

POSSESSION

A new Opera of Terror

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DRAMATIS PERSONÆ:

The NAGY family

COPERNICUS (Nicus), *the eldest; a priest*.....Tenor

KATERINA (Katta), *the middle child; an atheist, and former student*.....Mezzo

CLARA, *the youngest; left to care for their mother*.....Soprano

ZOLTÁN, *a bishop, and mentor to Copernicus*.....Bass

SZONJA Lupa, *a beautiful woman with a mysterious past*.....Soprano

MÁRTON, *betrothed to Clara*.....Baritone

Priests, townspeople, spirits etc.....SATB

Clara doubles as the YOUNG WOMAN in the Prologue. Szonja is the Demonic Voice, which can be adjusted through filters etc.

Setting: Hungary 1841. The Nagy family's manor is on the outskirts of Buda. The Church is in Buda.

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PROLOGUE:

Church. Night. The lights come up on a scene of chaos. A raving YOUNG WOMAN who's possessed is strapped to a bed and writhes as the room quakes. Priests chant in fear as the family looks on. In their midst is COPERNICUS Nagy, who holds a bible and chants with fervor over the girl.

PRIESTS *Adjure te, spiritus nequissime, per Deum omnipotentem!* Etc.

COP. *Adjure te, spiritus nequissime, per Deum omnipotentem!*

FAMILY Ooooh!

GIRL (CLARA) Aaaaah!

The more they chant, the louder a demonic voice grows.

DEMON (SZO.) *Chum pumookh!* (Shut up!) Copernicus...

COP. I conjure you by Heaven's light:
Withdraw before this Holy rite!

DEMON (SZO.) *Qatlin'ookh!* (I'm going to kill you!) Copernicus...

COP. Go, Satan get thee back! Begone!
Return thee unto Abaddon!

The girl begins to rise from the bed as winds lash the bystanders – a thunderstorm churns within the room!

GIRL (CLARA) There is a sinner in this room!

DEMON (SZO.) Who has assured this woman's doom!

Copernicus despairs and drops the bible.

COP. Ahhh!

GIRL (CLARA) The flesh was tasted lustfully!

DEMON (SZO.) And now this soul belongs to me!

COP. Ahhhhh!

The storm peaks as the girl hovers above the bed. Copernicus is powerless. The Father, pushing against the winds, raises a carbine, takes aim, and fires. BANG! Lights down.

OVERTURE

ACT I. SCENE I.

Copernicus' bedroom. The Nagy House. Dawn. Copernicus writhes in his bed.

COP. Go, Satan get thee back! Begone! Ahhh!

Clara runs in.

CLARA Nicus! Nicus! Awake! It's me!

COP. Oh, Clara! Oh, sweet Clara! You were there this time, in the bed!

CLARA Did you have that horrid nightmare again?

COP. I've been home for three months, and still, I have these visions. I fear I'm more of a burden than I'm worth.

CLARA Never speak like that! I'm happy you're home. And so is mother.

COP. But not Katerina.

CLARA Katta's not happy about anything! Come down when you're ready; I've prepared breakfast for everyone and our new boarder. The broker says she's quite beautiful...

COP. I'm a Priest! You know I'm forbidden.

CLARA Perhaps it's for the best: the broker also says she's garish: fancy accoutrements!

COP. Clara, judge not...

CLARA Lest ye be judged, yes yes. But, please, come down.

COP. I shall, I thank you sweet, sweet Clara, angel upon the earth!

She kisses his forehead and departs. He dresses himself as he ruminates.

I LIE AGAIN

COP. Here again this villain lies!
Not know woman as a Priest?
How can I look her in the eyes?
O, I'm but a hopeless beast!

O Lord, deliver me from this;
Return your grace into my heart;
Absolve me for the fatal kiss
Which tore my sacred vows apart!

For, the Priest who sins then sternly preaches
Is the Captain who his vessel beaches,
Is the Doctor rife with leprosy,
Is the Justice fraught with jealousy!

O! Each day is waking Hell!
If it were no sin to die,
I would gladly strike my knell,
And depart this mortal sty!

But I must live for others' need,
For this is God's immortal creed.

Attired, he leaves.

ACT I. SCENE II.

The Parlour. KATERINA, wearing a man's hairstyle and men's clothing that hangs off her, holds court at the dinner table over a smirking MÁRTON, who only has eyes for Clara as she clears the table.

KAT. Revolution, Márton, revolution! It's coming to Hungary, I swear!

MÁRTON And here I thought it was the feast of St. Valentine that's coming, Katerina! Is this what they taught you in Vienna?

KAT. (*Pompous*) Don't you dare mock me: I have a bachelor of arts now!

MÁRTON A bachelor of arts, with a bachelor's parts! Ha ha ha!

CLARA Márton!

MÁRTON What? She likes it.

CLARA She's still a woman.

KAT. The deuce I am!

MÁRTON See? She duped them all.

KAT. That's right! I tricked all those fools!

CLARA Please, I don't want to—

KAT. *(Right in Clara's face)* Revolution!

CLARA ...provoke her.

MÁRTON Too late!

REVOLUTION

KAT. Since time immemorial we've been oppressed—
Rudely cast down, betrodde and bemired!
Controlled in where we lived and how we dressed,
In how we loved, to what we all aspired!

CLARA Katta, please, your shouting will disturb mother: you know she's ill!

...on deaf ears.

KAT. *(In Clara's face again)* No more! The revolution comes!
With guillotines and pounding drums!

