



Leoš Janáček

(1854 - 1928)

Osud (Destin)

Opéra en trois actes de Leoš Janáček sur un livret du compositeur et de Fedora Bartošová d'après la vie de Kamila Urváková.

L'ouvrage est composé de 1903 à 1905 puis révisé en 1906 mais rejeté par le théâtre de Brno et le théâtre Vinohrady de Prague en 1907. La première audition est donnée à la radio de Brno en 1934 et la création sur scène eut lieu en 1958 sous la direction de František Jílek au Festival Janáček à l'occasion du trentième anniversaire de sa mort.

Rôles

Míla Valková	soprano
Živný, un compositeur	ténor
Mère de Míla	soprano
Dr. Suda	ténor
Doubek, fils de Míla et Živný	soprano (II), ténor (III)
Première & deuxième femmes	sopranos
Vieille femme slovaque	soprano
Épouses du major du conseil	sopranos
Lhotský, un peintre	baryton
Konečný	baryton
Miss Stuhlá, un professeur	mezzo-soprano
Miss Pacovská, étudiante	soprano
Premier invité, premier jeune homme	ténors
Deuxième invité, deuxième jeune homme	basses
Serveur	basse
L'ingénieur du son	ténor
Une jeune veuve	soprano
Fanča, une étudiante	soprano
Hrazda, un étudiant	ténor
Verva, un étudiant	baryton
Součková, une étudiante	soprano
Kosinská, une étudiante	mezzo-soprano

Argument

Avant que l'opéra s'ouvre, Míla et Zivny, un compositeur, ont eu une liaison dont est né un enfant, Doubek. La mère de Míla a fait tout son possible pour briser cette liaison, et a tenté de marier Míla à un autre homme – mais comme Míla était enceinte du fils de Zivny, ce projet resta sans suite. Zivny a écrit un opéra dans lequel il a sublimé son amertume vis-à-vis de ce qu'il croit être un abandon de la part de Míla.

Acte I

Une promenade dans une station thermale vers 1890, tôt le matin

C'est une belle journée dans une ville thermale, et la foule se réjouit à la vue des rayons du soleil. Dans ce contexte social, Zivny et Míla se rencontrent par hasard : leurs compagnons notent qu'ils semblent se connaître, et les laissent seuls. Míla demande à Zivny s'il est venu pour son fils.

Cependant, leur entretien est rapidement interrompu par la maîtresse d'école, Mlle Stuhlá, qui essaye de faire répéter une chanson à plusieurs voix à un groupe d'institutrices, ce qui provoque l'hilarité des autres curistes.

Avec l'aide du chœur et d'un joueur de cornemuse, le Dr Suda chante une ballade satirique à propos du soleil avant de les emmener faire une promenade impromptue

Acte II

Le bureau de Zivny un jour d'hiver, quatre ans plus tard

Míla et Zivny se sont mariés. Ils vivent désormais ensemble avec leur fils et la mère de Míla qui a perdu la tête depuis la catastrophe du mariage de sa fille avec un compositeur sans le sou. De temps à autres, on entend sa voix venant des coulisses et se superposer à la conversation entre Zivny et Míla. Zivny est toujours hanté par son opéra inachevé où il dépeint de manière amère le personnage de Míla. Il joue piano un extrait de la partition, et pris de remords, il commence à la déchirer.

Ils sont interrompus par leur petit garçon Doubek, qui a observé la conduite des domestiques, et demande innocemment, "c'est quoi l'amour". S'étant dérobée à la surveillance des domestiques qui la gardent, la mère de Míla entre précipitamment dans la pièce et chante en se moquant une chanson d'amour extraite de l'opéra de Zivny.

Elle sort en courant suivie de Míla qui tente de la calmer. Hors de scène, elles se tuent en tombant d'un balcon. Zivny perçoit cet accident comme une nouvelle intervention dévastatrice du "destin".

Acte III

Le grand hall du Conservatoire, onze ans plus tard

Des étudiants essayent un passage (la scène de la tempête) extrait du nouvel opéra de leur professeur Zivny, qui va être créé. Après que les étudiants ont fait une "tempête" de leur cru, l'étudiant Verva entre et leur parle davantage de l'opéra. Il croit qu'il s'agit d'une œuvre autobiographique, le compositeur "Lensky" étant en réalité Zivny, tandis que l'opéra, bien qu'apparemment achevé, est "sans le dernier acte". Verva chante l'une des scènes solo entre Míla et Doubek (une reprise de l'incident de l'Acte II où Doubek demande ce que c'est que l'amour), ce qui embarrasse Doubek, maintenant un étudiant du Conservatoire.

