

Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov

Kashchey the Immortal

Autumnal parable in one act

Libretto by Rimsky-Korsakov

SUNGTEXTS

TABLEAU ONE

The realm of Kashchey Gloomy scenery. It is autumn. The sky is covered with thick black clouds. Sickly trees and bushes half-covered with yellow and red leaves. In front, Kashchey's castle, with strange forms, a flight of stairs leading to a sloop. On the roof, an owl with phosphorescent eyes. Gouslis⁽¹⁾ are hanging above the entry. The palace has a tower on one end. The stakes of the palisade, except for one, have human heads on them. In back can be seen cliffs covered with moss, that seem to be the limit of the Kashchey's realm. Part of the wall is a doorway, unseen by the public. Night is falling. The princess is alone.

¹ Gousli: old Russian folk instrument, a sort of horizontal harp

THE PRINCESS

Days without joy, nights without sleep, go by one by one, monotonously, like winter clouds. My beauty will fade in this oppressive captivity like the leaves of the bitch trees that become yellow in autumn. I am wasting away. I know neither peace nor sleep: my cheeks are pale and my eyes are dim behind the tears that flow without stopping.

THE VOICE OF KASHCHEY (*from inside the castle*)

Princess, Princess. Come to me in the castle. Sing me a song or tell me a tale. With a nice smile come to cheer my old age, distract me with games full of energy.

THE PRINCESS

Bitter thoughts, gloomy thoughts keep me oppressed like iron chains.

KASHCHEY

Princess, Princess. Why don't you answer! Do you not hear my voice?

THE PRINCESS

Kashchey's prisoner. I thrash like a fish thrown onto a sandy shore.

KASHCHEY

I am going out of bed right now and will give you a good lesson. If you don't want to hear Kashchey's words, you will for sure fear his cane.

THE PRINCESS

May a passing bird or a breathe of wind take a message to you, my fiancé. Do you remember your love, do you feel the sadness of being far from her, and, armed for battle, are you seeking Kashchey's death across the world? Or perhaps, my valiant knight, have you forgotten your princess, has someone else conquered your heart?

Kashchey, leaning on his cane, enters in front of the castle.

KASHCHEY (*sardonically*)

Are you still moping? Tears become you. Cry, cry away! I love to see tears flow, while I softly caress your hair. Ha, ha, ha!

THE PRINCESS

Monster! Take pity on my sorrow! I beg you, let me see him. Just once more... You can let me... you are a magician... Let just one ray of light, a remnant of joys past, shine for only one instant in the darkness of the winter clouds.

KASHCHEY

All right, little idiot. I will grant you this consolation. Hey! Mirror with the diamond-studded handle, hurry and jump into my hands, to make the princess happy. Look at it. You will distinctly see all that is happening in the world, and even things that have not yet happened but that will very soon. My mirror will show you everything without fail. Look!

THE PRINCESS

My heart trembles: everything is cloudy. Oh, I'm scared, I'm scared!

KASHCHEY

What do you see? tell me!

THE PRINCESS

I see a beautiful... with tears on her pale cheeks and in her eyes.

KASHCHEY

What? What? (*He looks into the mirror.*) But, that's you! Ha, ha, ha! (*He breaths on the mirror.*) Now, look!

THE PRINCESS (*looking into the mirror again*)

I see a young woman who is marvellously beautiful. The sight of her freezes my heart, but I can't stop looking at her. Is she a nymph? A sorceress?

KASHCHEY

She is my daughter.

THE PRINCESS

Look who is coming? My fiancé, my beloved, is that you? Is that really you I see, my joy?

KASHCHEY (*angrily*)

Give me back the mirror! (*Taking it from her, he looks at it and is frightened.*) Oh! Could that be my death? *He lets the mirror drop and it breaks.*

THE PRINCESS, DUO

The mirror broke on the ground.
The wonderful vision has
vanished. My heart is torn with
sorrow, and the memory of my
beloved has broken like a thread.

KASHCHEY, DUO

It's not true! The vision lied! It's
impossible that it's my death
coming! I shall send a message to
my daughter to make sure. Wake
up, my disobedient messenger!
Wake up, Storm Knight! Prepare
to fly to the end of the earth.

THE VOICE OF THE STORM KNIGHT
(*from underground*)

Ho, lazy magician! I'm dying of
boredom and inactivity. Let the
Storm Knight out!

