

ROSANNA

(Music begins. The priest appears in front of the curtain.)

Young Priest

(to the audience)

O Lord, I walk in awe of the mystery of life and death. But I am overwhelmed by the tragic lives who come to me – and do not come – for help.

This child is with you, O Lord, in paradise.
Rosanna who loved him most is so steeped in sorrow
She does not appeal to me for help.
But I know, I know...

The child's mother who neglected him is so steeped in wine
She does not know she needs my help and yours.
I hear the villagers talk...

But they do not talk to the young priest from the big city.

As children, Rosanna and Angelina lived in the same poverty.

My parishioners tell me that Angelina
Spent her childhood in her sickbed.
Rosanna was sometimes more a mother to Angelina than a playmate.
One day, the Baron took Angelina out of a fever of squalor into a trance of splendor.
Meanwhile a young man in the village wooed Rosanna.
The villagers were glad until they discovered that she was with child.

Her mother threw her into the street, and the villagers scorned her.
That night Rosanna's lover sneak aboard
An American ship and never came back.

Rosanna's child was born dead, and years later
The same doctor delivered Angelina's child,
And she hired Rosanna to nurse it.
The Baron neglected Angelina,
Spending all his time with the boy, his heir,
Making Angelina's life full of jealousy.

When the Baron died last year,
Angelina turned her back on the boy.
I see, almost as clearly as Rosanna must see,
That thorn on the rose bush Angelina let die.
Rosanna and I see the thorn in the child's finger,
The infection, the fever, the long death.

I walk in awe, O Lord, of the mystery of life and death,
But I am overwhelmed by the tragic lives who come to me - and do not come to me - for
help.

Forgive me, O Lord, I must hide from them.

(He exits - the curtain opens slowly)

Rosanna

Steeped in the stupor
Of sleeplessness, my mind
Is no longer plagued
With the endless procession
Of memories of you.
I see only the tear in your eye
When you came to me
With the fatal rose thorn
Sticking stark as an animal
Out of your thumb.
And now this terrific heat
Forces your mother to bury you.

Your mother's rose bush - the stem,
Let it stick me, too.
Now she will begin to know the slowness of time,
Even though she is not captive on her great bed in grief for you,
In remorse - no, no –
She is a drunken child who cares for nobody.

I will look at you a while before Moro
Carries you out of the enchantment of this room,
Out of this world where time never trespassed,
To make a formal entry into the mind of God,
Where I cannot yet follow.

(She goes to the baroness' bedroom)

Angelina

Go away, you imbecile! I am too tired for funerals! I want to live! Bring me wine!

Rosanna

Baroness, Moro the mortician's man is waiting... Your child is to be buried... It is already past noon.

Angelina

No one will be buried today!
No one will be buried
Ever again in the dead place.
Oh, Rosanna, why must we go down in there, inside the earth where no one can reach us?
Do you remember, Rosanna, how many, many times they took that same coffin out of the cellar for me? But, I am still alive...

Get out! Get out! Out!
Nothing will die

If you don't let it.
I didn't I didn't.

Let him go down
For the boy and me!
Let the little weakling lie,
Lock him up,
Don't let him out!
No-thing must die!

Rosanna

He deserves something fit
For a Prince, Angelina.
You must get up
And go out with the boy.
It's your Christian duty.
The villagers expect it.

Angelina

Oh! You and what the villagers think! You idiot! Have you forgotten what they did to you? I took you in when they rejected you. Did you ever care what I think? No, it's always them.

Rosanna

Someone must go!

Angelina

Then you go!
You! You! You go!
Be me! Take
My black dress
That belonged to my mother,
My veil, my shoes.
Be me for a walk in the sun
All these years you've labored in the shadow of my prosperity, eking nourishment out of your childish little dreams of your lover coming back and of the villagers forgiving you.
No he is dead, for you,
As all gods must die,
And no dream in the world
Is powerful enough
To bring him back... I offer you
This revenge on them,
This beautiful farce.
Get that look off your face! I command you to go!

(The Baroness opens a locked trunk and gathers into her arms an old black dress and a veil.)

I beg of you.
Be me and go see
Him put under,
Satisfy them.

Your eyes are full of hatred.
You wanted to go with him.
You won't let him go alone
With only Moro there.
Think of it!
How you loved that child
Almost as much my husband loved him,
Who will find him now
And caress him in the grave.
And even there

Shall he ignore me.

Rosanna

I loved the child
Even more than the Baron did,
More than you loved the Baron.

Angelina

They will look upon you
With tearful eyes
And shake their heads.
They will have sympathy
For you in your grief.
I froze with the terror
Only a little girl can feel,
Not of the disease in my body,
But of the odor
Of decay they carried.
Their eyes would have been full of tears
For my mother had I died
When they, so sure every time,
Came chanting and praying
To hover over my bed.