Quand Zivny entre subitement, les étudiants lui demandent de leur dire quelque chose à propos de l'opéra. Il le fait avec passion, décrivant le personnage principal de Lensky, et comment il tomba amoureux. Le poids émotionnel de ce qui est en fait un souvenir personnel devient trop fort pour lui, et sur l'arrière-plan d'une tempête qui fait rage à l'extérieur, Zivny s'effondre après avoir eu la vision de sa femme défunte. On appelle un docteur (c'est en fait le Dr Suda qui arrive). Dans ses dernières paroles, Zivny soutient que le dernier acte de l'opéra demeure "dans les mains de Dieu".

Livret

Acte I

Fifteen years ago. The spa of Luhacovice, Moravia. From upstage centre an avenue stretches into the distance. On the right, an imposing spa hotel, with a salon and a verandah with a light blue glass roof. A row of tables. On the left the Amantka well and behind it an elaborate bandstand. Paths wind through the dark, and rustic steps lead to the forest.

Music from the bandstand. Spa attendants at the well. A poet and two ladies promenade. Old Slovak woman, Major's wife and her child, Marěnka, priests, academics, civil servants, schoolteachers and young girls. The sound of spa visitors' conversation rises and falls. Ladies open their sunshades. Greetings are exchanged. Lhotský, Konečský and Dr Suda in a group. Zivny is alone, deep in thought. He is dressed in the height of fashion.

Poet *(walking with two ladies)*

Free as a bird I bask in the sunshine, bright sunshine!

First lady *(affectedly)*

Heavenly, the sun filt'ring down through the treetops; it's just like a shower of golden butterflies!

Poet

See my spirit soar up to heaven; it longs for sunlight like flowers that blossom in the springtime, their petals shyly opening.

(Some students and schoolgirls are standing on the bridge, trying out an echo. Priests, civil servants, etc. promenading on paths in the park.)

Second lady

It awakens us to love and laughter and brings us to life again.

Students and Schoolgirls

Sunlight, shine on us!

Echo

Shine on us!

First lady

With its radiance, with its golden glow, it fills up our hearts with love again.

Students and Schoolgirls

Sunlight! Shine on us!

Echo

Shine on us!

Old Slovak woman *(entering along path)*

The sunshine warms my poor old bones, and even I feel young again,
(She takes off her jacket.)

Major's wife *(with her child)*

Up we come! Upsy-daisy!

Child

Mummy! Mummy!

Councillor's wife

Where's your daddy then? Isn't he with you?

Major's wife (*baby talk*)
Bye-bye! Wave bye-bye to Papa!
(*They leave.*)

Chorus

Shine on us, sunlight, warm on us to life and bring us laughter. Shine on us! Hey!

(With a gracious step, Míla Valková enters. She is in an elegant, dark, English-style ensemble with a long boa. On her golden hair is a little straw hat. Lhotský, part of a fashionable group of young men with Dr Suda and Konečský, comes up to Míla and offers her a bouquet of red roses.)

Lhotský

On this glorious summer morning, please accept these flowers, dear lady, as a token of admiration.

Míla (*thoughtfully, taking the flowers*)

What interrupted melodies lie hidden in these flowers. It is as if one's whole life were hidden in them. My thanks, my thanks.
(*She admires the bouquet.*)

Dr Suda

Other flowers grow pale before their scarlet brilliance.

Míla

Really? What memories they bring back to me in their beauty. Bitter memories!

(The group walks on a little. The musicians leave the bandstand.)

(Míla goes to the well and drinks a cup of water, gazing round as she lifts her veil. Lhotský holds her bouquet. She stiffens when she sees Zivny, talking to a group in the distance.)

Míla (to herself)

Heavens, it's him!

(aloud, pulling herself together)

Mister Zivny, isn't it?

Dr Suda (*noticing Míla's disturbed state of mind*)

Why should that upset you so much?

(Míla takes the bouquet from Lhotský and takes a few steps towards Zivny. She stops and controls herself.)

Lhotský

Looks an arty type, a composer perhaps.

Dr Suda

He's recently composed a bitter post-mortem on youthful passion, on love unrequited. His? Someone else's? I've no idea and don't wish to know.

Konečský (*with interest*)

He's from the town where I was born. His music breathes the landscape there; he's always been inspired by nature.

Míla (*troubled, aside*)

When the autumn leaves are blown in circles, then who knows where they'll come to rest?
(aloud)

Do you mind if we walk a little further?

(Zivny detaches himself from his group and approaches Míla, Konečský and their party from a distance. His manner both conceals and betrays his confused state; he has seen Míla in the party that includes Konečský, whom he knows.

Zivny's and Míla's steps falter. Her eyes seem filled with questions, but they are steadily fixed on Zivny.

In Zivny's face can be seen the question: 'Why are you here?' Zivny stops. He has no alternative but to greet the party. They introduce themselves.)

Lhotský *(sarcastically)*

Pardon us if we stand in your way.

Zivny *(bowing)*

I've no wish to intrude on you.

(to the men)

May I present myself?

Konečský *(introducing Zivny to Míla)*

Well, my dear lady, pray allow me...

Míla

There's no need to, we are acquainted...

