

LA RONDINE

PUCCINI

English Version by Donald Pippin

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

Magda, *Rambaldo's mistress*

Lisette, *her maid*

Prunier, *a well-known poet*

Rambaldo, *a wealthy Parisian*

Ruggero, *a young man, new to Paris*

Yvette, Bianca, Suzy, *ladies of pleasure, friends of Magda*

Students, artists, demi-mondaines, servants, waiters, ladies, gentlemen, etc.

ACT ONE

In a spacious, luxuriously furnished apartment in Paris a small but elegant party is in progress. Animated conversation is sparked by a world-shaking pronouncement by the poet Prunier: romance is back in fashion! For the cream of society from London to Paris grand passion has become the latest thing.

The notion is greeted with derision, but Magda, hostess of the party, has good reason to ponder: her own life has taken quite an opposite turn. Beautiful, intelligent, warm-hearted, charming, brought up in poverty, with limited horizons, she is now blessed with all of the so-called good things of life. But the price has been steep. Choosing one of the very few options available to a woman of her class, she has sold herself, as it were, to Rambaldo, a rich banker, to whom she owes her present good fortune. Yet she continues to yearn for a more fulfilling life, a happiness that might have been had she followed the dictates of her heart -- a point driven home by a song composed and performed by the celebrated poet called "Doretta's Dream", wherein the dreamer, a young, innocent girl, rejects the riches offered to her by a powerful king in favor of true love.

The song reignites smoldering embers. Magda recalls a brief episode from a good many years ago that has often come back to haunt her: a memorable night when, in a mood of reckless adventure, she escaped from the eagle eye of her stern, straight-laced old Auntie, and took off by herself to a wildly romantic place in Paris called Bullier. What she found there far exceeded her expectations: a magical encounter with the young man of her dreams. But frightened perhaps by the perils and uncertainties of

love, she fled back to the confining life that she was so eager to break away from. Yet the memory has remained -- the memory and the regret. What if?

Amid the laughter and frivolity that now surround her, the theme of lost opportunity and longing continues to resonate. Especially when the poet Prunier, reading her palm, likens her to *la rondine*, the migrating swallow that will soar across the sea toward the golden horizon of dreams and the sunlit island of love, but there the story breaks off. The curtain is drawn. At that very moment, the son of an old friend of Magda's rich banker, is announced. A newcomer, eager to taste the glamor and excitement of Paris, where should he go on his very first night in the city? The ladies promptly send him off to Bullier -- the scene, in fact, of Magda's long ago romantic adventure.

The young man has made little impression on Magda. Indeed, they have barely noticed each other. But the party conversation and the reawakened memories have left her in a state of eager restlessness. And after her guests have departed, she makes the daring, impulsive decision to go to Bullier by herself -- to relive that extraordinary night from the past. Not as the elegant lady of fashion that she has become, but dressed instead as a *grisette*, the simple working girl that no doubt she used to be.

Getting back to the party, who could help noticing the barrage of barbed arrows that the poet Prunier keeps aiming at Lisette, Magda's very pretty and very outspoken maid -- an aspiring actress, no less. His obvious antipathy, the disdain, the carping criticism really do seem a bit over the top. Opera aficionados will have little difficulty in diagnosing his real complaint.

Scene: An elegantly furnished salon in Magda's house in Paris. A lively party is in progress, as Lisette, the pert and pretty maid, bustles about doing her duties.

YVETTE: Ah! No, no!

BIANCA: How catastrophic!

PRUNIER: You ladies, I protest!
Who are you to laugh it off?

YVETTE: Who are you to bore us with your sermons?

PRUNIER: It's true, though, nonetheless.

MAGDA: (*approaching*) I find it most intriguing.

PRUNIER: And it's come to a crisis:
 People swooning with passion!
For the cream of society from London to Paris
 Romance is back in fashion.

LISETTE: How absurd! Pay no attention.
 Parisians going soft and sentimental?
 Time is too pressing.
"You're ready? I'm ready. To bed!"

PRUNIER: Her lack of breeding is revolting.

MAGDA: Lisette you must pardon.
A budding actress, she belongs in the theatre.

(to Lisette) Run along!

LISETTE: They will not take me so lightly
 When my star is burning brightly
 On the stage. *(She leaves hurriedly.)*

MAGDA: So my friend, you were speaking?

PRUNIER: Of romance, spreading rapidly.
 Sighs and caresses, vows of devotion,
Chaste, tender kisses, but nothing more.