Marriage unto Nature's an offence:
Thus with matrimony we'll dispense!
We shall seize the wealthy's property,
Torment take the haughty Bourgeoisie!
All shall work the wholesome fields and land,
Bowing to Equality's command!

MÁRTON *(Ironic)* Marvelous, I can scarcely wait

KAT./MÁRT. Rise up! The revolution comes!
With guillotines and pounding drums!

Copernicus enters.

COP. Katta, be quiet. You've woken mother with your bawling!

Clara rushes out as SZONJA quietly enters, unnoticed.

MÁRTON Hello, Copernicus!

COP. Good day, Márton.

MÁRTON Have you any sweet verses prepared for any sweet young ladies for
Valentine's Day?

COP. Saint Valentine was a martyr, Márton. And I am forbidden to court “sweet ladies.”

MÁRTON Speaking of martyrdom! We honour your sacrifice, dear Saint Copernicus!

KAT. Ha!

MÁRTON Oh yes! Are you ready for the revolution, father?

KAT. Of course he isn't, because all the priests are going to the guillotine as well!

SZONJA That was very unkind.

Everyone turns in surprise, like she's just become visible. All are spellbound by her beauty.

SZONJA Good day! I'm Szonja Lupa. I've rented the room upstairs for the month...

COP. Of course...forgive me. I'm Copernicus. This is Katerina, and Márton.

MÁRTON How do you do?

SZONJA Very well, thank you. I'm staying in a house with a priest! I wager there's no safer place in Hungary.

COP. Well...I...do strive to be...ha ha what am I saying?

Clara enters.

CLARA There, she's sleeping again.

Now it's Szonja's turn to be enchanted.

SZONJA And who is this lovely young creature?

COP. This is our little Clara.

SZONJA Perfectly adorable. I'm your new boarder. A pleasure to meet you.

CLARA (*Uneasy*) Welcome! You're a little late so your breakfast is cold, but I've saved you some.

SZONJA O, how thoughtful, but I had a very large supper late last night.

Something about the way she says this...

CLARA Well, it awaits if you change your mind. And Nicus, this came for you at the front door.

She hands him a letter, which he opens and reads.

MÁRTON What brings you to Buda? A sultry tryst for St. Valentine's?

CLARA Márton! Have some discretion! Forgive him, miss Lupa. This time of year it's like Cupid has fired an English volley into his backside!

MÁRTON And I only have eyes for you, my love!

He kisses her cheek despite her half-hearted efforts to repel him.

SZONJA Ha ha, ah, it's wonderfully charming to see. But, no, I come for business! Though, I'm no stranger to Hungary: it's where I was born! I've been away for many years, however.

MÁRTON Home at last!

SZONJA Not quite. I'm just passing through: my business will be taking me farther east.

COP. Cardinal Zoltán is at the cathedral, and he's summoned me.

CLARA Wonderful! Perhaps your mentor can cheer you. Go, I'll manage the house.

SZONJA Father.

Copernicus leaves.

SZONJA You've been quiet, Katerina.

KAT. *(overwhelmed, nervous)* I...must get to my pamphlet writing. Excuse me...

She runs out.

MÁRTON You seem to have frightened her! Amazing! Though, I can't imagine why anyone would be frightened of **you**...

SZONJA I've been told I have quite the bite. My wit, that is.

CLARA Your chamber is ready.

SZONJA Of course.

CLARA Ring if you need anything.

SZONJA I shall. Thank you.

She moves off. Clara hits Márton with her towel.

MÁRTON *(Playful)* My tender back! Why do you strike me so?

CLARA “I can’t imagine why anyone would be frightened of **you...**”

MÁRTON My little turtledove, don’t be jealous! You know you’re the only one for me!

MY TURTLEDOVE

MÁRTON O gentle night, so dark above,
Don’t hide from me my turtledove;
O blasting winds with whistling swirl,
Puff not away my darling girl;
O pouring rain, so dreary dull,
Change not my turtle to a gull.
O stately Majesty of love,
Ordain me and my turtledove!

MÁRT./CL. O gentle night, so dark above,
Don’t hide from me my turtledove.

They embrace for a few moments. COUGHING from offstage rouses Clara.

CLARA Mother.

MÁRTON No, my love. Rest, I’ll look after her.

CLARA But—

MÁRTON I know! But between her, Copernicus, Katta, and me, there’s no time for peace and quiet for little Clara. Let me.

She assents, he starts to move, but stops...

MÁRTON Do you notice an unusual odour?

He looks around but can’t identify the source.

CLARA No...

MÁRTON It must be something wafting in from outside. Recline. Rest.

He goes off, leaving Clara alone. She doesn't quite know what to do with herself. She attempts to tidy up, but that's quickly finished.

HOW SILENT IS THE NEST

CLARA How silent is the Nagy nest!
And, Clara, the untiring nurse,
Has been commanded to her rest;
O, this inaction is a curse!

What is a worker bee,
Without his family?
Without the buzzing hive,
He cannot stay alive.

What is the mother bear
Without her cubs in care?
Why else explore and hunt,
Enduring death's affront?

My heart no other calling knows
Than to dispel my family's woes.

Coughing is heard offstage.

MÁRTON *(offstage)* Darling, some help, if you please!

Happy to be needed again, she runs off.

ACT II. SCENE I.

Church. ZOLTÁN, brimstone shooting from his eyes, stands at the pulpit before the congregation (chorus).

O SINNERS!

ZOLTÁN O sinners! Ye court Heaven's wrath—
A furnace fraught with fire's bath,—
Since ye have spurned the righteous path!