KASHCHEY (*giving the keys to the
Princess.*)

Take the keys to the cavern and
open the door for the Storm
Knight.
*The Princess opens the door to the
cavern*

THE PRINCESS

Oh, free and happy wind! Fly off
far away! May my chagrin be
scattered with you above the
world!

THE STORM KNIGHT (*bursting out*)

Ahh! Free!

KASHCHEY

Wait a moment, obstinate
messenger. Why are you shouting
like a madman? Remember the
orders given by your master and
faithfully fulfil the mission I give
you.

THE STORM KNIGHT

The valiant knight doesn't save his
strength. Fly joyously to faraway
lands! The bolts are unlocked, the
vast and free world is open before
you. Go high in the air, soar, and
whistling and shouting, sing your
song!

KASHCHEY, TRIO

Impatient messenger! Fly to my
daughter, Kashcheyevna, in her
domain in the south where the
poppies and the henbane bloom,
and where red waves roll on a
rocky shore. Tell her that her

father is angry, without news of
her, angry that she hasn't sent him
new toys to distract him, and that
in his courtyard a new stake is
standing empty.

THE PRINCESS, TRIO

Oh, free and happy wind! If on
your route you meet the most
handsome of all the knights, tell
him that I am wasting away, held
prisoner by Kashchey. My cheeks
are pale, my eyes are dim behind
the tears that flow without
stopping.

THE STORM KNIGHT, TRIO

Bloc out the sun, hide the moon
behind clouds, take thunderbolts
for your journey. Storm Knight!
Twist branches, brake pine trees
and larches; blow, storm, on the
seas, scattering the foam of the
waves!

KASHCHEY

Remember, don't forget to ask
Kashcheyevna if she is still keeping
my death safe.

THE STORM KNIGHT

I'll remember, don't worry...
(*Continues to sing*) The surf
accompanies my song! Ahh! Free!
He flies off

THE PRINCESS (*pensive*)

Her eyes were dark, her look was
frightening. They were together.
Oh, cruel mirror!
*She goes into the tower and climbs
slowly.*

KASHCHEY (*alone*)

I have penetrated the mysteries of
nature, I have gained immortality,
and by the force of my spells I
have locked my death in one of
my daughter's tears. The beauty's
heart is cruel, years have gone by
without her eyes shedding the
tear that contains my death
forever. The effects of her love are
all-powerful, and many knights
seeking death have perished in
her enchanted realm! (*Calling the
Princess*) Princess! Come back to
the castle. Come and sit beside
me, and sing me a lullaby.

THE PRINCESS

Even with force you could not
make me do it, dirty old sorcerer!

KASHCHEY

Wait a while, rebellious Princess,
you'll soon ask me to let you in!
(*He climbs the steps, then,
stopping, traces a magic circle
with his cane.*) Form, magic circle,
around Kashchey's castle! May no
enemy be able to pass you, may
nothing come to disturb
Kashchey's sleep! Be away,
treacherous enemy! Far from
Kashchey's castle! You, gousli,
begin to play, and you, white
flurries, fly to the castle. Blind the
mean and headstrong Princess, tie
her hair in knots and strangle the
breath in the breast!
*He enters the castle. The gousli
begin to play by themselves. Night
falls. A snowstorm begins. White
ghosts swirl upstage (ballet). The
Princess, holding her furs tightly,
stands in the tower.*

CHOIR

White flurries, snowstorm, cover
the pines and larches in
Kashchey's courtyard with ice, on
this autumn day. The Princess is
wasting away in captivity.
Kashchey will never know death.
Pile high the snows, sing, dance,
twirl in Kashchey's courtyard on
this autumn day. Your knight has
fallen for Kashcheyevna's charms,
he will forget his Princess, Ivan
Korolevitch.

THE PRINCESS (*in the tower*)

My handsome fiancé will forget
his love, she will wither like the
grass yellowed by autumn.
She cries

CHOIR

First freeze, that reddens the
nose, hold fast without letting up
in Kashchey's courtyard on these
autumn days. The Princess is
wasting away in captivity. Old
Kashchey will never know death.
Don't knock at the castle door,
stay out in Kashchey's courtyard,
on these autumn days. (*The wind
makes the heads, whose eyes have
begun to shine, shake*) Ivan
Korolevitch will fall in
Kashcheyevna's burning arms,
without a fight he will die beneath
her blade. The heads of those who
seek Kashchey's death knock
against one another, waiting,

impatiently, for Ivan Korolevitch to come and join them.

