring as an illusion than any other illusion. Everything beautiful is just an illusion, but that illusion is more real and important than reality. Bereave me of my mask, and you bereave both yourself and me of the sacred illusion that brought us together and which is the only thing we have to live for.

*Christine* Alas, you just taunt me and provoke me, but you never give me any chance of a free vent!

*Erik* I channel your energy into the golden mould of the discipline of beauty, so that all your love should exclusively be concentrated in the loveliest art

and thereby be preserved forever. You must allow yourself to be disciplined, Christine! Energy without discipline is just coarseness and brutality!

*Christine* Then be coarse and brutal with me, so that I at last may love you!

*Erik* Never! I can't.

*Christine* You can anything but love.

*Erik* No, all I can is love and that sacredly. What else is love than constructiveness and creation? Heed my discipline, Christine, or become just an ordinary woman and perish.

*Christine* I must follow the music, Erik. That's all I have to live for. You know it.

*Erik* At last. Thanks for that. (*an alarm signal*)

*Christine (scared)* What's that?

*Erik* A trespasser. Someone has succeeded in entering. It hasn't happened in many years. Either it's an old friend who knows the way, or he has landed in the death trap.

*Christine* The death trap?

*Erik* I live absolute incognito without an identity, Christine, and therefore I can never allow anyone unknown to find me.

*Nadir (enters)* I know the way, Erik.

*Erik* Nadir!

*Nadir* You can't hold her a prisoner.

*Erik* So you make your appearance as my conscience in the ordinary way, Nadir. I haven't done her any harm.

*Nadir* Not yet.

*Erik* You know that I can't harm ladies.

*Nadir* Really? What about Carlotta's indisposition then? And how did Madeleine break her leg?

*Erik* It was for the sake of Christine. She sang better.

*Nadir* So the end justifies the means as usual, Erik. You are well aware that I have known you for thirty years, and you never denied yourself.

*Erik* I have only been tutoring her and given her the education the world could not give her. She couldn't even pay for her singing lessons. I have given her everything. She came to me as a sleeping beauty. I have turned her into a Violetta, a Gilda, an Aida, a Margaret, a Carmen, an Isolde, a new Jenny Lind and to a Queen of the Night!

*Nadir* And what next? What was your intention to do with her next? Bury her alive with yourself like Radames and Aida?

*Erik* No! I would give her the world! Ask her yourself, if she is here by or against her own free will!

*Nadir* She is entirely at your mercy, Erik, and you know it. She is powerless against you, so powerless, that she isn't even aware of it herself.

*Christine* I love him.

*Nadir* There you are, Erik. She is at your mercy. And she doesn't know that you are a monster.

*Erik*            Quiet! Spare her!

*Nadir*           I cannot spare you. You have to release her. She has a man out there who loves her and can give her everything that you can't give and which is all that a woman wants.

*Erik*            She is more than a woman! She belongs to music!

*Nadir*           You must release her, Erik. You have learned to live without daylight in a world of dreams and self denial, but she is young, thirty years younger than yourself, and she would only languish and wither in your company in the long run.

*Erik*            How cruel can you get, Nadir?

*Nadir*           I am just your doctor and the only one who can cure your illness and keep you alive. I am sinister but know the art of saving lives. You have to operate sometimes even if it hurts.

*Erik*            You are implacable as usual, Nadir.

*Nadir*           I have two lives to save here, your own and Christine's. Together you would only perish, for sooner or later she is bound to tear your mask off.

*Erik*            Quiet!

*Christine*      He is right, Erik. I have to return to the stage above ground if I am not to hurt you. I will continue singing for you there, and you will continue giving me wonderful lessons through the mirror.

*Erik*            In a world where you can make love with the self-sufficient count de Charny, who would only destroy you?

*Nadir*           Your jealousy betrays you, Erik. You have no claim on her.

*Erik*            Does he then?

*Nadir*           Yes, he does, for he is a man. You are just a monster. Don't forget that, Erik, for the sake and welfare of your victims.

*Erik (gives up)* You are right. Take her. Bring her up to the light. Let Paris fall to her feet. Let her fall to the world. I resign to the mortal reality into my own dreams of tragic eternity.

*Nadir*           You can always find comfort, Erik.

*Christine*      I will sing only for you, Erik.

*Erik*            I will listen to you, and I will cry when you perish, for on that day you will pass into my own eternity of discomfort.