Konečský *(turning to the others)*

Zivny, the composer.

Dr Suda *(bowing)*

Dr Suda.

Lhotský

My name is Lhotský.

Zivny *(correcting Konečský)*

The composer perhaps.

Lhotský

Perhaps? Why perhaps? What do you mean by that?

Zivny *(sarcastically)*

Isn't a composer's function 'to write postmortems on youthful passion'?

Konečský

Youthful passion?

Dr Suda

On youthful passion.

Zivny *(pointedly)*

In anger, bitterness, in the face of an abject betrayal?

Míla *(drawing closer to Zivny)*

Youthful passion?

You mean his youthful passion!

Zivny *(to Míla, pointedly)*

You ought to know.

(Míla turns away from the group as if wishing to walk alone with Zivny.)

Lhotský *(softly to Dr Suda)*

I fancy that these two know each other rather well. Why pry on them? Leave them to it.

Konečský (*to Míla*)

I'll take my leave, if you'll permit me.

Dr Suda

We'll take our leave, if you'll allow us.

(They withdraw politely. Míla takes several steps towards Zivny.)

Míla (*urgently*)

Is it your child you've come for? Tell me... for our baby?

Zivny (*uneasily*)

I am here to seek an echo of the cry that exposed my spirit's emptiness. I come to seek that baby's cry, the cry that filled me with terror.

(coming closer to Míla)

The cry that bore witness to my transgression but also to my obligation, and I seek it, since its tears and its laughter join to proclaim my undying right to my son and his mother.

Míla

That right is yours if you claim it.

Zivny

And I defend it both now and always.

(Schoolmistresses gather on the promenade and gaze inquisitively at Zivny and Míla, who move slowly away.)

Zivny (*almost in a whisper*)

See how our souls are reaching out to us, calling to us from the darkness, from that insane abyss where the hopes that once we had are lying, drowning in bitterness.

(Miss Stuhlá, an elderly schoolmistress, starts to summon her brood, searching amongst the promenaders. Students and schoolgirls enter, dressed for tennis.)

Miss Stuhlá (*through her nose*)

It's time, dear ladies, for rehearsal.

Students (*mocking her*)

'It's time, dear ladies, for rehearsal!'

Dear ladies, your rehearsal!

Schoolgirls

Super! Super!

Miss Pocovská

Are you ready? We're having an excursion.

It's time, dear ladies, for rehearsal!

Schoolgirls (*merrily*)

Yes, we're ready.

Miss Stuhlá

We're late already.

(Schoolmistresses gather by the salon.)

Where have you been? Late again!

Schoolmistresses (*gathering, severally*)

Here I am! Here we are!

Miss Stuhlá

There's still some more.
We're not all here yet. Go, tell the others hurry up.

(The rest eventually arrive. Dr Suda and Lhotský, accompanied by a bagpiper, enter in a merry mood. Dr Suda has an umbrella turned inside out.)

Schoolgirls *(severally)*

Oh, doctor, dear doctor! Won't you join our excursion?

Dr Suda

Maybe. Why not!

Schoolgirls and Students

Won't you lead the way? Oh, please do!

Dr Suda

Maybe.
(brandishing the umbrella)
I've found a flag, our standard!
(He gives it to Miss Pacovská.)

Schoolgirls

Decorate it with ribbons, ribbons. Make it beautiful. With red ones, and white ones, and blue ones.

(They sit on the promenade and decorate the umbrella. The bagpiper plays.)

Dr Suda

Hey, Lhotský, find some musicians!

Lhotský

But first we must eat! To keep our strength up.

(He joins the diners at the tables, where waiters are hovering.)

First guest

The set lunch, quickly!

Second guest

And for me.

Waiter

Just two of you?
(to Lhotský)
Or you as well, sir?

Students

We've got a pole, to fly our standard!

Schoolgirls

Our standard! To fly our standard!

(Miss Stuhlá and the schoolmistresses are by the piano in the salon. The students and schoolgirls are at the window.)

Schoolmistresses

'Scarlet poppies in the grass...'

Miss Stuhlá

No! No! Stop! Once more please, and together.
One, two, one, two!

Schoolmistresses

'Scarlet poppies in the grass...'

Miss Stuhlá

First sopranos, you continue:
'Call out when the reapers pass.' Now!

Schoolmistresses

'Call out when the reapers pass...'

Miss Stuhlá

The altos next, you have the tune.
Now both parts sing together.

Dr Suda

This must be stopped.

Lhotský

This must be stopped.

Schoolmistresses

'Call out when the reapers pass.
From your sickle spare us.'

Miss Stuhlá

Stop!

Dr Suda, Lhotský, Students and Schoolgirls (*mocking*)

Spare us, spare us, spare us!

Miss Stuhlá (*angrily, at the window*)

Your manners, really, are disgraceful!
Behave yourselves; be your age!
(*turning to her choir*)
Now! One, two!

Schoolmistresses

'Scarlet poppies in the grass...'

