

THE RAKE'S PROGRESS

Igor Stravinsky

Act I: Anne Trulove is in the garden of her father's country house with her suitor, Tom Rakewell, admiring the springtime. Sending Anne into the house, her father, Trulove, tells Tom he has arranged an accountant's job for him in the city. Tom declines the offer and the older man leaves. A stranger enters as Tom declares his determination to live by his wits and enjoy life. When he says "I wish I had money," the stranger introduces himself as Nick Shadow, "at your service." Shadow tells Tom that a forgotten rich uncle has died, leaving the young man a fortune. Anne and Trulove return to hear the news, the latter urging Tom to accompany Shadow to London to settle the estate. As Tom leaves, promising to send for Anne as soon as everything is arranged, Shadow turns to the audience to announce, "the Progress of a Rake begins."

At a brothel in the city, whores entertain a group of "roaring boys," dissolute young playboys; together they toast Venus and Mars. Shadow coaxes Tom to recite for the madam, Mother Goose, the catechism he has taught him: to follow nature rather than doctrine, to seek beauty (which is perishable) and pleasure (which means different things to different people). Tom refuses, however, to define love. Turning back the clocks when he sees Tom restless to escape, Shadow commends him to the pursuit of hedonism with these companions. Tom responds with ruminations of love. When the whores offer to console him, Mother Goose claims him for herself and leads him off.

As evening falls, Anne leaves her father's house, determined to find Tom, since she has heard nothing from him.

Act II: Tom, who is in the morning room of his house in the city, is beginning to tire of city pleasures and no longer dares to think of Anne. When he says "I wish I were happy," Shadow appears, showing a poster for Baba the Turk, a bearded lady whom he urges Tom to marry, because only when one is obligated to neither passion nor reason can one be truly free. Amused by the idea, Tom gets ready to go out.

Anne approaches Tom's house but is hesitant to knock. As darkness falls, she sees servants enter with strangely shaped packages. A conveyance arrives and Tom steps out. Startled to see Anne, he says she must forget him, he cannot go back to her. Baba calls out from the sedan, whereupon Tom admits to the astonished Anne that he is married. Hurried along by Baba's impatient remarks, Anne faces the bitter realities, while Tom repeats that it is too late to turn back. As Tom helps Baba from the sedan, a curious crowd gathers. Anne hurriedly leaves.

In his morning room, Tom sits sulking amid Baba's curios as she chatters about the origin of each. When he refuses to respond to her affection, she complains bitterly. Tom silences her and she remains motionless as Tom falls asleep. Shadow wheels in a strange contraption, and when Tom awakens, saying "Oh I wish it were true," the machine turns out to be his dream: an invention for making stones into bread. Seeing it as a means of redemption for his misdeeds, Tom wonders whether he might again deserve Anne. Shadow points out the device's usefulness in gulling potential investors.

Act III: On a spring afternoon, the same scene (including the stationary Baba) is set for an auction. Customers examine the various objects: Tom's business venture has ended in ruin. Amid rumors as to what has become of Tom, Anne enters in search of him. An auctioneer, Sellem, begins to hawk various objects -- including Baba, who resumes her chatter after the crowd bids to

purchase her. Indignant at finding her belongings up for sale, she tries to order everyone out. She draws Anne aside, saying the girl should try to save Tom, who still loves her. Anne, hearing Tom and Shadow singing in the street, runs out.

Shadow leads Tom to a graveyard with a freshly dug grave, where he reminds the young man that a year and a day have passed since he promised to serve him: now the servant claims his wage. Tom must end his life by any means he chooses before the stroke of twelve. Suddenly, Shadow offers a reprieve: they will gamble for Tom's soul. When Tom, placing his trust in the Queen of Hearts, calls upon Anne, and her voice is heard, Shadow realizes he has lost. In retaliation, he condemns Tom to insanity. As Shadow disappears and dawn rises, Tom -- gone mad -- imagines himself Adonis, waiting for Venus.

In an insane asylum, Tom declares Venus will visit him, whereupon fellow inmates mock the idea. The Keeper admits Anne. Believing her to be Venus, Tom confesses his sins: "I hunted the shadows, disdain thy true love." Briefly they imagine timeless love in Elysium. With his head upon her breast, Tom asks her to sing him to sleep. As she does, her voice moves the other inmates. Trulove comes to fetch his daughter, who bids the sleeping Tom farewell. When he awakens to find her gone, he cries out for Venus as the inmates sing "Mourn for Adonis."

Epilogue: The principals gather to tell the moral that each finds in the story. Anne warns that not every man can hope for someone like her to save him; Baba warns that all men are mad; Tom warns against self-delusion, to Trulove's agreement; Shadow mourns his role as man's alter ego; and all concur that the devil finds work for idle hands.