*Nadir*           He is like that, Christine, but it will pass. Follow me now back to the world of senses. You have a performance to make tomorrow night.

*Erik*            I will keep protecting you, Christine.

*Christine*      But don't harm anyone!

*Erik*            I will try not to.

*Nadir*           I will try to persuade the board to return to you your box.

*Erik*            Thanks, Nadir. I am getting too old to have any energy left to fight the stupidity of vain theatre directors.

*Nadir*           You will see her on stage tomorrow, Erik.

*Christine*      Farewell, my spectre of the rose!

*Erik*            Never let go of your music, my child! (*blows a kiss. Nadir and Christine leave.*)

Gone! For a short moment I had the sun here in the underworld. Now the underworld has to start haunting the world of senses again. Unblessed is the state of the eternal, and my eternity with all its beauty will at length only remain a nightmare. (*removes in weariness his mask and shows his perfectly grotesque death skull of a face with a hole instead of a nose, with deep sunken eyes and with his mouth like a death skull's grin.*)

What shall I say? To be or not to be, that is the question? I am, and I can't help it. I did not choose myself to be born what I am. A victim to the cruel capriciousness of nature, my own mother was innocent, and my father did not know what he did when he ravished her. A hopeless case, and all I can do is the best of it, the best of a sad thing, the best of a tragedy, the best of a human disaster. And the best thing I could do was to hide, to vanish underground and hide behind a mask. (*puts it back on.*) I should never have taken it off. It should have been stitched to my face, so that I could have forgotten the looks of me. But nature must always have her way, your snot and tears have to have their outlet, and food and liquid has to get in. My only comfort is that nature also one day has to release me from this body and finish my life with a final liberation. I have longed for that moment all my life since I first saw a mirror. Death is my only and inseparable friend, a deadly and morbid company and a very poor comfort but still something to look forward to, the only thing. Thanks to you, my theatre and audience, for always letting the curtain down. (*retires*)

## Scene 2.

*Raoul (upset)* But Christine, this is outrageous!

*Christine* Take it easy, Raoul. I am still alive.

*Raoul* But the affront! The humiliation! The crime! The infamy!

*Christine* Don't worry, Raoul. I am still a virgin.

*Raoul* That's not what concerns me. It's the tremendous audacity and enforcement! We have mobilized half of Paris and half the country to search for you! The opera has almost gone bankrupt! The public has threatened the board with some lynching!

*Christine* How emotional you are. You are not standing on stage. You don't have to exaggerate.

*Raoul* I am not exaggerating! The man must be put away! He is dangerous! You must lead us to him, so that he can be confined to a psychiatric ward for psychopaths!

*Christine* Leave him in peace, Raoul. He is not ill. He is only unhappy, like every genius.

*Raoul* So you love him!

*Christine* I didn't say that.

*Raoul* But you do!

*Christine* Raoul, now you are even jealous.

*Raoul* Have I no right to be? A criminal maniac abducts you from the opera and keeps you for himself for three weeks, while I and only I am your fiancé! Am I not then in my fullest right to be jealous and worried mad of concern?

*Christine* No, Raoul, you have no right to be jealous, for we are not engaged.

*Raoul* Are you breaking the engagement?

*Christine* Only you engaged yourself. I am already married.

*Raoul (appalled)* With whom? With that phantom?

*Christine* No, with music.

*Raoul (allayed)* Bosh, nonsense.

*Christine (indignant)* Music is no nonsense to me, Raoul. It is more sacred than any religion could be.

*Raoul* Of course it is no nonsense to you. It is your livelihood and half your life, especially when you are a success.

*Christine* Raoul, music is to me all my life, and it will always come first before you.

*Raoul* But it is no man. It is impotent.

*Christine* How could you say such a thing? How can you drag music down into the dirt of sexualism?

*Raoul* Sexualism is part of nature, Christine. No one can avoid it.

*Christine* Music manages better without, and many musicians have allowed themselves to get lost and perish in the bog of sexualism. Just look at Liszt and Wagner.

*Raoul* Germans are not like we Frenchmen. They could never make an art out of love. For us love is free from all lowness since we deal with it handsomely in style and with discretion.

*Christine* Still music is better without filth.

*Raoul* How on earth did we come to enter on this subject? But there you are, gentlemen! (*enter Richard and Moncharmin.*) I now have all the information, and we have to settle with this phantom once and for all.

*Moncharmin* With pleasure. Mademoiselle Christine, the opera has made irreparable losses as a consequence of your absence.