Students and Schoolgirls

Ha, ha, ha, ha!

Miss Stuhlá and the Schoolmistresses (*exploding*)

What shocking manners!

Míla's mother (*searching for Míla, to Lhotský*)

Where is my Míla? Have you seen my Míla?

Lhotský (*shrugging his shoulders, turning away*)

How should I know?

Councillor's wife

Where's Mr Zivny? Where did he go?

Dr Suda (*closing the window*)

Now we'll sing our own song, to see us on our way. Sing and off we go!

Students

Be quiet, quiet!

Lhotský

Waiter, the menu!

Schoolmistresses

What shocking manners!

(*The bagpipe player strikes up.*)

Dr Suda

'Sun in the heavens up on high,
Though you have only got one eye,
You can see in our hearts.'

Lhotský and Students

Oh, yes, you can see in our hearts.

Schoolgirls

Wonderful, wonderful!

Dr Suda

'Sun in the heavens up above,
You can get all you want of love,
Though you have got no heart.'

Lhotský and Students

Oh, yes, though you have got no heart.

Dr Suda

'Sun up above descend to us,
Down from on high and send to us,
Love to inflame our hearts.'

Lhotský, Students

Oh, yes, send love to inflame our hearts.

Schoolgirls

Wonderful, wonderful!

Lhotský

Are we all ready? Off we go!

Students

Off we go!

(*They fall in line behind the improvised flag and set off gaily.*)

'Sun up above descend to us...'

(*The stage grows empty, save for a few waiters and spa guests. Miss Stuhlá comes out of the
alon with her choir.*)

Students (*from a distance*)

'Hearts...'

Miss Stuhlá (*angrily*)

What a disgrace! What shocking manners!

(Miss Stuhlá and the schoolmistresses leave. Míla's mother wanders off in the same direction as the excursion, searching for her daughter.)

(The sun shines brightly. A spa guest or two take advantage of the shade in the colonnade. Míla and Zivny enter from the avenue of trees.)

Zivny

We're back too late, we've missed your friends.

Míla

Whatever shall we say to them?

Zivny *(quietly)*

Say to them? Say to them that we both have started to retrace the steps that lie behind us, in the past.

(They go to the end table outside the hotel and sit.)

Let's sit awhile.

(to the waiter)

Bring us the menu.

Míla

Only if you choose for me.

Zivny

No, it's for you to choose.

Míla

Choose it for me.

Zivny

As if the two of us had any choice...

Míla

Do go on...

Zivny

The past, the past, with what longing I relive it, the past. Silent and passionate glances illumined our empty existence, and filled it with a blazing light that no-one, that nothing could extinguish.

We did not heed the outside world, whose darkness only made the light brighter, light that no-one, that nothing could extinguish.

Sometimes desire fed on those glances; at other times, how it longed for more to feed on. For when we were apart, suspicion made our lips ask secretly, where were those glances turning to?

Yet whenever we met, silently those lips needed words that were never enough – no lips, no words were ever enough.

Oh how glorious the harmony of human passion, when two spirits seek and find each other. Was there not beauty and honesty in the way we expressed our love? Yet something conspired to threaten us each day we spent together.

(passionately)

Everything round us assumed new warmth and colour; flowers, and people shuffling about their daily business glowed in our love and shared its glory.

We lived in a world of our own creation made of dreams. 'Dreamers, romantics and parasites!'

(bitterly)

That was the way your mother once described us.

How could she understand that passion is the spring of creation and is my only source of inspiration.

(Míla rises uneasily. The afternoon sun, which has been beating down warmly, disappears.)

Míla

The sun's vanished.

(sadly)

I need its heat to burn my sorrow.

(resuming her story)

They forced me to receive a suitor, assuming I'd agree. He was elegant, perhaps even handsome.

Yet, every time, no sooner had he left me, I ran to be with my secret love, just to catch a glimpse, just to see your face, longing to speak a word with you, so you, you could see in my eyes my misery at all I had lost: a life in ruins, my live in ruins.

And once, in the opera house, I remember clearly as if it were today, I watched you conducting your latest opera, and willed you to turn and look at me. In the applause that followed, you were lost to me.

But how I drank you in! Oh, it's so clear, as if it were today. It all came back just now with my bouquet, when you leant down to smell the scarlet roses.

Then came the moment when it all seemed over, like an unfinished novel. Yet at first it was painless, though I thought we would not ever meet again.

But later, when they took me from Prague, to help me forget you, and sent me away to the country, how I missed you!

(despairingly)

You were in Prague, so far away from me!

(She sits near the chair where the bouquet is lying. Zivny sits in the chair next to her and gazes into the distance.)

Until that physical separation, I lived so near you in a world of dreams, and felt you through the bustle of the city. Sometimes I imagined that we met, and we walked through the trees by the river's edge. And when I gazed into the silent water, seeing your reflection next to mine, I lost myself within a misty dream-world, in an idyll of never-ending pleasure.