CHORUS Lord preserve us!

ZOLTÁN The Lord ye have offended sore,
He whom your baseness doth abhor,
And whom your errors doth deplore!

CHORUS Lord preserve us!

ZOLTÁN O ye licentious wretches, quail!
Ye who of harlots doth avail,
Who riot in appeasing Baal!

CHORUS Lord preserve us!

ZOLTÁN Yet, the Lord preserveth all of ye
In his glorious generosity,
For, by his lone hand your fate is stalled,
His sweet mercy flowing when it's called!

CHORUS Amen!

ZOLTÁN There is a pestilence at hand!

CHORUS Amen!

ZOLTÁN Corrupted is this palsied land!

CHORUS Amen!

ZOLTÁN Satan doth amongst ye stalk!

CHORUS Out upon thee!

ZOLTÁN Satan doth amongst ye walk!

CHORUS Out upon thee!

ZOLTÁN Prostrate ye before the Lord!

CHORUS O saviour!

ZOLTÁN Or Perdition's your reward!

CHORUS Amen!

ZOLTÁN *In Nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti, Amen.*

ZOLT./CHOR. Amen!

ZOLTÁN Now depart my flock, and carry our saviour's name upon your lips, for there is mischief about. Let not the frivolities of our great martyr's day turn your heads. An illness has descended upon the land – this is why Rome has sent me. Be faithful, and we shall purge the poison.

The Chorus departs, leaving behind Copernicus.

COP. That was quite the sermon, your grace.

ZOLTÁN Ha ha, Copernicus, my son!

Zoltán allows Copernicus to kiss his hands before embracing him.

ZOLTÁN How has my most promising apprentice fared since his return from Rome?

COP. I still see it, father. That horrible night...

ZOLTÁN Yes, it's only natural, but you did everything you could. She now rests with God.

They cross themselves.

COP. What brings you to Hungary, father?

The cardinal makes sure no one else is present.

ZOLTÁN All is not well, Copernicus.

SECRETS I CARRY

ZOLTÁN **Secrets I carry you must not repeat;**
I know you're sober, devout, and discreet,
So, I will tell you of my urgent quest:
Satan's disciples a girl have possessed!

COP. **What? I've not heard of it, how can this be!**
Why would these tidings be sheltered from me?
And are you certain that she is possessed?
Maybe she's ailing, or merely depressed!

ZOLTÁN **That is the reason that I have arrived:**
I came to see by what source it's contrived.
But, all the signs have been justly reported:
Noises, fixation, a visage distorted;
Blasphemy, odours, superlative might;
Sweating and sleeplessness throughout the night!
There is no doubt, but she hosts a fell fiend,
By the damned Devil her soul is demeaned!

COP. **Heaven forfend, father! What will you do?**

ZOLTÁN **Purge** the intruding defiler with **you!**

COP. O, father, I cannot;
With doubt I'm overwrought;
I fear I lack the skill,
And such is heaven's will
That I must keep aloof
For that poor girl's behoof.

ZOLTÁN Copernicus, the Lord is testing you;
What happened three months passed is not your fault:
Yours is a soul immaculate and true;
Come here tonight and aid in the assault.
I have the wretched woman bound below:
Her family is sore beset with woe.

Copernicus ruminates with anxiety.

ZOLTÁN You needn't answer now, my son. Go home, pray. I know you'll serve God's will. Peace be upon you.

COP. Thank you, father. God go with you.

Zoltán grips him firmly by the shoulders, then departs.

COP. Lord, grant me the strength to know thy will.

His spirit is not uplifted. Dejected, he leaves.

ACT III. SCENE I.

At the Nagy house. Clara, Katerina, and Márton sit spellbound before Szonja.

ON PRETTY MAIDENS SHE MADE FEAST

SZONJA On pretty maidens she made feast;
Their youth, she said, made them nutritious;
Beauty, their sumptuousness increased,
But innocence made them delicious!

CL./MAR./KAT. Ooooooh! Countess Bathory!

KAT. Of what extraction was this dame?

SZONJA From the nobility she came,
The blood within her veins ran blue;
But, one could not aver the same

After she drained her virgin stew!

CL./MAR./KAT. Oooooooh! Countess Bathory!

MÁRTON What else did she do with the flood?

SZONJA To keep her youth, she bathed in blood,
But only from the sweetest lasses,
Disdainful of the common mud
That through the wicked strumpet passes!

CL./MAR./KAT. Oooooooh! Countess Bathory!

KAT. And did she bite them? If so, where?

MÁRTON Their asses?

CLARA Márton, please!

MÁRTON I'll be more polite.

SZONJA Indeed, it's said she had a bite
That could punch through the skin,
And she would come in darkest night,
And sink her sucking canines in!
Then she, as this nocturnal guest,
Would bite the neck, the thigh, or breast!

CL./MAR./KAT. Oooooooh! Countess Bathory!

KAT. And would the virgin girl protest?

CLARA Katta, no more; let's have some rest.

Directly to Clara now:

SZONJA At first, she would be seized with pain,
As though impaled by a knife,
But then she'd yield to Pleasure's reign,
And to Delight become the wife!

MAR./KAT. Oooooooh! Countess Bathory!

CLARA Enough! This is repugnant!

MÁRTON Clara! It's only a harmless diversion in these dreary days!

CLARA *(Uncharacteristically vicious)* To hell with your diversions! What do you do around here but idle and keep me from my work?

MÁRTON Clara...I...

CLARA *(Coming down from her rage)* Forgive me Márton! I didn't mean that. I...simply...do not like these idle tales.