Rosanna

(talks to herself)

This is a new revenge
Upon the villagers
She always hated,
This mockery of the dead.

Angelina

Go now Rosanna. End it. Leave me alone to mourn the loss of my own loved one. My husband has been dead for two years.
I envy you. You never let people die, do you?
It's not the same for me.
I mourn the dead,
You merely bury the dead,
For in you, they go on living
Because that's the kind of love

You live
This boy, a complete stranger to me,
And your own lover,
Who is probably in a ship
At the bottom of the ocean somewhere.
Bury them both this time,
Rosanna, and come back to me.
And we'll live together
The rest of our days
- mourn together, as it should be.
That's the only way
To stay alive.

Rosanna

Alive?

(Rosanna turns and walks out of the room. When she approaches the door of the child's room, Moro comes out, the coffin on his shoulders.)

(To herself)

Always the sight of Moro disturbs me,
An oppressive sense of time.

Moro

(Points toward Angelina.)

So she – the woman does not come with us, uh?

(Rosanna shakes her head. She follows ten paces or so behind. Moro carries the coffin. The harlot stands in doorway, looks at Rosanna with contempt. She pushes herself away from the wall, and walks beside her, stumbles in her rage. Gossip, an old woman, comes out into the street and watches them pass. Two more women from the church approach her from the rear. Mistaking Rosanna for Angelina the women make a procession. The women move very slowly in the procession, crowding in around Rosanna, elbowing, speaking to her viciously in a low drone of voices. Then someone's sharp knuckles dig in between her shoulder blades and she cries out.)

Harlot

(Pointing at Rosanna mistaking her to Angelina.)

You are not fooling us, Angelina! You don't mourn that child. You filthy, heartless creature!

1st Church woman

Impostor! You are no mother. It's your own servant who dressed, fed, and cared for the child all these years and who should walk along us today, Angelina!

(The harlot shuffles alongside Rosanna.)

Gossip

My mother is buried in there and so is yours, Angelina. You're unfit to enter those gates, with the evil that is your heart.

2nd Church woman

Go home! Angelina! Leave the child in peace. Let Rosanna come out and mourn, as it should be!

Rosanna

(Stunned by the totally unexpected reaction to Angelina.)

(To herself.)

I knew they resented Angelina
For escaping their own poverty!
But I did not know they hate her –
For my sake!

(The harlot strikes Rosanna - "Angelina" across the face. The veil drops away. The women stop, their uplifted hands fixed in incredulity, their eyes stinging with recognition. Pity softens their faces.)

Harlot

Rosanna! Look, it is Rosanna - not Angelina!

All

Rosanna! Rosanna! Rosanna!

Harlot

We marvel at all years of misery and sorrow, Rosanna, O, O, how we pity you.

All

Pitiful... pitiful...pitiful...

Rosanna

(Recoiling from their pity)

No! No! Pity, pity, is not, no
Not what I ever wanted.
Not sheer pity.

(With a swift, vigorous sweeping movement, Rosanna lifts the veil from the dust and abruptly turns her back on the villagers and with deliberate pace, follows Moro, moving toward the audience, toward the gates of the cemetery.)

(To the audience)

Somewhere inside me now,
A new darkness descends,
Smothering my dream
Of my lover's return.

(Priest enters, his arms open to embrace Rosanna with pity, she raises her arms to ward him off.)

Rosanna

Even if I were to live among my people
In the village again,
This is all they will ever, can ever
Allow me: sheer pity!

All

We marvel at all your years of misery and sorrow, Rosanna. O, O, how we pity you!

Rosanna

(Turning to villagers, who have followed her to the gates.)

I will never give myself to your pity!
All my life has been nothing but giving:
To my sickly playmate, Angelina,
To my lover who left me with child,
Then to Angelina the mad child-woman,

To Angelina's abandoned little boy
And to you, my people, I gave my youth!
All these years, I gave, gave, gave!
I do not need you anymore
I never needed your pity, never that!
Now it is I who will take!
I take my freedom from you!
I take my freedom from Angelina!
After all these years of giving,
I take my freedom from all of you!

*(Rosanna exits through the gate. All exit slowly.
Light dim: curtain falls slowly. There is an interlude of the orchestra.)*

(The Priest appears in front of the curtain)

O Lord, I walk in awe
Of the mystery of life and death.

Rosanna accompanied the child to his grave. A month later, she left our village and we never saw nor heard of her again. The villagers have accepted me now,
But I am overwhelmed by the tragic lives who come to me --
and who do not come to me - for help.

O Lord, I walk in awe of the mystery
Of love and hate and death and new life.

(Music continues. Black out. The music fades. Lights on)

END