Zivny *(half to himself)*

To think I believed what the slanderers said of you...

(Míla lowers her head to the flowers, heavily self-absorbed.)

Míla *(recovering herself)*

What did they say?

Zivny

Oh, nothing. You'll learn soon enough.

Míla

And in the end I bore it all alone. Once more my life was empty and routine; but then, here beneath my heart, something stirred within me.

The emptiness within me was filled by life awakening, filled by the life of our baby, who cried within my womb for his absent father!

Zivny

The life of our baby!

(The excursion starts to return.)

Míla *(hurriedly)*

Listen! They are back again.

(She gives Zivny the roses and adjusts her hair and hat.)

Zivny *(hurriedly taking the flowers)*

Can you bear seeing them after this?

Míla

No let's avoid them.

(They start to leave. It is growing dark. A young widow and an engineer drift back with the excursion.)

Engineer

Never will I forget this fleeting moment! Tomorrow!

Young widow

After dark?

Engineer

After dark?

(They leave.)

Konečký (reading a love poem to a young excursionist)

'Love lingers on your lips and turns them into a scarlet flower, ripe for plucking, while in your eyes...'

(They leave. Some young gentlemen returning notice Zivny and Míla.)

First young gentleman

Good heavens, Zivny!

Second young gentleman

Looks as though we'd better leave them to it.

Lhotský (to Míla)

I've spent the day admiring you revelling in the sun.

Two young gentlemen

Revelling in the sun.

Lhotský

Revelling in the sun.

Míla

How kind of you.

Councillor's wife (to the Major's wife)

Why ever didn't Míla join the party, I wonder?

Major's wife

Who knows? Why not go and ask?

(They both watch Zivny and Míla with curiosity.)

Míla (to Zivny)

Oh, take me away!

Zivny

There's no hurry. Since prying eyes never find much pleasure from an open book.

Míla

From an open book?

(with sudden passion)

Let them see all, yes all! I am yours! I and the child are yours!

Two young gentlemen (watching from the verandah)

Let them be.

Zivny

You are mine! You and the child are mine!

(They start to leave.)

Míla (*turning round, pausing*)

Yet even as I say it, I'm still frightened. Just think how our meeting here will affect my mother.

Zivny (*following Míla*)

Well, that's settled then.

Dr Suda (*entering with students, carrying the flag*)

Indoors for the grand finale!

Students

Grand finale!

Dr Suda (*to Míla*)

Won't you join us for the grand finale?

Students

Grand finale!

(*Dr Suda goes into the hotel.*)

Míla's mother (*to Lhotský*)

Have you seen my Míla?

Lhotský (*trying to avoid her, gesturing that he hasn't*)

Not for ages.

Major's wife

She was here just now, but she left with Živný.

Míla's mother

Oh, no! That's not true! Not with Živný!

(*The remaining excursionists have gone into the hotel. Míla's mother stops and looks at the lighted windows. The electric lights on the promenade are switched off. It is dark.*)

A student (*softly*)

Fanča! Let me kiss you once again!

Fanča

Never! Never!

Student

If not, I'll tell what you did just now. You'll catch it then!

Fanča

What I did just now? Let me go!

(*She escapes.*)

Míla's mother (*distraught*)

Have you seen my Míla?

Dr Suda, Lhotský and Konečský

Romance! Just a summer romance!

Míla's mother (*exploding with grief*)

Gone with Živný!

Student (*from the distance*)

Fanča!

Míla's mother

Oh, God! A disastrous blow!

Quick curtain.

Acte II

Four years later. About 6 o'clock on a winter evening. Light from a standard lamp in Živný's study. A piano to the left with a sofa; a balcony with pillars supporting it is seen through the window.

Upstage a door leading to a passage which in turn leads to stairs up to the balcony. A door, right, leads to other rooms. A potted palm in the curve of the piano. Živný sits at the piano. Míla is in a rocking-chair, from which she can see the music. Doubek, their four-year-old son, is pulling music out of a cabinet and examining it.

Zivny (*picking up the score of his opera*)

Slumber on undisturbed in the shadow, bitter memories, sleep. You who bear the burden of our past sorrow... when, oh when will you take flight and release your victims?

How sweetly you come to charm us, promise our hearts the love and certainty that we both long for. Yet you bear witness to the lingering doubts from out of our past.

Must I leave you to reproach me in silence, denied to your public, the victim of your creator's conscience? Dare I awaken you? Or must it be that you remain here in silence?

Yet this is the music I wrote when first we fell in love.

I wrote the whole of this opera, and only the last act remains incomplete.

(lightly)

A funny way to put it, come to think of it.

Míla (*smiling*)

A funny way to put it! To have completed an opera with no ending!

Zivny

We must let these notes sound at least once, to exorcise their power to haunt us, to silence them, to leave not even an echo.

Míla (*gently*)

You regret having written these notes?

Zivny

Regret them?

