

VANESSA

Composer: Samuel Barber

Libretto by Gian Carlo Menotti after a story by Isak Dinesen in Seven Gothic Tales

Vanessa has spent twenty years in her country house after being left by her lover, Anatol; she has kept the house shut up, with all of the mirrors covered. Her mother, the Old Baroness, will not speak to her; her only companion is her niece, Erika. As the opera opens, they are preparing for the arrival of Anatol. He is sighted coming towards the house, and Vanessa sends everyone else away; as soon as he arrives at the door, she declares her love for him--then faints when she discovers that the man on the doorstep is not her lover. He is, he explains to Erika, that Anatol's son; he has come to meet the woman whose name haunted his father and mother. The Anatol that Vanessa knew has died. Anatol, left alone with Erika, seduces her; the next day, after Erika learns that he has been making advances to Vanessa, she confronts him; he offers to marry her, but, offended by the flippancy with which he has proposed, and worried about Vanessa, rejects him. At the party where Vanessa and Anatol's engagement is announced, Erika reveals to the Old Baroness that she is pregnant with Anatol's child. She runs away from the house and causes herself to miscarry; a search party sent out by Vanessa brings her back. Vanessa, still unaware of Anatol's liason with Erika, marries him, and they leave together. Erika, left alone in the house with her grandmother, who now will not speak to her, orders the mirrors covered again and the gates closed and locked, just as before.