THE PRINCESS

Ivan Korolevitch, my valiant knight, you will never be able to discover the secret of Kashchey's death!

The clouds cover the stage.

Change of scenery while the music continues. Darkness. Red and violet flashes of light illuminate the stage. They become stronger and stronger through the white shadows that slowly dissipate.

TABLEAU TWO

A legendary realm. The rocky shore of an island. The blue sea stretches to the horizons. The moon is reflected in the water. In the forefront, Kashcheyevna's enchanted garden and mysterious castle. The castle is surrounded by bright poppies and pales, violet henbane.

Kashcheyevna comes out of the castle, carrying a sword in her belt and with a cup in her hand.

KASHCHEYEVNA

Night is falling. The wind has died. The perfumed shadows cover everything and furious waves bear even more furiously. Celebrate the funeral rites, waves. The hour has come. And you, flowers, tell me your charms. Light the fires of love in his breast, red poppy, and you, henbane, give him the power to forget. May the knight who is attracted by your powers come here to find Kashchey's death. Enflamed by passion, may he find eternal forgetfulness in my arms, after having completely emptied my golden cup, filled with intoxicating liqueur. *(She sets down the cup and takes out her sword.)* My potion is ready. Now I shall sharpen you, my sword, accomplice to my secret deeds.

She sharpens her sword on a stone while singing.

My sword, my most cherished friend.

That gives the chaste Kashcheyevna her victory. You make the fiery stone beneath you cry out.

The sparks fly and you sing your song.

The steel heats on the burning stone.

My sharpened sword is fearsome. You are thirsty for knight's blood, my sword!

Above his shoulders you'll make his head fly.

Valiant knight, your struggle is in vain.

Your destiny has already been decided.

My sword, my most cherished friend.

That gives the chaste Kashcheyevna her victory.

You make the fiery stone beneath you cry out.

The sparks fly and you sing your song.

My sword!

She puts her sword in her belt, picks up the cup and returns to the castle.

IVAN KOROLEVITCH *(enters)*

The night is black, and the path stops here. Where am I? There is that strange light that, like a firefly, brought me here through the forest as if by magic. No, those are not fireflies. Those are flowers that shine, and there stands a beautifully sculptured castle. I hear the call of a bird and the noise of the waves that break against the rocky shore. Oh, hear me, night, and you also, perfumed garden, and you, waves, stars and flowers of the night. Listen closely to my voice: I love my Princess, I hasten to her with a soul full of hope. Nothing scares me. I shall find Kashchey's death. And my heart believes firmly that the hour is near when I shall see my Princess.

Kashcheyevna approaches Ivan Korolevitch. They look at each other for a long while in silence.

KASHCHEYEVNA

Welcome, desired guest. Do you still have a long way to travel? I can see that your voyage has exhausted you. Sit down, please. *(She offers him the cup.)* This refreshing drink will give you back your strength and will help your heart to forget.

IVAN KOROLEVITCH

Thank you for your kind welcome, my beauty.

He drinks from the cup. Kashcheyevna stares at him, casting a spell on him with her beauty. He cannot resist her magic.

IVAN KOROLEVITCH

The image of my loved on is fading. My head is becoming cloudy. A veil is covering all my past.

KASHCHEYEVNA

Your reasoning has become muddled, your cheeks are flaming and your breath is cut of in your chest.

IVAN KOROLEVITCH

I am overturn by the flow of passion. You are mine. Let me feast on the endless look in your dark eyes.

KASHCHEYEVNA

The wine's magic power has troubled your blood: my heart is enflamed, full of sensuous delight.

TOGETHER

The flow of passion will carry both of us off on a golden ship on the sea of marvellous dreams.

KASHCHEYEVNA

I will take you in my arms and our eyes will meet.

IVAN KOROLEVITCH

My kiss will close this beauty's lips.

TOGETHER

No, you will not escape my embrace. I love you, you are mine. I will forget everything in you as you will forget everything in me. We are alone, we are as one. Nothing will ever separate us.

Kashcheyevna kisses Ivan Korolevitch, who falls on the ground unconscious.

IVAN KOROLEVITCH

A sweet drowsiness fills my soul.
(*falling asleep*) The light has gone out of my eyes. My strength is failing.