Míla

You play them so often, these tunes that still accuse me.

Zivny (*approaching Míla, full of love*)

May we not hear them just once without recrimination?

(There are indistinct screams from Míla's deranged mother off-stage. Živný affects not to hear them.)

Míla's mother (*off-stage*)

What are those people saying? My daughter, and Živný?

Míla

That ghastly gibbering...

Zivny

Do you still remember what I wrote in my first letter?

He starts to play softly

Mila (*plainly shaken*)

I do, I do!

(*to Doubek*)

Little Doubek, go to Nanny.

(*She hugs him. Doubek potters off with a book.*)

Zivny

'I saw the beauty of your eyes,

(*Mila stirs uncomfortably.*)

dimmed by the long hours of weeping.

(*Mila rises in fear.*)

What have I done to cause you pain, why is your soul racked with suffering?

Why are you unhappy?'

Mila's mother (*off-stage*)

God be my witness, what those two did was sinful.

Mila (*to herself*)

Oh, these memories, why revive them?

Zivny

And you replied: 'Unspoken thoughts go far beyond words, silently winging between us; but our thoughts are elusive, they can't speak for both of us. I have surrendered my will to your will.

Our hearts are conflicting echoes; my heart is full of uncertainty, yours is always demanding; my heart is never free from anguish, yours is calling me, "Come, oh come to me, Destiny"!'

Mila

For heaven's sake, stop it!

Mila's mother (*her voice heard from off-stage*)

'Destiny! Our hearts are conflicting echoes; my heart is full of uncertainty, yours is always demanding; my heart is never free from anguish, yours is calling me, "Come, oh come to me, Destiny"!'

Zivny

Always that answering echo!

Mila

All these years of harrassment, never relenting.

Zivny (*tenderly, calmly*)

We're married now; why are you crying, when none can harm you? To protect you was my one desire, but I failed in protecting you from myself.

Perhaps because I saw in you, saw in the flower of our passion, all I needed to inspire me.

(*He flicks rapidly through the pages of the score.*)

Oh, cruelty, such cruelty!

(*glancing at the score*)

This is how I took revenge. I wanted to tear out the heart from your body, and reveal your wounds in public, drowning your death knell howling with laughter.

I wanted to bathe in the tears you shed, and strike at your breast with a knife, hacking you till I'd killed you. Bring you to judgement, show you for a lying harlot! Lay bare your pretences, and tear off the mask that concealed your debauchery! To anyone and everyone you gave both your heart and soul as well, you gave them all your body!

(*He goes to the piano, seizes the score, tears pages from it and hurls it to the floor.*)

Deceit, deceit, a lie, born of my own suspicion and nurtured on jealousy!

(*Mila pulls herself together and goes to the fallen score.*)

(*The door flies open, revealing the passage and the steps to the balcony.*)

Doubek (*running in*)
Mummy, Mummy!

Míla
What is it, little one?

Doubek
Mummy, do you know what love is?

Míla
Darling, I do, I do.

Doubek
No you don't, no you don't.

Míla
Oh, yes I do, I do.

Doubek
No you don't, no you don't. Because you don't behave like John and Nanny.

Míla
What do you mean, John and Nanny?
(*John and Nanny peer nervously through the door. Míla picks up the score and walks towards Živný.*)

Míla
All the same, it is true that I did wrong, and guilt will not be silenced.

Doubek (*turning to John and Nanny, whom he sees at the door*)
John and Nanny!

Míla (*turning to Doubek and seeing John and Nanny.*)
Nanny, where's the mother?
(*She hurries from the room with John and Nanny.*)
Quick! Can't you see her room is empty? Where's my mother? Where's my mother?
(*Doubek is about to follow them.*)

Zivny
Stay here with me, Doubek. Stay with Daddy.
(*Having found her, John, Nanny and Míla gently try to lead Míla's mother into the room. She is clutching her jewel box.*)

Míla (*in the hall*)
Mother dear, come and sit in here with us.

Míla's mother
Don't come near me, I'm not crazy!
(*She sees Zivny and runs to him with outstretched arms.*)
'Unspoken thoughts go far beyond words, silently winging between us, but our thoughts are elusive, can't speak for both of us.'
I know you! You have seduced my daughter!
(*with grotesquely amorous movements*)
'Oh! My heart is full of uncertainty, yours is always demanding; my heart is never free from anguish, yours is calling me, "Come, oh come to me, Destiny"!'

Zivny
Silence her!

Míla's mother

She always came when you called to her. Ha, ha! Destiny!

(slyly, as she backs towards the door)

But the songbird fell to the earth. You will see what I mean, after I'm dead and gone, you will see what I mean.

(She gets closer to the door, trying to conceal her jewel box. Míla keeps close to her.)

You'll not get anything! I'll take my jewellery!

You'll not inherit it! I'll get away from you vultures.

(in surprise to those crowding around her)

Who are these mad people? What do they want of me?

