

The libretto in brief

Act I

A winter's night in St Petersburg, in the salon of Count Vladimiro Andrejevich, captain of the Royal Guards.

The servants kill time while waiting for the Count, who is out celebrating his last night as a bachelor. The next morning in fact he is to marry the beautiful and recently widowed Princess Fedora Romazoff, whose riches will relieve his embarrassed financial situation. The bell rings. It is Fedora, who is worried because her fiancé has not joined her at the theatre. While the page Dimitri hurries off to look for the Count, Fedora gazes at the portrait of her betrothed, basking in thoughts of the happiness that awaits her. The Count's sleigh arrives, but to everyone's surprise the police officer Gretch and the diplomat De Siriex enter, with two men bearing Count Vladimiro who has been shot and wounded. Gretch questions the coachman, who reports that he took the Count to the gate of a mansion in the park. Shortly afterwards he heard two shots and saw a wounded man running away from the garden. The coachman had then gone with De Siriex to a secluded lodge, where the Count lay wounded and unconscious, holding the pistol that he always carried with him for fear of the nihilists. The lodge had been rented to an old lady, who had that day brought a letter for Vladimiro. The letter had been placed in a drawer, now empty. Dimitri recalls that a man had come that afternoon to look for the Count and had remained waiting in the salon, but had then vanished: that man is Loris Ipanoff, who lives opposite the Count's palace and is on friendly terms with the nihilists. Fedora swears by the cross on her neck to avenge the crime. Gretch sends for Ipanoff, but the man has already escaped. In the meantime the Count dies.

Act II

A soirée at Princess Fedora's house in Paris.

Politics and courtesies intermingle in the guests' conversation and among the guests are De Siriex and Countess Olga Sukarev, who has brought with her a young Polish pianist. De Siriex courts Olga with a light Russian song, to which the Countess replies with a short French piece. Also present at the soirée is Loris Ipanoff. Fedora tells De Siriex that she has followed Loris to Paris, driven by the desire to avenge Vladimiro; that she has made him fall in love with her and is now only waiting for the right moment to get him to confess his crime. Loris confides to his friend Boroff his passion for the Princess. Joking with her guests, Fedora reveals that the cross she wears on her neck has a deadly poison hidden inside it, ready for her enemies or herself. During the soirée Loris declares his love to Fedora, who pretends not to believe him; Loris however is not convinced by her rejection. When Fedora informs him that she is returning to Russia the following day, the young man is shaken, for he is accused of having murdered Count Andrejevich and

therefore cannot re-enter his country, even to visit his old mother. Prodded by Fedora, Loris confesses that he fled Russia to escape justice after having killed a man. But he maintains that he had good reasons for doing so and promises to prove it to her. Fedora sets her trap, asking him to come back later, when the reception is over, with proof of his innocence. While he is absent, news arrives that the nihilists have made an attempt on the life of the Tsar. The party is abruptly interrupted. Alone, Fedora writes a letter to the chief of the Russian imperial police. She then instructs inspector Gretch to post it as soon as possible to St Petersburg, and warns him that he will be able to arrest Loris later, outside her house. When Loris returns he reveals to Fedora that he killed Vladimiro because he was the lover of his wife Wanda. The day before the Count's marriage, Loris had found a note in a drawer at his house, in which Wanda had arranged a rendezvous with him that evening. Deeply shaken, Fedora does not want to believe Loris, but as proof he shows her the letters written by Vladimiro to his wife. Continuing the story, he tells how that evening he had come upon the two lovers together. The Count had shot and wounded him, before he could return the fire. Fedora is aghast, and begins to feel her love of Vladimiro turn to hatred. She begs Loris to forgive her suspicions. Impressed by the sincerity of his love, she asks him to stay the night with her and so saves him from being arrested.

Act III

Switzerland, a chalet in Oberland.

Loris and Fedora savour the bliss of their love, while in the distance a chorus of village girls is heard singing. Olga, who keeps the couple company, receives a visit from De Siriex and prepares to go out for a bicycle ride. De Siriex brings Fedora bad news: due to her letter of denunciation, Loris's brother was arrested and imprisoned in the fortress on the Neva, where he drowned when the river rose and flooded his cell. Their mother has died of grief. Hearing this news, Fedora is consumed with remorse. A dispatch received from Boroff in Russia invites Loris to return to his country, since he has now been pardoned. But Loris's elation is silenced by a further letter from Boroff, informing him of his mother's as well as his brother's death, for which he attributes the blame to a letter of denunciation sent from Paris. He also announces that he is on his way to Switzerland, where he will reveal to him the name of the woman informer. Fedora asks Loris in vain to forgive that woman, but he is adamant in his determination to seek revenge. When Fedora insists, Loris grows suspicious. In the end Fedora gives in, and reveals that it was she who wrote the letter denouncing his brother. She takes the hidden poison from the cross on her neck and dies, begging her beloved to forgive her.

(Traduzione di Rodney Stringer)