She leaves, dizzied. Márton is stunned.

SZONJA I think it were best you comforted her.

He goes after Clara. Katta bursts out laughing.

KAT. Ha ha ha!

SZONJA What is so amusing?

KAT. These foolish lovers' squabbles. Such bourgeois frippery.

SZONJA *(Amused, indulgent)* And you're above such trivial sentiments?

KAT. Of course! My life is erudition. I attended University in Vienna, and convinced them all that I was born a man.

SZONJA That **is** impressive. But what about love?

KAT. What about it? It's just another opiate used to distract us from perfection. You seem to be above such trifles. Here you are, a woman, unaccompanied, conducting your business without having to answer to anyone! Tell me: is this not superior to being chained to some man?

SZONJA Perhaps I like chains.

This response puts Katta into a state of sensual confusion which stalls her tongue.

KAT. Ahh...

SZONJA And what if I were to tell you that **I** have been in love? Does that mean I can never be perfect?

KAT. *(Bumbling, blushing)* Well...perhaps...But...you seem so...sensible: governed by your mind.

SZONJA I do my utmost. But I too have my appetites. Do **you** have appetites, Katta?

His musings sanctimony's epitaph;
Ovid's rhymes the words of Christ replaced,
As Cypria's vocation I embraced.

The air with Jasmine was perfumed;
By her bright gaze I was consumed;
I questioned my ascetic calling,
For, I in hopeless love was falling...

SZONJA Did this beauty mirror your affection,
And fuel your tender insurrection?

COP. Yes, she did, and I could not resist...
Nor, once we shared our hearts, could I desist.

COP./SZO. It was spring in Rome, and she was fair;
She wore a lily in her radiant hair;
Little were her hands, her fingers fine,
Her glowing smile wrought by hands divine.

SZONJA And you lost her?

COP. Yes. I'm not usually so forthright, but, I feel like I know you.

SZONJA I'm told I have that effect.

COP. You speak so little of yourself, and yet...

He begins to draw closer to her...

COP. ...you have such a familiar feeling...

Enter Zoltán, disrupting the spell.

ZOLTÁN Copernicus— Good evening, madam. Would you excuse us?

SZONJA Of course! I have an engagement I must attend. Good night.

She exits.

ZOLTÁN What sort of woman has engagements this time of night? There is a smell in here...Where were you, Copernicus?

COP. Please, father, the others are sleeping—

ZOLTÁN And so is that young woman...peacefully, God be praised, and no thanks to you!— Forgive me, Copernicus. I am taxed. The possession was strong and the demon did not easily relent. I am troubled.

COP. I've never seen you worried, father: something dire must be afoot.

ZOLTÁN Are we alone?

COP. My sisters are upstairs and miss Lupa has departed.

DEEP IN THE VATICAN

ZOLTÁN Deep in the Vatican there lies a book,
 Ensconced by brick within a hidden nook;
 Few eyes upon this tome have ever chanced,
 But on its fearful pages I have glanced,
 And what is there inscribed will raise your hair:
 A catalogue of terror and despair!
 Grim creatures, human criminals, and worse—
 Fell spectres who exhale damnation's curse,—
 Adorn with Horror's reddened fang its pages,
 And tells of butchery throughout the ages!

Katta comes in, but stops when she sees the two men. She hangs back and listens.

COP. Why do you tell me of this horrid tome
 That hides within the Papal catacomb?

ZOLTÁN O, my son, I saw a sight
 On the woman's flesh tonight
 That infused my soul with fright
 And revealed a Hellish spite!

As she fell into her rest,
 I beheld her virgin breast
 Had become a sinful nest,
 Bitten by a wicked guest!

COP. Father above! What demon could do this?

ZOLTÁN There's only one that could: a Succubus!
 These female fiends are Satan's lustful prize,
 Appearing as fair women to men's eyes,
 Whilst on their coursing blood they make their feasts,
 And worse: the most accomplished of these beasts
 Can cast her tainted spirit from her breast

And victims' weakened bosoms can infest!

COP./ZOLTÁN There is a Succubus about;
My mind is paralyzed with doubt!
By Christ alone we shall be saved,
By Christ we'll drive out the depraved!

CLARA *(Offstage)* Ahhhhhhhhh!

The scream interrupts the men who turn and see Katta.

ZOLTÁN How long have you been there?

Katta responds with a smirk. Clara runs in, weeping, devastated.

CLARA She's gone, O she's gone! Nicus, where were you?

COP. What do you mean?

CLARA Mother is dead!

COP. Oh!

CLARA And she wanted you to give her the last rites. Where were you?

COP. I was here...

CLARA I sent Katta to get you.

COP. Katta?

KAT. I don't owe anyone an explanation!

COP. It was the last sacrament! *(Shouting)* Do you understand what you've done?

The family shouts over each other.

COP. What have you done? Her immortal soul!

KAT. I don't answer to God, to you, or anyone!

CLARA She's gone, she's gone!

Zoltán pounds the table.

ZOLTÁN Enough! We'll not have her soul escorted to heaven by your bickering. Let us pray for her, together.

Cp./Cl./Zn O Lord, thy gates of pearl ope wide,
 And take this soul in thine embrace,
 That she in heaven may abide,
 And live eterne within thy grace.

Katta conspicuously does not pray.

COP. I...shall go consecrate her body...

ZOLTÁN The grief is fresh, my son. I will do it.

He exits.

COP. I wish you had summoned me, Katta.

Clara collapses in a faint.

CLARA Oh! This all my fault...