*Christine* Did you ask them here, Raoul?

*Raoul* Of course.

*Christine* Why?

*Raoul* To prevent your being abducted again by any crazy phantom. He must be eliminated.

*Christine* I am not agreed.

*Raoul* So you love him.

*Christine* He is my teacher, and he has given me three weeks' intensive education. That is all. He has done that without any salary. If you want to thank him for it by interrupting his activity, I will have to leave the opera.

*Raoul* The sooner, the better.

*Richard* Monsieur le conte, perhaps we should tread more carefully.

*Raoul* No need. Aren't we agreed that that secretive creature who at any time might abduct primadonnas from the stage constitutes a disturbance and risky element to the opera that has to be eliminated?

*Richard* All operations must be performed with the utmost caution and delicacy.

*Raoul (hits the table)* I hate him! He must be gone!

*Christine (rising)* Gentlemen, I forbid it. My definite condition for remaining at your service at all is that you have to leave my teacher alone. *(leaves)*

*Raoul (devastated)* She loves him!

*Richard* Take it easy, count. It will pass. He has nothing and perhaps not even a face. You have everything. All you need to do is to wait and be faithful to her. If you desire her she is bound to submit.

*Raoul* She already submitted to the other one.

*Richard* No, she only loves his music. He is hardly not even a man.

*Raoul* What do you know about him?

*Moncharmin* No one knows anything about him, and those few who know anything keep quiet. Therefore there is nothing we can do as long as we don't know where he is, where he lives, what he looks like or how he lives. We have to bide our time.

*Raoul (rising)* I will track him down and force him to a duel!

*Richard* My dear count, he could be more dangerous than anyone can guess. No one has anything to gain from either his or your death.

*Moncharmin* We must ask you to observe discretion and tread carefully.

*Raoul* The problem has to be resolved!

*Richard* But not by force!

*Moncharmin* We have to avoid a scandal at any price.

*Raoul* You are only thinking of yourselves.

*Richard* No, we are only thinking of the opera for which we are responsible with its welfare and the satisfaction of the Paris audience. That's what we are paid for, and it is our duty.

*Raoul* Well, gentlemen, I will avoid violence, but I will track him down and find out everything about him, and nothing can stop me! *(leaves infuriated)*

*Moncharmin* He is angry.

*Richard* It's worse than that. He is an offended lover with no self control. People like that easily become self-destructive, dragging others down with them in their fall.

*Moncharmin* If he wants to fall he will have to do it alone.

*Richard* Of course, Moncharmin. *(They toast each other.)*

### Scene 3. Christine's dressing room.

*Raoul (enters stealthily and looks around)* No one is here. Now I have the chance. What is so mysterious about this dressing room? Christine will enter any moment. She never wants me to come here, as if she was afraid I would discover something here.

Well, if there is anything to discover I am here now to do it. (*hides in an obscure wardrobe*)

(*soon Christine enters, approaches the mirror with some hesitation, sits down in front of it*)

*Christine* You are avoiding me, my friend. I haven't heard from you for a week. Have you forsaken me? Have you forgotten me? Have you grown tired of me? I miss your voice, the most melodic of all voices. Please, come back! What is music without you? Who am I to sing for if I don't know that you are listening?

*Raoul* Who is she speaking to? Her own image? Is she then actually out of her mind? She caresses her own reflection and flirts with it as if she herself was her own lover! I have never seen such a remarkable egoism.

*Christine* Now when I don't have you any more I know that I love you although I don't even know what you look like.

*Raoul* Doesn't she know the looks of her own reflection? She must then be imagining a lover whom she pretends to be with by her own reflection. It is no mental disease. It is just an artistic eccentricism. I almost think I could draw a sigh of relief. She has neither any lover nor any serious psychic illness!

*Christine* Alas, come and bring me back to you so that I might enjoy your voice and tutoring!

*Raoul* She must still have a teacher. I wonder what he looks like.

(*A gentle knock on the door.*)

*Christine (happy)* Here he is!

*Raoul* The teacher!

*Christine* Come in!

(*The door opens and Jules Bernard shows up, an elderly theatre worker, with a large parcel.*)

*Christine* Jules!

*Jules* Sorry to bother you, mademoiselle Christine, but perhaps you could help me.

*Christine* What is the matter?

