

MARGARITA LA TORNERA

by Ruperto Chapí (1851-1909).

Act I

Scene 1: A square in Palencia at twilight

As the curtain rises, the servant Gavilan appears, just having received a beating after one of the amorous escapades of his master, Don Juan de Alarcón. He complains of the bad life he leads, blaming it on the licentious living of his master to whom, nevertheless, he professes great fidelity. Don Juan arrives, proud and happy, bragging about his luck with women. His latest conquest is already history and now he is looking forward to something more difficult, seducing a nun, the beautiful Margarita, the doorkeeper of the convent in the square. Don Juan tells his servant how to enamor the young girl and confides to him that he intends to flee with her that very night. Gavilan is shocked by such doings, which he considers sacrilegious, but Don Juan makes fun of him.

The farmhands arrive from their labors in the fields. The convent bells ring out the Angelus and they all make the sign of the cross. The farmhands depart. A group of tenant farmers arrives to ask after the health of Don Gil, Don Juan's father. An argument takes place between Don Juan and the tenant farmers, and they tell him of the sadness and prostration of his father due to the troubles his son causes him. Moved by this news, Don Juan departs toward his father's home.

Scene 2: Outside the convent at night

In spite of Gavilan's warning, Don Juan is determined to carry out his proposal. Everything is ready. Don Juan approaches a window grating of the convent, calling Margarita with sweet words and she answers him from inside, leading to an impassioned duet. Gavilan warns them they can be sentenced to ten years in jail, but his master thinks only of holding Margarita in his arms.

Scene 3: Cloister of the convent. That same night

A storm is approaching. There is the sound of wind and rain. Margarita appears in a state of agitation. She feels a foreboding of danger and misfortune, but takes courage, telling herself that Don Juan will free her from all evils. The doorkeeper nun, who is extremely devoted to the Virgin, kneels before her image and asks for her protection. The nuns can be heard at prayer, unaware of Margarita's inner conflict. Overcoming her scruples and summoned by her lover, the nun decides to flee that night with Don Juan. Nevertheless, she continues to waver between divine and human love. The storm becomes worse and the clock in the tower strikes two in the morning. Margarita lights a candle to the Virgin, places some flowers at her feet and leaves the keys to the convent near the worshipped image as she commends herself to the Virgin. Don Juan's voice is heard calling Margarita. Love is stronger and the young girl climbs a ladder in order to jump over the wall of the holy place and flee with her seducer.

Act II

Scene 1: Inside the 'Corral de la Pacheca' in Madrid

The noisy animation of people of all classes and conditions fills the festive atmosphere of the theater. Gentlemen, students, soldiers, dancers, etc... appear on the scene. Don Juan and his rival, Don Lope, enter from opposite sides of the stage. They are both looking for Sirena, a well-known dancer. Typical songs are heard and a saraband is danced. When they finish, a radiantly beautiful Sirena appears and is enthusiastically greeted by all. Don Lope approaches her and proclaims in front of everyone that Sirena will be leaving the theater out of love for him. They both seem very happy. Don Juan, who has already had a relationship with Sirena, is jealous. Gavilan now serves Don Lope on instructions from Don Juan himself, who has dispatched him as a spy to

keep him informed of all his enemy's plans. More dancing takes place with another saraband. Taking advantage of a moment when Sirena is left alone, Don Juan approaches her and reminds her of their past happiness. She reminds him he now has another woman, to which Don Juan replies that he will leave her if Sirena agrees to return to him. It is the beautiful dancer's cue to go on stage in reply to a clamoring public. Sirena dances in the midst of popular admiration.

Scene 2: A street in Madrid, at night

Margarita, who has seen what went on in the theater, bitterly laments the treatment afforded her by Don Juan, his unfulfilled promises, his voluble nature. Her pain is such that she imagines the situation to be unreal, believing that Don Juan loves only her. People begin to leave the theater and Margarita hides among the shadows so as not to be seen. Don Lope and Sirena come out in amorous conversation, with Don Juan close behind in solemn anger. Don Lope tells Sirena he has prepared a huge party for her in his palace and Don Juan, hearing this, decides to attend in spite of not being invited. Margarita, who has witnessed the entire scene, disconcerted by her pain, decides she will also attend the party.

Scene 3: A room in the Haunted Mansion

Don Lope's servants, Gavilan included, are preparing for the party. Gavilan relates the mysterious history of the palace called the Haunted Mansion, but Sirena laughs at this superstition and sings and dances a saraband to the enjoyment of all. Suddenly, a disturbance is heard and Don Juan appears, haughtily announcing to Don Lope that he has come to claim what is his. Sirena belongs to him and he has come for her. When both men are about to strike each other, Margarita appears and proclaims to them that Don Juan belongs to her and refuses to leave without him. They all laugh at her because they know Don Juan well, but he, on a sudden noble impulse, defends her. Both rivals provoke each other and a duel seems inevitable. So it is and both men unsheathe their swords and start to duel. The servants announce that a troop of guards has entered the palace because of the disturbance. As the guards enter, Don Juan wounds his rival in the chest. Seeing that his master is in danger of being arrested, Gavilan opens a secret door through which his master escapes. When the troop tries to pursue Don Juan, Margarita intervenes, blocking the door of escape with her body.

Act III

Scene 1: Palencia. The convent church square at night

Two years have passed since Margarita's escape from the convent. The faithful are leaving the church. Don Gil, Don Juan's father, has died. Gavilan laments all that has transpired. A poorly dressed Don Juan appears. His old servant tells him of his father's death and the rogue feels pangs of conscience. Lately, he has been thinking of changing his lifestyle and becoming a good, upright man, but it may be too late. Gavilan brings him up to date on events. Don Lope's wound has healed and Sirena has left him. Margarita was imprisoned and then set free; she fled from Madrid and there has been no further news of her. However, in Palencia, everyone affirms that the doorkeeper never left the convent and was there all the time, never failing. Suddenly, Margarita appears, oblivious to everything around her, and goes toward the convent as if drawn by a mysterious force. On reaching the door, the delinquent girl implores the favor of the Virgin and asks her forgiveness. From inside the church, a sweet voice is heard to say "Yes" and the doors open wide. Don Juan, having observed all this, goes toward Margarita, confessing that he has been searching for her, that he truly loves her. She rejects him, he insists, Margarita vacillates, and heavenly songs are heard calling to the young girl. Don Juan attempts to retain Margarita, but she definitely refuses him and enters the church. The seductor follows her, but is stricken back as he attempts to cross the threshold of the sacred hall.

Scene 2: Inside the convent church

Margarita appears in her nun's habit from the first act. Guided by the whitest moonlight, she walks toward the convent cloister. On reaching the high altar, she sees her own image surrounded by a white halo. Margarita asks who she is and the image says she is Margarita the Doorkeeper and has held this position for two years. The apparition is then transformed into the image of the Virgin just as it appeared in the first act. Margarita finally understands the miracle and falls down in extasis, her arms open, as the image of the Virgin rises heavenward in a blinding transfiguration as angelical voices fill the church.