COP. Clara!

CLARA Oh!

COP. Call for a doctor! A doctor!

Black. INTERMISSION

ACT IV. SCENE I.

Clara's chamber. Dusk. Clara is lolling in a bathtub, damp and feverish. Katerina is nearby, patting her forehead with a cloth.

CLARA Ooohhh...

KAT. Ah, I'm a wretched care-taker. You're better at this.

CLARA Mmmm...

Frustrated, she throws the cloth on the floor.

KAT. I've been at this for two days. Why am I given the woman's work while the others are free to go about as they please?

I DON'T DO THINGS LIKE THE LADIES

KAT. I don't do things like the ladies do:
 I like trousers and I can't stand dresses;

Over babies I will never coo;
I want manly locks, not flowing tresses.

I would rather learn the use of arms
Than do needlework, or clean, or sweep;
I despise assuaging feeling's harms,
And attending the infirm who sleep.

For romance and courtship I don't care,
They are pabulum for a dotting wit;
Prison's musty cells I'd rather share
Than to matrimonial bonds commit!

I don't do things like the ladies do!

Copernicus and Márton enter.

COP. What on earth is wrong with you? Clara hasn't been able to relax fully in days and this is how you behave? What were you shouting about?

KAT. Never you mind.

MÁRTON Oh, look at her! She's so pale!

He sits beside the tub, picks up the cloth, and dabs her forehead.

MÁRTON Patience my love, we'll see you through this.

KAT. Don't look at me like that!

COP. You were supposed to watch over her.

KAT. I did! And what have *you* been doing?

COP. I've been at the cathedral getting the parish to pray for her.

KAT. She needs medicine, not prayer, you ignorant charlatan!

CLARA Ohhhhh...!

COP. Mind your tongue, you idolatrous sophist!

CLARA Ohhhh...!

MÁRTON Hey! Look at her: you're making her worse!

COP. Forgive me, you're right. I should know better. I'll leave in peace. Katta, you should do the same.

He goes.

KAT. You'll look after her, Márton?

MÁRTON Yes, Katta. Go on.

She leaves.

MÁRTON Just us now, my turtledove.

CLARA Ohhh...mother is sick, Márton. I have to look to her.

MÁRTON Poor creature. I do confess, my sweet, this not how I envisioned our feast of St. Valentine together! I had planned a gourmet extravaganza – tarts and roast as far as the eye could see! Wine from Tuscany! Cheese from France!

He pulls out a slip of paper.

And...I composed a few trifling verses for you. I'm sure they cannot compare with the lofty sermons of your brother or the frenzied polemics of your sister, but...

MY VALENTINE

MÁRTON It is the day of old St. Valentine,
 (The Roman martyr, who adored good wine,)
 And on this special day when lovers dine,
 (Or errant souls in their seclusion pine,)
 Across a little table we'll incline,
 (A quaint and cozy lovers' shrine)
 And muse on matters flippant, foul, and fine.
 Your beauty, heart, and modesty combine
 To make the darling woman who is mine,
 Upon this day of old St. Valentine.

This settles her right down into a regular sleep. Márton very carefully extricates himself and begins to depart the room, but a creaking floorboard halts him. Quiet now...he moves again, but again, the floor creaks. Now it groans again, without him moving at all! And again, and again! Suddenly, it seems as if the whole house is trembling. He looks back at Clara, but she's still in a daze. He kneels down, burying his head in his hands.

MÁRTON Ahhhhhhh!

Suddenly, all the noises stop. He looks around, then quickly looks at Clara. She's peaceful. He cradles his head.

MÁRTON I must tell Copernicus...

He runs out. A series of consumptive coughs ring out through the room. Clara shoots up.

CLARA Mother! I must have slept late! Patience, I'm coming!

She tries to clamber out of the tub, whereat the whole house rattles. She quickly retreats as the coughing is renewed.

CLARA I can't leave and she needs me!

She tries again, and once more, the world seems to tremble.

CLARA Ahhh!

VOICE (SZO.) *(Offstage)* Do not be frightened...

CLARA You're not my mother.

VOICE (SZO.) *(Offstage)* No...but I am a friend.

CLARA Who are you?

The trembling stops and all seems as before, except a hooded figure rises from the bathtub (Szonja). She then steps out of the tub and stands before Clara.

CLARA Are you the one I was speaking with?

FIGURE (SZO.) Yes, darling one.

CLARA Is mother well? Have you spoken with her?

FIGURE (SZO.) Yes, she's in a place where no one can hurt her.

CLARA I should be tending to her; it's what I do.

FIGURE (SZO.) Yes, so selfless!

CLARA Has Nicus sent you?

FIGURE (SZO.) Yes, he's praying very hard for your recovery.

CLARA I don't feel well.

MY HEART IS HEAVY

CLARA My heart is heavy, and I don't know why;
 It's like a summer day obscured by cloud,
 Or like a cooling well that's since run dry;
 I feel as though I bear a deathly shroud,
 And walk, a stranger, through a mourning crowd.
 It is as though earth's colour has been drained,
 And everything that once was bright and proud
 Now lies in ruin on the ground, disdained;
 All beauty and good will have been arraigned.

Do you remember when the world sought love?
 When neighbours to each other's welfare toasted?
 When hand encountered hand without a glove?
 When of big hearts and open palms we boasted?
 When every hearth newcomers proudly hosted?
 I long for those lost times with all my heart!
 With dances, celebrations, victuals roasted!
 With singing, conversations, games, and art!
 O, how I wish these dreary days would part.