*Jules* I should have met with Erik a week ago, but he never turned up. Every day I have been waiting at the usual place of our agreement, but he remains absent. But you are in touch with him. He ordered these things. If I leave them with you, you could perhaps take care of them until he calls on you?

*Christine* What things are they?

*Jules (secretively)* A wedding dress and a ring.

*Raoul* A wedding dress and a ring!

*Christine* I don't understand.

*Jules* You will understand mademoiselle Christine. What I don't understand is his absence.

*Christine* That's what I understand least of all, especially when he has ordered such things.

*Jules* Yes, isn't it strange?

*Christine* What do you think might have happened?

*Jules* Perhaps something serious. He maybe has fallen ill and stays in bed. It has happened before. Then he will not make any contact again until he is well again.

*Christine* I will be glad to take care of them, Jules, and do what I can to deliver them to him.

*Jules* Thanks, mademoiselle. (*leaves the things with her and leaves*) I hope you succeed, for the sake of both of you.

*Christine* Thanks for your goodness, Jules. (*Jules leaves.*)

(*Christine immediately opens the parcel, unfolds the bridal dress and tries it on herself*) Erik! It will suit me perfectly! You must have taken my measures in secret! But what a secret! You must then love me as much as I love you if not even more! You have prepared everything, but why have you then kept away from the wedding? The bridegroom has done everything to surprise his sweetheart with a ready-made feast but then absconded without an explanation. What is all this supposed to mean?

*Raoul (crushed)* It's getting worse and worse!

(*The mirror starts to open.*)

*Christine (full of joy)* Mirror, mirror on the wall, welcome, bridegroom, loveliest of them all! (*Nadir comes out.*) Nadir! What are you doing here?

*Nadir* Christine, I have bad news.

*Christine* What has happened?

*Raoul* Another joker in the deck! And what an exotic magician! He must be from the very Orient!

*Nadir* Christine, I have an upsetting story to tell. Erik is seriously ill.

*Christine* What is the matter with him?

*Nadir* I can't tell you. But it has to do with that he has fallen very deeply and unhappily in love with you. But he is too old for you, and he knows it.

*Christine* How can he be too old who is timelessness itself?

*Nadir* He is fifty years, Christine, thirty years older than yourself. And it is not healthy for such an old man as he has become to fall in love with such a young fair lady as you.

*Christine* Good God! Then it's my fault!

*Nadir* Not at all. Destiny alone can be charged with all the tragedies and all things evil in this world. He was elated by your love unto unsound rapture and rushed away so far with his own imagination that he thought he could have you, wherefore he ordered this bridal dress and ring. A typical case of uncontrolled wishful thinking. But then health had a say, and he couldn't keep his appointment with Jules.

*Christine* Is he getting better now?

*Raoul* At last I am getting this mysterious teacher defined to me. So he is just an old fool! So let him die!

*Nadir* He is improving but not well enough to be able to see you. Still I think it is best for both himself and you that you may meet again. Therefore I have arbitrarily taken the liberty to come here and ask you to follow me down to him.

*Christine* I will not hesitate a moment.

*Nadir* Bring your presents with you.  
*Christine* They will then be my presents for him.  
*Nadir* They couldn't have been presented by a more suitable hand.  
*Christine* But not through the mirror, Nadir. Let us take the other way. Only he has the right to lead me through the mirror.  
*Nadir* As you wish, mademoiselle. I will follow you.  
*(Nadir politely opens the door for her. She walks out, he follows and closes the door.)*  
*Raoul (hurries out from his hiding place)* Let me just follow them all the way without being noticed! If the old loving fool hasn't the sense to die by himself, let me then strangle him! That bride is only intended for me and can never belong to anyone else! *(out)*