(In a flash, she runs through the door to the flight of steps. Míla hurries after her, and in the course of a struggle is pulled over the balcony as her mother throws herself off.)

Zivny *(running to the stairs)*

God almighty!

Doubek *(alone on stage, his eyes fixed on the door, which is now closed)*

Where's my mummy? Where's my mummy?

(Zivny enters, carrying Míla's corpse.)

Mummy! Mummy!

Zivny *(laying the body on the sofa)*

Silence, silence! Silence, silence, and a blast from a clear sky. With nothing to warn us of lightning, to warn us of it. Why was there no thunder?

Why was there no thunder?

(He sees the others carrying Míla's mother upstairs and falls to the floor at Míla's side.)

Curtain.

Acte III

Eleven years later – the present. The Great Hall of the Conservatory. On the left a huge organ with silver pipes; two doors at the rear. Sofas and chairs line the walls. Paintings on the walls. A chandelier converted to electricity. In the centre a concert grand piano. Students enter severally to attend a lecture. A group of eight or ten is gathered round the piano, following a score which Verva is playing. A group of girl students, led by Hrazda and Kosinská, enters and forms a group upstage.

Students *(round the piano)*

'Listen to the thunder over the horizon. Farmland and field deserted, as though death lay in waiting; roads to the villages empty and silent, fearful at the anger of God's own messenger.

'See, the cockerel hurries homeward, tail feathers blown in the wind, until at last he is safe, underneath the rafters roosting; and even humans cower in terror.

'See now a bolt of lightning strikes at the old oak tree and splits the trunk from top to bottom, shattering its age-old beauty.'

Hrazda *(singing the tenor solo from the score)*

'Endless the pain I must suffer; in the stormwind

I see you so clearly, my silver flower.

And always that unforeseen lightning, that bolt from a cloudless sky, strikes from the very height of heaven.'

Students

'Unforeseen lightning, striking from heaven, spent at last in the cold earth.'

Verva

That's it, that's how the opera ends.

Součková

Where's the thunderstorm?

Students

Funny ending!

No more thunderstorm?

No thunder? Funny ending!

Součková

It's up to us to improvise the thunder!

(Součková seats herself at the organ and plays loudly.)

Students

Improvise the thunder!

(They tune their instruments noisily.)

Hrazda

Shut up! Stop it!

(The girl students dance.)

Verva *(sits at the piano again)*

Enough of that! That bloody awful racketing will fetch the roof down. Stop that noise!

(They stop dancing and quieten down.)

How many of you are going to the premiere?

Students *(affectedly)*

We must all go!

Hrazda

Oh, yes, we'll all go.

(They gather round the piano.)

Verva

I've been backstage in rehearsal.

Students

All go.

Součková *(sarcastically)*

Oh what a lot you'll have seen there!

Verva

Yes, indeed, you learn a lot in rehearsal.

(He points to the score from which he is playing, subdued, serious.)

Živný came with his score to the theatre for the first rehearsal, saying he'd brought the whole of the opera except for the incomplete finale, which was still in God's hands and there it would stay.

Students *(to themselves)*

'Still in God's hands and there it would stay...'

A funny way to put it! He has completed an opera with no ending.

Verva *(looking at the score again)*

There's more to it. Lenský, he must be Živný himself.

Students

Lenský is Živný?

Verva

He must be writing about his own suffering. Every note cries out his name, and her name also, and the child can only be Doubek.

(Doubek enters. Verva whispers something to Hrazda.)

Girl students *(sotto voce)*

Do you think it's true? Does Doubek know?

(Součková starts to play the organ.)

One way to find out, that's by going to Živný and asking him.

Hrazda *(sarcastically)*

Go and ask, go and ask. He will be certain to tell you, certain!

Girl students

Come on, come on, leave them alone with their secrets. Come on Doubek, leave them to it.

Verva *(sits at the piano again)*

Don't go. Listen to this extraordinary little passage scored for treble; surely there's something for you here.

(imitating a child's voice)

'Mummy, Mummy! Do you know what love is?'

'Darling, I do, I do.'

'No you don't, no you don't.'

'Oh, yes I do, I do.'

'No you don't, no you don't. Because you don't behave like John and Nanny.'

'What do you mean, John and Nanny?'

Students *(mocking)*

'Do you know what love is?'

'John and Nanny!' Very pretty!

Hrazda

Verva!

Kosinská

Součková!

(They all burst out laughing.)

Součková *(jumping up from the organ)*

Watch out!

(Živný has entered unobserved. Verva gets up from the piano.)

Živný

Why this unusual silence?

Verva *(smiling shyly)*

We were preparing for this evening's premiere.

Kosinská

And we were going to ask you to tell us all about your opera, about the man called Lenský.

Živný

For my opera's premiere?

Lenský? You could say I know him intimately.

Short-tempered, and a lonely man.

(He goes to the piano and sits, as if to lecture them. They gather round. Doubek watches his father solicitously.)