FIGURE (SZO.) I can take away all the sadness.

CLARA I don't know you, but I feel like I do. And I don't trust you.

FIGURE (SZO.) Ha ha ha ha! How innocent, I adore it!

The house shakes with her laughter. She climbs back into the tub as she sings.

I CAN TAKE YOUR PAIN AWAY

FIGURE (SZO.) I can take your pain away,
 And comfort you with ease;
 Come with me on holiday,
 I only want to please.

It will only take a second
 And offer briefer pangs;
 Your delights my lust has beckoned,
 Prepare you for my fangs!

CLARA *(Trying to resist)* Ooohhh!

FIGURE (SZO.) Just let go, my darling sweet,
 I am already in;

O, how it shall be a treat
To frolic in your skin!

Of your flesh I must have taste,
I crave it to my core;
Come, my beauty, make we haste,
Be mine for evermore!

Clara is powerless to stop the figure from dining on her breasts. Her terror at length turns to rapture.

CLARA Oooohhh...aaahhhhh!

The bathtub fulminates with blood, spilling over the sides and decking the walls as Szonja takes possession of Clara...

ACT IV. SCENE II.

The Church pulpit. Copernicus stands before the congregation. He's wild, volatile. Zoltán is in the crowd, but we can't see him yet.

COP. And the Lord regretted that He had made man, and was grieved in His heart!

CHORUS Ah!

COP. So He said, "I will destroy man, for I am sorry that I have made him!"

CHORUS Oh!

COP. And said He, "seven days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe from the face of the earth every living thing I have made, for I regret Me of them!"

CHORUS Oh!

COP. And just as it pleased the Lord to make you prosper and multiply, so also it will please Him to annihilate you and destroy you!

CHORUS Ah!

COP. And I say to you, we have sinned!

CHORUS Ah!

COP. And I say to you, the Lord must strike us down again!

CHORUS Ah!

COP. Strike us down, O Lord!

CHORUS Strike us down, O Lord!

COP. Unleash thy wrath upon us!

CHORUS Unleash thy wrath upon us!

COP. That we may be cleansed of our filth! Strike us down!

CHORUS Strike us down!

COP. We are not worthy of thy love. Destroy us!

CHORUS Destroy us!

COP. Take me from this earth, O Lord, I implore thee!

His fervour goes beyond the bounds of sanity, bringing the sermon to an abrupt halt as he plunges to his knees. There's an uncomfortable murmur from the congregation.

ZOLTÁN Amen.

CHORUS Amen.

The congregation disperses, leaving Zoltán and Copernicus.

COP. Father...I thought you left for Rome.

ZOLTÁN Once I heard that your sister had fallen ill, I decided to stay. How is she?

COP. She's not well, but I'm certain she'll recover.

ZOLTÁN You're a poor liar, my son. Have you checked her bosom for marks?

COP. *(Angry)* You speak of my sister!

ZOLTÁN Have you made certain?

COP. *(Ferocious)* Ah, despicable lecher to talk of gazing at women's bosoms while they sleep!

ZOLTÁN *(Calm, paternal)* Have you looked?

Copernicus crumbles.

- COP. I'm too frightened, father!
- ZOLTÁN We shall ask Katerina to do it.
- COP. Where do you get this strength, father?
- ZOLTÁN From the Lord, Copernicus.

I WAS NOT ALWAYS AS YOU SEE

I was not always as you see,
 I, too, once cringed in misery;
 In youth, I was a Hellish child,
 Aggressive, covetous, and wild;
 My humour led me into sin,
 As I conceived a love for gin;
 While I was reeking drunk one night,
 With strangers I began a fight,
 And in this battle blood was spilled,
 As one among their group I killed.
 This accident assured my doom:
 All clamoured for my early tomb.

- COP. But, you are standing here, alive.
 Did you a secret flight contrive?
- ZOLTÁN No; God sent me a humble saviour
 Whose holiness changed my behaviour:
 A Priest convinced the judge to spare,
 So long as I dwelt in God's care.
 I joined the church, and served her well:
 Thus Faith delivered me from Hell.
- COP. Your candour has put me in mind to confess to you.
- ZOLTÁN I will gladly receive your confession, my son.

IT WAS SPRING IN ROME (REPRISE)

- COP. It was spring in Rome and she was fair;
 She wore a lily in her radiant hair;
 Little were her hands, her fingers fine,
 Her glowing smile wrought by hands divine.
 Her allures I laboured to ignore,
 But to her charms my forces lost the war.
 In illicit love I took the maid,

And for my lust, with anguish she was paid:
For, her soul by Satan was possessed,
Whose filth I could not exile from her breast.

ZOLTÁN The girl in Rome; you debauched her, and she fell prey to wicked spirits...?

COP. Yes.

ZOLTÁN She did indeed pay the price.

COP. Yes.

ZOLTÁN But God forgives. And so must you. I absolve you, my son.

COP. Thank you, father.

ZOLTÁN And now you know what must be done.

COP. Yes.

ACT V. SCENE I.

Clara's room, she's now in bed. Katerina stands near Clara as Copernicus, Zoltán, and Márton keep respectful distance. Zoltán holds a sizeable bible. Clara raves and writhes.

KAT. This is perverse!

COP. Please, Katta. Do it.

KAT. This superstition is insufferable! We should send for the doctor again—

ZOLTÁN Do it, woman!

KAT. Don't call me that!

MÁRTON Katta, please!

She exhales with frustration, then extends her hand to lift up Clara's shirt. Clara's hand suddenly shoots up and grabs Katta's. She's unusually strong.