Scene 4. Erik's quarters.  
*Erik diseased on his divan.*

*Erik* What pain to have to see through it all including your own pathetic fool's tragedy! You will die your own parody, Erik, a grotesque dowdy parody on a flagrant failure of a lost life, where all your efforts were wasted on chasing the wind, a ridiculous witch-hunt for your own shadow, a mortal chase for the illusions of vanity, a hideous twisted mask of coward hypocrisy and delusions! Die then, Erik, so that if it comes to the worst you can start all over again from the beginning, for all you have gained by the strains of this life in struggling with destiny and your own handicap is the certitude that nothing is worth the trouble. But who is coming? *(enter Nadir)*  
*Nadir* Erik, it's me, but I am not alone.  
*Erik* Who have you brought with you?  
*Nadir* A friend. A surprise. Take it easy.  
*Erik* Have you forced her with you back to me? To what avail? She belongs to the world of light up there. I belong to the world of darkness down here. So leave her then alone from me.  
*Nadir* She can have no peace, Erik. She loves you.  
*Erik* She must not do that.  
*Nadir* You don't command love, Erik. You obey it.  
*Erik* You follow it if you are blind and stupid.  
*Nadir* It's the task and nature of love to make us blessed by blindness and stupidity.  
*Erik* What is your game, Nadir?  
*Nadir* Don't charge me with the caprices of love.  
*Erik* I fear some intrigue. I smell manipulation and insidious schemes.  
*Nadir* Erik, neither you nor I have any power against love.  
*(enter Christine in Erik's bridal dress.)*  
*Erik (stunned)* Christine!  
*Christine* Erik, I have made up my mind. I am yours.

Erik            You don't know what you are doing! I am just a mask!

Christine      A mask that conceals a man who is too good for this world.

Erik            You don't know what you are talking about. You sacrifice yourself for a phantom, a monster, an inhuman demon. You have never seen me.

Christine      Yes, I have seen you, but only your soul. *(approaches him)*

Erik            Christine, I forbid you! I gave you the bridal dress to give you as a bride for your count de Charny!

Christine      No, Erik. You loved me and ordered the bridal dress for yourself as a bridegroom to me. For that purpose you also bought the ring. You have bought my soul, and I will gladly pay the price.

Erik            Christine, you don't know what you are doing! I deceived myself!

Raoul *(shows up concealed)* He wants to give her as a bride for me!

Christine      Don't playact any longer, Erik. Hide yourself as you please. I don't care what you look like. I will never again try to tear off the mask from your face against your will.

Erik            Christine, this is too much! *(groans heavily in a sudden attack of pain)* You come too late. I am dying.

Christine      Erik! My prince! *(rushes to his side)*

Nadir *(intercedes)* Gently, Christine. I am his doctor. *(examines him)* You have more knots in your stomach now than before, Erik.

Erik            I know. They grow within and consume me. They are my life's only and most uninvited guests.

Christine      What is the matter with him?

Nadir           A life of only grief and failed purposes. What can the greatest genius in the world do with all the wonders of his creations when his only reward is disappointments, ingratitude, indifference and no results?

Christine      Erik, I am yours. I have come to save you.

Erik            Too late, Christine. It was someone like you I dreamed of all my life. When I at last found her I was already dying. But still I managed to make something of her.

Christine      Erik, tell me it isn't true!

Erik            Christine, not even love can do anything about the truth. Destiny in its ironic cruelty works against us sardonically, and there is nothing we can do about it. All I can do is to go under.

Christine      Don't give up, Erik!

Erik *(caresses her chin with his hand)* Christine, you have to face facts. I am of more than double your age. You have a future. I am an old man and only have death.

Christine      No, you are my prince, my young divinely gifted teacher, my timeless master!

Erik            Still I am mortal.

Christine      No, you must not be!

Erik            You make unreasonable demands of an impossible love.

Nadir           He is tired, Christine. He must needs have some rest.

Christine      How long has he been ailing? Why was I not informed about it?

*Erik* I was sick all my life, Christine. The pain of my bitter grief affected me from the beginning the first day I saw a mirror. I was doomed from the beginning. Nothing could save me, not even you, not even the highest and purest form of love.

*Christine* I refuse to accept it!

*Erik* I was condemned by my looks to a permanent underground life. Yes, I created this opera and gave many poets and musicians many wonderful ideas, which materialised in immortal works of art, by the music of Bellini and Chopin, by the poetry and novels of Victor Hugo, by the impressionism in art and by Offenbach's ballets and operettas of joy. Hoffmann is me with my tragic clownish impossible adventures, but the only salary of my life was this hideous visage that condemned me, and I now address to you my life's only request and demand: that you never will remove my mask.

*Christine* I obey you and wish to obey you in so much more.

*Erik (pulling her closer)* Could you love this mask and what it conceals without ever discovering it?

*Christine* I only care about your soul.

*Erik (pulling her down and embracing her)* So love my soul then without feeling my body. Nadir, leave us alone. You have brought my life's only happiness down to me. Let me embrace it before it is too late.

*Nadir* Master Erik, I am yours to command. *(retires)*

*Raoul* I have nothing to say against this. His love stands far above my jealousy.