Music flowed from his imagination, poured out in a golden stream, although he led a solitary, private existence.

(half aside)

Must I revive these memories?

(aloud)

Most of his music reflected his loneliness, and in its intensity it failed to please the public taste. But something happened to change that.

(He gets up and walks to the window.)

People said it must have been his falling in love.

Kosinská *(half to herself, half to Součková)*

Falling in love! Oh, how wonderful that must be!

Zivny

Please could you switch the lights on? It's getting dark outside.

Součková *(tartly)*

As if she didn't know.

(Zivny turns round; there are signs of a storm outside. He sits again.)

Zivny

How happy he was then! He felt that God was smiling on him. Confidence blossomed within him; no longer lonely, his passion embraced all humanity.

And from the breath of love, what inspiration came to him, what spontaneous melody flowed from his soul that seemed born again, and, reflected in her beauty, music assumed perfection of form.

And when in time their love came to an end, memories sufficed to feed a spirit always hungry for new stimulus. Soon his libretto sprang to life, and he conveyed so well his laughter and joy, his pain, his pain.

Verva *(to Součková)*

Don't you see now? He is describing his own pain.

Součková

And how much pain it gives him!

Zivny *(disjointedly)*

Where once their spirit shared a life of perfect unison, now their existence was always threatened by strident rhythms and by hysteria.

Crashing and beating down on them, in the end, strings that had bound them snapped in two.

(Doubek goes to his father in alarm. Zivny looks round in surprise.)

Why are you silent?

Students

We're so frightened. Please don't go on with it, don't you see we are afraid for you?

Zivny

Now you understand why these memories make me so bitter?

Doubek *(pleadingly, warning)*

Father!

Zivny *(agitated)*

Bitter memories! Separated from her Lenský, she became a ghostly shadow, aimlessly wandering, cowering and timorous, a broken reed blown helplessly hither and thither. And Lenský? Like dead wood severed from live branches, hacked off and heedlessly cast aside, battered by the fierce winds, thinking he had been defeated.

In revenge he made his score an attack on her, and hoped that her guilt would shame her into loving him again.

Could the winds that blew the broken reed bring her back to him again, bring her to the dead wood still battered by the storms?
Who knows... maybe they were right to say it was chance when Lenský and Míla met at the spa.

Doubek, would you fetch me a glass of water?

(Exit Doubek.)

Who would have recognised Lenský when they met again? Full of love and deeply happy, both of them drowning in pleasure. How could they have realized that love so gentle and harmonious would soon be silenced by the nearness of death?

(with great pain)

How could he forget, how could he forget? Listening to her last breath, listening to her last sigh?

(with a spasm of pain)

An interrupted melody, torn from her, torn from her dying lips!

Verva and Students

Do you start to understand him?

(A wind rises outside.)

Zivny

From then on no sound came to him save for the menacing rumble of thunder. Ever louder and louder still, it hurtled around in his head.

He tried to challenge that music, to silence it for ever through his will. He stood by trees in storms to watch them shake in terror, waiting for God's own messenger.

(A great clap of thunder; flashes of lightning criss-cross; the lights in the hall flash on and off.)

There in the lightning's flash he saw the gates of eternity. In his surprise he stood and gazed at the blinding gleam of silver light; he knew that dark clouds meant the storm was near.

(More lightning. The students back away and crouch in fear.)

Students

Oh, dreadful! Oh, dreadful!

Zivny

Why do you shake like leaves in a storm?

(Doubek returns with the glass of water.)

It seems to be so clear, where the silver lightning shatters into fragments. There is a white face, so pale and so sad!

(The students crouch behind the organ. Doubek turns from Zivny and looks at the lightning outside in alarm.)

Now I see you once more, ah, once more, see you so clearly once more... your heavenly face, your golden hair that falls around your brow, and your shining eyes smile at me...

Doubek *(crying out and dropping the glass of water)*

My mother!

(Thunder and lightning; the lights go out; darkness on stage; Zivny falls in a faint.)

Students

Jesus!

(The lights come on again; students still by the organ; Zivny lies unconscious.)

Verva *(the first to pull himself together)*

Run and get help for him!

Get a doctor! Hurry up!

(Hrazda and the others raise Zivny. Součková runs for a doctor.)

Zivny *(raising himself slightly)*

Can't you hear it too? That terrible sound!

Can't you hear it too?!

(He intones wordlessly.)

Verva

Oh, please be calm, I beg you.

Kosinská

One of you fetch some water, fetch him some water.
Send for help!

Zivny (*intoning again, expressively, passionately*)

Listen now! That is her weeping.

Can't you hear it too?

Verva (*to students*)

Could that be the music for the final scene?

Zivny (*hearing him and raising himself briskly*)

Music for the final scene?

That is still in God's hands, and there it will stay!

(*He clings to Doubek, who supports him with difficulty.*)

Dr Suda (*entering*)

What is the matter now?