He falls asleep

KASHCHEYEVNA

He is sleeping. Your hour has come, my valiant knight. You can say good-bye to life. (*She brandishes her sword and stops.*) Be hold, my sword! His face is clam and fearless. How young and handsome he is! (*She brandishes her sword again and stops, indicative.*) Why do I hesitate? Kashchey's daughter has never known fear. (*Prepares to strike.*) Be hold, my sword!

The Storm Knight bursts in, singing. Kashcheyevna lowers her sword. Korolevitch is awakens.

THE STORM KNIGHT

Twisting branches, breaking pines and larches. I advanced, happy to be free. Over the sea the storm scattered the foam of the waves. The surf accompanied my song.

While he sings, Ivan Korolevitch regains consciousness.

IVAN KOROLEVITCH

A cold wind blew across my face. My thoughts are clear and my strength is coming back.

THE STORM KNIGHT

Hail, Kashchey's daughter. Your father has sent me. Receive his message with the honors due him.

KASHCHEYEVNA

You arrive at a bad time, foolish messenger! What do you want?

IVAN KOROLEVITCH

Kashchey's daughter! She is the one I held in my arms! Was it a dream?

THE STORM KNIGHT

In Kashchey's courtyard, there is a stake that is standing empty, and at dusk you can hear singing: 'May a passing bird or a breath of wind take a message to you, my fiancé! Do you remember your love, do you feel the sadness of being far from her?'

KASHCHEYEVNA

Idiot, will you be quiet! Why do you say such nonsense? Did my father speak of his health?

IVAN KOROLEVITCH

Your words torture my heart: it is my Princess who calls me to come and rescue her.

THE STORM KNIGHT

Kashchey, your father, said to me: "My fiancé, my handsome Ivan Korolevitch. I am wasting away in Kashchey's realm. My cheeks are pale and my eyes are dim behind the tears that flow without stopping."

KASHCHEYEVNA

Your words are incoherent. Be quiet, be quiet, foolish messenger!

IVAN KOROLEVITCH

My Princess, my beloved fiancée, forgive me. I'll fly with the wind to Kashchey's realm.

THE STORM KNIGHT

Oh yes, I remember: your father ordered me to find out whether his daughter is still keeping Kashchey's death safe. (*To Korolevitch*) And he is impatient to have your head for a trophy.

IVAN KOROLEVITCH

He is waiting for it? Well, take it to Kashchey!

THE STORM KNIGHT (*throwing down part of his cloak*)

Very well, look: my flying carped is ready. We'll cover the distance quickly.

IVAN KOROLEVITCH

Let us fly quickly, the moments of our meeting is near. Princess, unforgettable beauty!

KASHCHEYEVNA

Stay, my knight, stay! Forget your princess! Oh, woe, woe is me! My charms have no more power!

THE STORM KNIGHT AND IVAN KOROLEVITCH

Let us fly!

KASHCHEYEVNA

Woe is me! (*Furiously*) Be cursed, foolish, stupid wind!

Change of scenery while the music continues.

TABLEAU THREE

The same scenery as in Tableau One. It is night. The snow storm has stopped. The Princess is sitting on the steps in front of the castle. Kashchey is sleeping inside.

THE PRINCESS (*singing a lullaby*)

Sleep, Kashchey the Immortal.
Sleep, go to sleep cruel Kashchey.
Bai, bayou-bai, bai, bayou-bai.
May the gods of the hearth
Choke you, hateful sorcerer!
Go to sleep and sleep forever
And may death haunt your dreams.
Go to sleep, cruel Kashchey.
Bai, bayou-bai, bai, bayou-bai.
May the bitterness of my tears
Cause you eternal pain
And may your body, drying up.
Be shaken with trembling!
Go to sleep, Kashchey the Immortal.
Bai, bayou-bai, bai, bayou-bai.
Lying on your feather bed
May fever devout you.
Hateful sorcerer, relax.
And may death take you!

The Storm Knight and Ivan Korolevitch arrive.

THE STORM KNIGHT

Here is Kashchey's castle. The lazy immortal must be sleeping. As for me, I feel like going for a walk again across the wide world.

He flies off.

IVAN KOROLEVITCH

Am I dreaming? Or is this the Princess?

THE PRINCESS

It is him that I see? It isn't possible!

IVAN KOROLEVITCH

The time of separation is over, my beloved is again with me. The rays of happiness light us, our hearts are full of joy!