KAT. She's...so strong! I can't move!

The men rush over: Copernicus and Márton try to pry Katta free – they can't!

MÁRTON Clara, darling, please release her!

COP. It's like trying to bend steel!

DEMON(SZO.)/ Begone!
CLARA

The floors begin to shake as the whole world seems to tremble. Zoltán dashes forward, pressing the bible into Clara's face.

ZOLTÁN Retreat before the Lord, fiend!

DMN(SZO.)/CL. Hiss!

The floors grow calm as Clara's grip relaxes. Everyone falls away.

ZOLTÁN It retreats: look now!

Katta peeks and then speeds away.

KAT. There are markings!

ZOLTÁN She has fallen prey to a succubus and the subsequent possession! We must transport her to the church at once! I will keep her subdued with an incantation. Márton, her cloak; Copernicus, you must walk her to the carriage. Katerina, find anything that ties her to this world, and follow us. Hurry! *In Nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti, etc.*

The men leap into action and convey the stumbling Clara from the chamber. Katerina looks around, then suddenly stops.

KAT. Come out, I know you are here.

As if materializing out of the shadow, a hooded Szonja appears.

KAT. I know it is you, Szonja.

She takes off the hood.

SZONJA Clever. How?

KAT. Like you said, I'm clever.

SZONJA So. I'm the demon. Do you still revile your brother's god?

KAT. Because there is evil, doesn't mean there is good.

SZONJA Ha ha ha ha! You **are** clever! Do you plan to reveal to your family the identity of your boarder?

KAT. No.

SZONJA **What** then?

I WANT YOU TO MAKE ME YOURS

KAT. I want you to make me yours!
Use me like you use your whores!
Bite, drink deeply, and deprave:
I will gladly be your slave!
All your hauntings I'll abet
If you let me be your pet;
To traverse the world you're free:
Let me keep you company!
Take me, take me, drink my blood!
Bathe in my unblemished flood!

Szonja, amused, deliberates for a moment, which agonizes Katerina.

SZONJA Why?

KAT. I...want to belong to something...beautiful. I want to be possessed!

SZONJA You are already possessed.

KAT. I am? With what?

SZONJA Ingratitude.

KAT. Ingratitude?

SZONJA Some would say that belonging to a loving family **is** belonging to something beautiful. It is more than some of us have.

KAT. Loving! Have you not seen with what disdain they treat me?

SZONJA O, you deluded child! They endure your outbursts and insults with temperance; they always welcome you home; Clara cooks and cleans for you; Copernicus paid for your schooling, provisions you, and prays for you, and Márton indulges you to the point frivolity.

KAT. But!—

SZONJA And my answer is: no. I will not take you.

KAT. But...why?

SZONJA You have nothing I want.

And with that, Szonja applies her hood and seems to disappear into the shadows.

SHE SPEAKS OF FAMILY

KAT. She speaks of family like it were delightful,
Rather than a constraint unfair and frightful!
 My sister is beloved by everyone;
 Copernicus was mother's golden son;
 But what of Katerina, bold and loud,
 The one who made her alma mater proud?...

But...did she help when mother was laid low?
 And when she said that priests to death should go?
 Was this not reprehensible and cruel?
 Has she not been a monstrous little fool?...

No! They before my learning ought to kneel,
 And join with revolutionary zeal!...

But...Clara is with malady beset...
 And if she dies because of me...regret...

Ah, superstitious fools! She needs a doctor,
 Not the intoning of a clownish proctor!

She makes to leave, but stops.

Yet...is not Szonja something more than...matter?
 O, how my wits before this puzzle scatter!
 Who now can give me guidance? I'm alone!
 Into a boundless maelstrom I've been thrown!

I am alone...but do I need to be?
 Are there not others who have...need of me?

Katerina realizes what she has to do, and dashes out.

ACT V. SCENE II.

The Church Basement. Clara, raving and writhing, is tied to a bed which is itself surrounded by Catholic iconography. Surrounding the bed are Copernicus, Zoltán, Márton, and a dozen priests, all of whom clutch Bibles and rosaries. Márton chants with the priests. There's a man amongst them holding a rifle.

PRIESTS *Adjure te, spiritus nequissime, per Deum omnipotentem!* Etc.

COP. Why does he have a carbine?

ZOLTÁN You know why. Her soul must not be allowed to be claimed or she will burn in torment for eternity. Are you ready, my son? Begin the procedure.

THE EXORCISM

COP. Forgive thy servant's sins, O Holy God,
And, through my faith, bestow on him thy might,
That from thy daughter he may drive this bawd,
And with thy fury this invader smite!

While Copernicus says this, Zoltán sprinkles holy water on himself, Copernicus, and then Clara, who hisses and writhes beneath the droplets.

ZOLTÁN The water of Christ!

CLARA Haaaa!

COP. Oh!

ZOLTÁN Stay strong, my son! Continue!

COP. Who is before us on this night?

DEMON(SZO.)/
CLARA Sweet Clara Nagy's in your sight!

COP. That is the owner of her frame,
But you're not master of that name!
The floors rattle.

DMN(SZO.)/CL. Swine! Clara Nagy beckons thee!

COP. Enough of your mendacity!

He presses the Bible towards her, causing her to recoil.

DMN(SZO.)/CL. Haaaa!

COP. Your name!

DMN(SZO.)/CL. Baaaaathoooooryyyyy...

All the mortals recoil from this revelation.

ZOLTÁN Dear God!

DMN(SZO.)/CL. Ha ha ha ha!

