

MADAMA BUTTERFLY – STORY OF THE OPERA

PLACE: Nagasaki, Japan
TIME: 1904

ACT ONE

A Japanese house and garden overlooking Nagasaki Harbor

Intermission

ACT TWO

The same, three years later

ACT THREE

The next morning

ACT ONE

U. S. Navy Lieutenant B. F. Pinkerton inspects the house he has leased from Goro, a marriage broker. Goro has procured him – for 99 years but subject to monthly renewal – three servants and a geisha wife, Cio-Cio-San (known as Madame Butterfly). Sharpless, the American consul, arrives breathless from climbing the hill. With a glass of whiskey in hand, Pinkerton describes his carefree philosophy of a Navy man roaming the world in search of pleasure (Duet: *Dovunque al mondo*). For the moment, he is enchanted with the fragile Cio-Cio-San and intends to go through a marriage ceremony with her. When Sharpless warns that the girl may not take her vows so lightly, Pinkerton brushes aside the consul's concern, asking him to drink to the day that he will marry a "real" American wife. At that moment, Cio-Cio-San and her friends are heard in the distance. The girl appears, proclaiming that she is answering the call of love (Entrance Scene: *Ancora un passo or via*).

Cio-Cio-San tells Pinkerton how, when her family fell on hard times, she had to earn her living as a geisha. Soon her relatives arrive

and noisily express their opinions regarding the marriage. When she finds a quiet moment, Cio-Cio-San shows her bridegroom her few earthly treasures, and explains her intention to embrace his Christian faith. With much pomp, the Imperial Commissioner performs the wedding ceremony, after which the guests toast the couple. Suddenly Cio-Cio-San's uncle, the Bonze – a Buddhist priest – bursts upon the scene, cursing the girl for having renounced her ancestors' religion. Pinkerton angrily orders him and the rest of the family to leave.

Finally alone with Cio-Cio-San, Pinkerton dries his bride's tears and reminds her that night is falling (Duet: *Viene la sera...Bimba dagl' occhi pieni di malia*). Helped by her maid Suzuki into a bridal kimono, Cio-Cio-San joins the ardent Pinkerton in the moonlit garden.

ACT TWO

Three years after Pinkerton has returned to the United States, Cio-Cio-San still awaits her husband's return. After praying to the Japanese gods for aid, Suzuki informs Cio-Cio-San that they will have no money left if Pinkerton takes much longer. Cio-Cio-San urges Suzuki to have faith: One lovely day the ship will appear on the horizon (Aria: *Un bel dì vedremo*). Sharpless arrives with a letter from Pinkerton, but before he can read it to Cio-Cio-San, Goro brings in the latest of a long list of suitors. Cio-Cio-San dismisses both Goro and the wealthy Prince Yamadori, insisting that her American husband has not deserted her. When they are alone, Sharpless again starts to read the letter to Cio-Cio-San, suggesting as tactfully as he can that Pinkerton may never return. Proudly bringing in their child, Cio-Cio-San declares that as soon as Pinkerton knows of his son, he will surely come back. If Pinkerton does not come back, Cio-Cio-San could return to life as an impoverished entertainer, but she

would prefer to die (Aria: *Che tua madre*). Promising to tell the lieutenant about his son, Sharpless sadly leaves. Cio-Cio-San, on the point of despair, is startled to hear a cannon report; she observes Pinkerton's ship entering the harbor. Nearly delirious with excitement, she asks Suzuki to help her scatter flower petals everywhere (Duet: *Scuoti quella fronda di ciliegio*). Then as night falls, she puts on her wedding kimono and, with her son and Suzuki, waits patiently for her husband's return (*Humming Chorus*).

ACT THREE

As dawn breaks, Suzuki insists that Cio-Cio-San rest. Singing quietly to her child (Lullaby: *Dormi amor mio*), she takes him to another room. Within a few moments Pinkerton arrives, accompanied by his new wife, Kate, along with Sharpless. Suzuki greets the two men joyfully, but when she realizes who Kate is, she collapses in misery. Out of consideration for her mistress, she agrees to help in breaking the news to her (Trio: *Io so che alle sue pene*). Pinkerton, overcome with remorse, bids an anguished farewell to the scene of his former happiness (Aria: *Addio, fiorito asil*) and rushes away.

No sooner is he gone than Cio-Cio-San appears, expecting to find Pinkerton but finding Kate and Sharpless instead. Quickly guessing the truth, she agrees to give up her child if the father will return for him in half an hour. Then, sending even Suzuki away, she takes out the dagger with which her own father committed suicide years before (Death Scene: *Con onor muore*). As she prepares for the *seppuku* ritual, Suzuki pushes the child into the room. Cio-Cio-San pauses and asks her son to look into her face so that he can remember her. She stabs herself, and Pinkerton returns just in time to witness her last moments of life.