*Erik* Christine, I am yours if you will have me, but I haven't got much time left.

*Christine* I am yours forever, my master.

*Erik* Don't promise too much.

*Christine* I know what I am promising.

*Nadir (to Raoul)* Monsieur count, let us leave.

*Raoul* Were you aware of my presence?

*Nadir* But Erik is not. Leave them alone. He is dying.

*Raoul* What is his illness?

*Nadir* Tumors in his stomach. He has suffered from them for many years but endured them and deadened the pains by morphia. Now it will work no longer. He has to die.

*Raoul* Poor fellow!

*Nadir* It pleases me that you realize it, monsieur le conte. *(leaves with Raoul)*

*Christine* Erik, I am yours.

*Erik* So finally I was bestowed a small glimpse of happiness after a too long life of only darkness and terror.

*Christine* Life is beginnig now, Erik.

*Erik* Yes, for you.

*Christine* No, for us. I will never let you go.

*Erik* But what if I manage to slip away from you?

*Christine* It is too late now, Erik. You will never manage with that.

*(They start making love. The stage is hidden in darkness.)*

Act IV scene 1.

*Raoul* Christine, he is dead.

*Christine* I know, but we cannot be rid of him.

*Raoul* But he is gone from our lives.

*Christine* I am not so sure about that.

*Raoul* The child he conceived with you is a totally different human being, and I am more than willing to love him as my own son, for that's how sincerely I love you.

*Christine* For that I am grateful to you, Raoul, and therefore I agreed to marry you. But I will never be able to love you like I loved him.

*Raoul* Still you never saw his face.

*Christine* That was his condition, and I agreed to it.

*Raoul* While I embraced you with all my love without conditions.

*Christine* Therefore you also got me. You won me in the end, and he can never have me any more. Still it feels as if he lurked in the background somewhere.

*Raoul* He is the father of your child, Christine, and no one can change that fact. But I am his judicial father and alive. No matter how faultless and beautiful your child is, Christine, he can never make any claims to it any more.

*Christine* That is not his interest.

*Raoul* What do you mean, Christine?

*Christine* I don't know. It's just a feeling.

*Raoul* Your mysticism has always fascinated me.

*Christine* Still I am only natural.

*Raoul* But you have a supernatural talent. You always had it. That's why you sing so divinely.

*Christine* He was the one who opened my voice.

*Raoul* But the voice is yours and was never his.

*Christine* Still methinks I hear his voice in my own sometimes, as if he was singing through me. There was something more than natural also about his voice.

*Raoul* That voice is now dead, Christine. Only yours is alive.

*Christine* The voice of his conscience lives within me forever.

*Raoul (sarcastically)* So. How does it sound? What does it say?

*Erik* Christine, I only wish you well.

*Christine* Erik!

*Raoul* You look as if you saw him.

*Christine* I heard him.

*Raoul* So. What did he say?

*Christine* Did you not hear him?

*Raoul* No. Have you got hearing hallucinations?

*Erik* I always watch over you, Christine.

*Christine* He is haunting me.

*Raoul* So. What does he look like? Is he transparent?

*(Erik shows himself but only to Christine. It is the same white mask, but now also his silk mantle is shining white.)*

Christine No. He is just himself.

Raoul Naked or dressed?

Christine You are just jesting with me, Raoul. Of course he is dressed, but he is more beautiful and spiritual in his being than ever.

Raoul And the face? Do you see his face?

Christine No, he wears the same mask as ever.

Raoul Then all you see is his memory.

Christine No, it's much more than that, for he is alive.

Erik I love you for ever, Christine. It's only so tragic that now when at last I am worthy of you and can love you I may not any longer.

Christine He is speaking to me.

Raoul What does he say? This is like a regular séance.

Christine He has finally become himself. Something very strange is going on here.

Raoul Yes, in your imagination.

Christine No, in reality. That's what is so strange. He has come to finally reveal his secret.

Raoul Didn't he give you everything while he lived?

Christine Everything except his looks.

Raoul Is that what he is willing to show you now?

Christine It doesn't look any better.

Raoul Well, tear at last his mask off his face! Dismantle his real self! Expose him!

Christine No need. He is doing it himself.

Erik Christine, I am free at last but not from you. *(takes off his mask and shows a young beautiful face worthy of a fairy tale prince.)*

Christine He is beautiful!

Raoul What are you saying?

Christine He is beautiful! I knew it! He is the most beautiful man in the world!

