

## KÁT'A KABANOVÁ

Leos Janáček

**Act I.** The small Russian town of Kalinove', sometime in the 1860s. The young clerk Ván'a Kudrjás' rhapsodizes over the afternoon view of the Volga, to the amusement of the literal-minded housekeeper of the adjoining Kabanov home. They see two men approaching — the overbearing merchant Dikoj and his nephew, Boris Grigorjevic' — and leave quickly as Dikoj continues his castigation of the young man. When the merchant discovers that Kabanicha, matriarch of the Kabanov family, is not at home, he stalks off, leaving Boris to explain to his friend Ván'a why he puts up with such abuse: his parents are dead, and in order to collect his inheritance, he must treat his uncle with respect. As members of the Kabanov household return from vespers, Boris confesses to Ván'a that he is secretly in love with Kát'a, the young wife. The two men depart as old Kabanicha berates her son, Tichon, for his lack of attentiveness. He tries to please her, as does his wife, Kát'a, who tells the old woman they love and respect her. At a sharp reply from Kabanicha, Kát'a enters the house, soon followed by her mother-in-law, and Tichon's temper snaps at being told he spoils his wife. Tichon complains to Varvara, foster daughter of the family, who retorts he would rather drink and forget his troubles than stand up for Kát'a's rights.

Inside the house, Kát'a tells Varvara how free and happy she felt as a child, constantly dreaming. Even now, she admits, she has dreamed of having a lover. Before she can say more about the man who attracts her, Tichon comes to say good-bye: he is leaving on a short trip to Kazan at his mother's behest. Kát'a begs him not to go or else to take her along, but he refuses. When she asks him to make her swear to speak to no strangers during his absence, he wonders what is wrong with her. Kabanicha announces that it is time to leave, adding that Tichon must tell his wife how to behave while he is gone. Tichon dutifully repeats that Kát'a must treat Kabanicha like her own mother and always act with propriety. Then he bows to his mother, kisses her and Kát'a and hurries away.

**Act II.** As the women work on embroidery, Kabanicha criticizes Kát'a for not making a display of grief over Tichon's absence. After she has left, Varvara shows Kát'a the key to the far part of the garden: she plans to meet her lover there and hints that Kát'a might want to do the same, pressing the key into her hand. Kát'a hesitates but decides that fate has willed it: she is going to meet Boris. As darkness approaches, she steps outside. Kabanicha reenters with the drunken Dikoj, who says she is the only person he can talk to. He complains that people take advantage of his softheartedness: a peasant recently angered him, but he ended up on his knees to ask the man's forgiveness. As he demonstrates, blubbering, Kabanicha primly tells him to get hold of himself.

Waiting for Varvara in the garden, Ván'a amuses himself with a song about an independent-minded young girl like his sweetheart. To his surprise, Boris appears, having received a message to come there. Varvara arrives, cheerfully picking up Ván'a's song, and they head for a walk by the river. When Kát'a appears, Boris proclaims his love. She is hesitant at first, seeing only sin and ruin, but finally her pent-up feelings pour out, and she embraces him. They too go for a walk as Ván'a and Varvara return, Varvara explaining her precautions in case the old lady should look for any of them. As the rapturous voices of the second couple are heard, Ván'a and Varvara call to them that it's time to go home.

**Act III.** Ván'a and a friend, Kuligan, are walking near the river when an approaching storm drives them to shelter in a ruined building, where they are joined by other strollers. When Dikoj appears, Ván'a tries to conciliate him by talking about a new invention, the lightning rod, but this only

angers Dikoj, who insists storms are not electricity but God's punishment. When the rain lets up, people start to leave the shelter, and Ván'a runs into Boris and Varvara. The girl reports that Tichon is back, and Kát'a seems very upset. The men retreat as Kabanicha approaches with Tichon and Kát'a. Bystanders at first assume that Kát'a is frightened by the returning storm, but she confesses to Tichon in front of everyone that she dallied with Boris during her husband's absence. Then she runs out into the tempest.

As evening approaches and the storm has passed, Tichon looks frantically for Kát'a at another spot along the river bank. While they are helping him, Varvara and Ván'a decide to escape to Moscow, where they can lead a life of their own. As the searchers move off, Kát'a appears, aware that her confession served only to dishonor her and humiliate Boris. Her life is a constant torment, and she longs to see her lover one last time. He wanders in, surprised to find her, and they embrace. He says his uncle is sending him away to another town — but what will become of Kát'a? Her mind wandering, she bids him farewell. As he walks off in sorrow, she thinks how nature will renew itself over her grave, then throws herself into the river. On the far bank, Kuligan sees her jump and calls for help. Tichon rushes back, followed by Kabanicha, whom he blames for Kát'a's self-destruction. Meanwhile, bystanders fetch a boat and try to help. When Dikoj brings Kát'a's body and lays it on the ground, Tichon flings himself down, sobbing. Coldly, Kabanicha thanks the bystanders for their assistance.