TOGETHER

The sinister shadows of the night are dispersed, dawn is glittering, this was only a painful dream from which we are awakening. The time of separation is over, rays of happiness light us, our hearts are full of joy. I see the light in your eyes again, your smile, and I hear the divine sound of your voice as if in a marvellous dream. This was only a painful dream, but now we are awake. The time of separation is over, the rays of happiness light us. Dawn is glittering and our hearts are full of joy.

THE PRINCESS (*Pulling herself together*)

But, where are we?

IVAN KOROLEVITCH

At Kashchey's.

THE PRINCESS

Misfortune!

IVAN KOROLEVITCH

Do not fear, I am with you. I came on the wings of the wind to free you. I didn't find Kashchey's death, but my sword will help us clear the way. Let's go. Courage!

The two of them go upstage. Kashcheyevna appears and blocks their way.

KASHCHEYEVNA

Stop, my knight! Stop. In vain you try to flee. There is no way out of this realm. No prisoner can escape from here.

THE PRINCESS

Who is she? I'm frightened!

IVAN KOROLEVITCH

Before us is Kashchey's daughter.

KASHCHEYEVNA

Leave the Princess, my knight! Am I not better, have I not prettier eyes, longer hair, aren't my kisses more passionate?

IVAN KOROLEVITCH

You lured me at night into your enchanted garden, you made me drink a magic poison so that I would forget my fiancée. My soul hates you! And now my sword will punish you!

KASHCHEYEVNA

My handsome knight. I will free the Princess. I will open the door for her, but you stay with me. We will go together to a wonderful country and in my warm arms, my knight, you will find eternal happiness.

THE PRINCESS

There will never be happiness for a princess separated forever from her beloved. She does not want liberty alone, she will never leave the one she loves. Only death can separate us.

IVAN KOROLEVITCH

My beloved fiancée!

KASHCHEY (*In the castle*)

The cursed Princess makes too much noise. The old man can't get any peace! Wait awhile. I'll teach you! Oh, hate chokes me! Ah, now I see what you're trying to do, stupid girl! And that worthless nothing is still alive! Is he not trying to take away my Princess? Ha! Ha! You'll never leave this realm alive. Oh! I suffer. And what is the matter with my daughter? Oh woe is me! Impudent woman! Are you still keeping good watch over Kashchey's death?

KASHCHEYEVNA

What do I care about your death?

KASHCHEY

Oh!

THE PRINCESS

Good-bye, my beloved prince. I am not afraid to die with you. Let me look at you and kiss you one last time!

KASHCHEYEVNA

I enchanted all the knights with my beauty. But you are the only one who didn't deign to look at me. Why has an unknown feeling entered so deeply into my soul? My eyes are burning and my heart sighs. I am in love and I suffer!

KASHCHEY

I am suffering, my bones hurt, my hands tremble and my vision is blurry.

IVAN KOROLEVITCH

I cannot believe that death is near. The evil forces must die.

The Princess, with a feeling of compassion, suddenly approaches Kashcheyevna and kisses her on the forehead.

KASHCHEYEVNA

Oh, what pleasure and what pain! What is happening to me? It is a miracle! My eyes shed tears for the first time. And my tears refresh my heart like the dew that falls on a perfumed flower. Good-bye, sweet Princess, and you, handsome and valiant knight. I will remain in love with you for eternity, and for eternity I will cry.

She changes into a magnificent weeping willow.

KASHCHEY (*Jumping with hate*)

I will never die. I will live forever for your misfortune. I will destroy you. My breath will poison you! Be cursed! Oh, my death! (*He falls dead in front of the castle.*) Choir offstage. The clouds dissipate and the sun rises.

CHOIR

This is the end of the cursed realm. The magic chains are broken. Old Immortal Kashchey has fallen.

The door opens wide. A vast clearing can be seen, lit by the sun, covered with fresh grass and flowers. In Kashchey's realm, the trees and bushes become green and their branches hide the palisade. The sky is clear and blue. Everything is lit by a spring sun. The Storm Knight stands in the doorway.

THE STORM KNIGHT
You are free! The storm has
opened the doors for you!

THE PRINCESS AND IVAN
KOROLEVITCH
Oh, beautiful sun, freedom,
springtime and love!

THE STORM KNIGHT
Go in freedom!

*The Princess and Ivan Korolevitch,
their arms around each other,
slowly go through the doorway.*

CHOIR (*offstage*)
Go in freedom! The storm has
opened the doors for you! Oh,
beautiful sun, freedom, springtime
and love!