Raoul He is dead, Christine. You are dreaming.

Christine No. I see him alive. I see him revealed. He is free at last and himself. He has got rid of his afflicted and disfigured body. At last he has come out right.

Raoul You are deranged.

Christine No, I stand in touch with him. He will never desert me.

Raoul *(to himself)* I can't have a ghost for a rival. That is too absurd. She is pulling my leg. She is demented.

Christine No, Raoul, I still just love him.

Erik Forgive me, Christine. I knew it. I should never have visited you. *(wraps himself up in his cloak and disappears.)*

Raoul You need a psychiatrist.

Christine He is gone!

Raoul You still need a psychiatrist. He must not return.

*Christine* Could you stop him? Can you control forces from the other side? Can you stop me from seeing what I see? Can you close my ears to voices from the other side? Can you stop me from loving? Can you separate me from my feelings?

*Raoul* You are hysterical.

*Christine* No, Raoul, I am just a woman, and I love.

*Raoul* I can't share you with a phantom haunting your dreams.

*Christine* You can't accept a dead man surviving himself. You are jealous of a ghost.

*Raoul* No, Christine, it's you who are ill! You must believe me! I don't want to lose you or see your senses get lost as a prey to your own illusions. I love you, Christine, and I don't want to do without you.

*Christine* I belong to another, Raoul. I belong to my son's father.

*Raoul* He is dead!

*Christine* No, he lives! I know him!

*Raoul* You are crazy!

*Christine* Raoul, by your attitude you will make me sick and lose me.

*Raoul* So you are sick! You must have a doctor!

*Christine* No doctor can help me, for my lover is dead! And he can't help you either, if you have that attitude.

*Raoul (makes an effort to control himself, assumes another condescending attitude)*

It will all be well, Christine, you will see. Some medicines of the right sort will do the job, so you won't have to hear voices and hallucinate any more. *(leaves)*

*Christine* He is lost, and I can't help him. My son Charles, what will become of you! *(takes up her child from the cradle and clenches it close to her heart)* Raoul will never understand, and Erik's son must be saved from his limitation. We must go to Nadir. Only he can help us. *(wants to go out. Is met in the door by a strict servant.)* Let me by.

*Servant* Madame may not go out. Madame is ill. It's by order of the count.

*Christine* So I am taken prisoner in my own marriage?

*servant* You must not go out, Madame. *(closes the door)*

*Christine* Erik, do you see me now?

*Erik (shows himself)* I am always with you, Christine.

*Christine* I may have to escape to you from this side of life to the other.

*Erik* Try to endure the general narrowness, Christine, for the sake of life and of our son.

*Christine* I will try, Erik.

*(sits on the bed playing with her child. Erik sits down gently and carefully beside them but without touching them, but all his being expresses the deepest tenderness.)*

## Scene 2.

*Raoul* But doctor, you have to be able to save her. That's what you are paid for.

*doctor* I can't go beyond my education.

*Raoul* But you are educated to be able to save lives! What else is the purpose of your profession?

*doctor* You can easily cure fevers and malaises, infections and inflammations, but if a person wants to die herself nothing can cure her.

*Raoul* Do you mean to say that Christine wants to die?

*doctor* Of course she wants to die. Or else she would not be so ill.

*Raoul* But why?

*doctor* You did describe her case to me. She loved a man who died but had time to father her child. She must have loved him deeply, for she has never let go of her sorrow, and you can die of such a grief.

*Raoul* But she is young and has everything to live for! She has her son, and she has her career! She has everything!

*doctor* But she misses her love, and that is fatal. You could never replace the love of her lover, monsieur le conte.

*Raoul* Don't blame me for her illness!

*doctor* I didn't .

*Raoul* Charles' father was a monster and a criminal psychopath!

*doctor* But obviously a better lover than you.

*Raoul (crushed)* What can we do?

*doctor* There are many things you could do but nothing that would help. As long as you can't give her back her love you cannot cure her.

*Raoul* You doctors are all equally incompetent.

*doctor* Why have you never given her the only doctor she has asked for, that oriental Nadir?

*Raoul* He is just a dangerous charlatan.

*doctor* How do you know?

*Raoul* The whole world knows that.

*doctor* I doubt it.

*Raoul* Do you think he could save her?

*doctor* There is nothing for you to lose by letting him try.

*Raoul* Very well, I will let her see him. But if he does anything to her, you will bear the responsibility.