Everything trembles.

ZOLTÁN Bathory is the mightiest Succubus listed in the tome! Naming her will not be enough to banish her. This will require both of our strengths: come, we must purge this fiend!

They advance on Clara, Bibles extended. Zoltán nods.

COP./ZOLTÁN Do you, Clara Nagy, consent to be exorcised?

DMN(SZO.)/CL. No!

ZOLTÁN Silence, fiend!

COP./ZOLTÁN Do you, Clara Nagy, consent to be exorcised?

DMN(SZO.)/CL. No!

COP. You are not Clara!

They draw closer with their Bibles.

DMN(SZO.)/CL. Haaaa!

COP./ZOLTÁN Do you, Clara Nagy, consent to be exorcised?

CLARA Yes! Nicus, get her out!

MÁRTON Stay with us, Clara!

COP./ZOLTÁN I exorcise you, Bathory, you spirit of filth! In the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ: be uprooted and expelled from this Creature of God!

DMN(SZO.)/CL. Haaaa! Ah ha ha ha haa!

Clara contorts, and then begins to float over the bed.

DMN(SZO.)/CL. *Qatlin'ookh! Qatlin'ookh!*

ZOLTÁN It's Aramaic, and she says we'll die! Again!

COP./ZOLTÁN I exorcise you, Bathory, you spirit of filth! In the name of –

Clara swoops, knocking Zoltán across the room. The Priests scatter in fear, thus interrupting their chant.

DMN(SZO.)/CL. Ha ha ha ha! Weak from sin, you murderer!

COP. Don't quail: return and invoke our Lord!

In desperation he shoves them all back into place and they resume the chant as Clara hovers menacingly overhead.

DMN(SZO.)/CL. Scramble like vermin, it won't avail you!

A horrendous wind picks up, threatening to blow everyone away, again interrupting the chant. Copernicus can scarcely stand.

COP. I...exorcise you...you spirit of filth!

DMN(SZO.)/CL. Says he who plundered maiden's treasure,
Forsaking vows for carnal pleasure!

Copernicus is toppled, no longer resolute.

CLARA Please, Nicus! She devours my soul!
Against her I have no control!

He struggles to rise, but is losing the battle. The rifleman raises his gun.

COP. No...do not shoot her! Give me...but a moment...more...

The rifleman shakes his head and takes aim...when Márton races over and tries to wrest the gun free.

MÁRTON No, I will not let you kill her!

DMN(SZO.)/CL. Ha ha ha!

Katerina suddenly enters and helps Marton wrest the gun free. She then runs over to Copernicus.

KAT. My brother wants another moment, and so we shall give it to him!

COP. Katta!

KAT. Get up, brother! Clara needs you!

She helps him up.

COP. Did you bring the object?

KAT. Yes, it's us! You speak; I will hold us firm!

COP. O, vile seducer, get thee gone!
Fear God, O Satan's wicked spawn!

COP./KAT. Ahhh!

CLARA Again! I can feel her recoil!

COP. This tender soul thou wilt not spoil!

DMN(SZO.)/CL. *Chum pumookh! Chum pumookh! Ahhhh!*

The battle is fierce, but at last, the winds and trembling wane, and Clara begins to descend; the priests resume their chant. As Clara returns to her bed, Copernicus advances, draws the cross on her forehead, then presses the Bible to her chest. There's a great rending in the air as the Demon bellows and reluctantly withdraws.

DMN(SZO.) Ahhhhhhhh!

Copernicus and Katerina collapse, every last ounce of strength spent. Clara opens her eyes.

CLARA Nicus...Katta...she's gone!

MÁRTON O Clara!

They embrace, and are joined by Copernicus and Katerina. Meanwhile, the priests revive Zoltán, and help him to his feet.

COP. Father, it's done. Clare is saved.

ZOLTÁN Praise be!

FINALE

CP./KT./CL./
MN./ZN. The night was long and filled with dread,
A waking nightmare of despair;
It was the haunting hour of the dead,
Wherein the Devil sets his snare;

But Dawn did not neglect to rise,
To cast her brilliant gaze below;
Before her light the Darkness flies,
And with it, scurries all our woe.

ZOLTÁN Clara is forever free from her clutches: such is the covenant between the succubus and the mortal soul: if she fails to claim it, she must forfeit it forever. But let us not tarry here: the fiend is weak now, but may recover quickly and invest another. I shall have the priests bless the entire church – that will drive her out. Let us go.

MÁRTON Yes, let's leave this morose place as quickly as possible, and celebrate! Let's go to the house. We'll invite Miss Lupa as well. I'm certain she'll be very pleased by the news.

KAT. Miss Lupa has departed. Her business is concluded.

MÁRTON Alas. So much the worse for her!

Clara, Márton, Zoltán, and the priests exit.

COP. You saved Clara, Katerina.

KAT. We did it together, Nicus. And...forgive me for being so...ungrateful.

COP. With all my heart, a thousand times over.

They embrace.

KAT. Go. I'll be along.

COP. Heed what the cardinal has said: do not linger!

Copernicus nods appreciatively to Katerina before he leaves. Katerina is alone.

KAT. I knew what would defeat you: family is what ties Clara to this world. I'm clever, remember.

Suddenly, the floor rumbles, startling Katerina.

SZONJA *(Offstage)* Ah, she could not resist! Boastful child, we shall see how clever you are!

The lights go black and Katerina screams – but her cry is cut short. The lights come back up: her throat has been torn open, and she lies dead on the floor.

DMN./SZO. Ha ha ha ha!

Black.