*doctor* You are married to her, my count, and you married her yourself voluntarily. Only you are responsible for your wife's life.

*Raoul* Begone, doctor!

*doctor* You will cure no patient that way, my count. Then our patience is better.

*Raoul* Yes, yes, leave now, please! (*the doctor leaves.*)

Damned impostors the whole lot of them who just charge you for making her worse! But he is right. It has to be my fault. But what on earth did I do wrong?

Act V scene 1. Christine's death bed.

*Christine* Thanks for coming, Nadir. You are the only one among the hyenas around me who is human.

*Nadir* Am I then a hyena as well?

*Christine* Misunderstand me correctly, Nadir. People are worse than hyenas.

*Nadir* Christine, I repeat my diagnosis. Only you can save your life yourself. If you don't want to live any more yourself, nothing can save you.

*Christine* And what would I then have to live for, Nadir? All these human hyenas?

*Nadir* Your child, Christine, yours and Erik's child.

*Christine* What is he to live for without Erik? He will manage better without me. I would only be a burden to Raoul's son.

*Nadir* He does not belong to Raoul. He belongs to you and Erik.

*Christine* But he is dead, and I love him too much not to follow him.

*(Raoul breaks in.)*

*Nadir (rising, aroused)* Monsieur le conte, I ordered you to stay outside!

*Raoul* I can't stand it any longer! Even outside I can hear everything that you are saying in here! I was the one who loved her, not Erik! How would I then not jealously watch her every breath and listen to every sigh from her lips?

*Christine* Obviously I won't be rid of you, Raoul, not even in death. You won't even let me die in peace.

*Raoul* You are ruthless with your superiority, Christine!

*Christine* No, it's just you mortals who are daft. There is only one person I need by my side, Nadir, and no one will get him for me, so I have to look him up myself by visiting him in death.

*Erik (enters, now entirely dressed in shining white without a mask)* I am coming, Christine.

*Christine* And that's the only way I can make him come: by coming to him myself.

*Raoul* You must not die, Christine! Think of your son!

*Nadir* Be at least quiet, monsieur le conte, and don't make her upset!

*Christine* You are only making matters worse, Raoul, by your banal silliness.

*Raoul (sinks down on his knees crying in powerless despair)*

*Erik* Christine, live for us and for our son, as long as you can, I pray you, for the sake of the living.

*Christine* No one is more alive than you, Erik.

*Nadir* She is getting delirious.

*Erik* Still try to make an effort, Christine. No human being needs someone more than a child needs his mother.

*Christine* Do you really want me to try?

*Nadir* With whom are you speaking? We all really want you to try to live on.

*Christine* But my beloved is beyond the grave, and I can't live without loving.

*Erik* Love our son, Christine!

*Christine* You still love me beyond the grave. So shall I love our son with you beyond the grave.

*Nadir* She is delirious.

*Raoul* Christine, no one can love you more than the living!

*Christine* Thereby you in your limited sense exclude all those who are more living than the living. Don't exclude anyone from the right of love, Raoul. That would be the supreme injustice.

*Nadir* You should never have come here, my count.

*Raoul* Have I then no right to be with my own wife on her death bed?

*Nadir* She asked herself not to be visited by you.

*Raoul* This is too much! (*rushes out, crying*)

*Erik* Don't let go of life, Christine.

*Christine* I let it go in order to gain it.

*Erik* A stupid sacrifice.

*Christine* No sacrifice is stupid. What is a life against the life of eternity? If you lose your life, eternity is at your disposal.

*Erik* The human life is the most sacred of all duties. By that I mean the duty of a living human being to be human.

*Christine* Let us commence a new life together, Erik. (*rises from her bed and starts walking towards him*)

*Nadir* (*as if she was still lying*) She is going.

*Erik* I tried to do everything for you, Christine, and even to sacrifice myself for your life.

*Christine* Then I will pay that debt by giving up my own for the sake of ours.

*Erik* Nothing can resist the free will. (*receives her and embraces her.*)

*Nadir* It is almost over.

*Christine* No, Nadir. Now it begins. (*starts quietly to walk out with Erik, who gently and tenderly leads her.*)

*Nadir* It is fulfilled.

(*Erik and Christine walk out.*)

*Raoul* (*in despair, outside*) Christine!

(*Nadir bows down his head towards the bed in sorrow, as if she was still lying there.*)

*Curtain.*

(*April-June 2003,  
translated in February 2022*)