YVETTE: My only!

SUZY: Oh, rapture!

YVETTE: The anguish!

BIANCA: Hold me!

SUZY: I weaken.

YVETTE: I perish!

BIANCA: In agony I languish.

YVETTE: Enfold me in your arms.

SUZY: O destiny ill-fated!

BIANCA: Risking all, I have waited . . .
 YVETTE: Hooray for purity!
 MAGDA: Stop the teasing.
 PRUNIER: We've captured your attention.
 MAGDA: Perhaps. So do continue.
 PRUNIER: This epidemic has swept across the nation,
 A fatal inflammation
 Consuming the fragile world of women.
 A weapon of the devil's,
 Invisibly it travels
 To lull the drowsy senses
 And strike at love's defenses.
 YVETTE, BIANCA, SUZY: A product of the devil's,
 Unseen, you say it travels
 And batters down defenses?
 Often fatal!
 Ah! From poison so appealing
 There is small hope of healing;
 So seductive, for a fact,
 No heart is left intact.
 Not one? No exception?
 PRUNIER: No exception! No exception!
 Not even Doretta's
 LADIES: Doretta? Do we know her?
 PRUNIER: My new heroine, created
 As a character of fiction
 Overcome by this affliction.
 Through me she'll live forever,
 In song commemorated.
 LADIES: We are eager to hear.
 PRUNIER: O you women, beware!
 LADIES: We beg on bended knee.
 MAGDA: They beg but I command.

(to men)

You over there, be quiet!
As the poet Prunier, rising star of the nation,
For our pleasure will introduce
A song of his own creation.

RAMBALDO: What about?

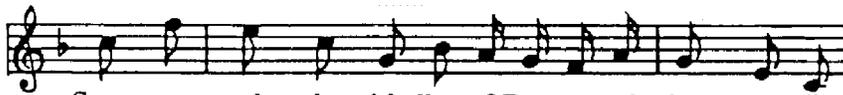
PRUNIER: True love.

RAMBALDO: That notion long outdated!

MAGDA: And never goes away. Poet, tell us!

LADIES: Poet, tell us!

PRUNIER: For Magda!



Some may solve the rid-dle of Do-ret-ta's dream, not I.

Try as I will to explain, it is still unclear.
Lo, behold! The king while passing whispered with a sigh,
"Make me your lover!
Gold I can offer,
Jewels and splendor!

"Ah, lovely creature! So fair, so tender!
No cause have you to fear.
Cry surrender
And your pangs of doubt will disappear."

"No!" she answered, unpersuaded.
"True love cannot be traded,
And neither gold nor silver
Feed the starving heart."

MAGDA: (*spoken*) Why do you break off?

PRUNIER: I've not decided on an ending.
Supply it yourself, and you can claim the glory.

MAGDA: The challenge is tempting.
Perhaps I can conclude Doretta's story.

(*The song continues.*)

Have you heard what next occurred in our Doretta's dream?
Who could forget how they met and they danced all night,
Or the wonder and delight of kisses long and sweet,
Bursting with fire, born of desire,
Enkindled by passion?

Love in flower! Fire of rapture!
What music can recapture
The tenderness conveyed
When lips of lovers meet?

OTHERS: (*Spoken softly*) (How delicious! How delicious!
So exquisite! So exquisite!)

MAGDA: Ah! I've been dreaming all my life!
Who cares for pomp and power
When roses are in flower
And the skies are fair?
Of love, dream on!
For I may find it there.

PRUNIER: I offer garlands to the goddess of lyric beauty.

MAGDA: No . . . Your compliments are too absurd.

PERICHAUD: I beg to differ. Exquisite!

CREBILLON: So charming!

GOBIN: So artistic!

RAMBALDO: So impassioned!

MAGDA: Praises! From a person so practical!

RAMBALDO: I yield to popular opinion.

MAGDA: Then we must thank Prunier
For your forced surrender.

PRUNIER: No fault of mine!
For deep within each mortal soul
A romantic devil's lurking,
Stronger than you or me,
Than man, than woman . . .

RAMBALDO: No! My own devil is dormant!

YVETTE: Busy man! What a shame!

RAMBALDO: I have a magic charm
Stronger than your devil.
Shall I draw out my weapon?
Have a look!

(He takes a pearl necklace from a small box and offers it to Magda.)

MAGDA: For me?

RAMBALDO: Who else?
I had intended to make my offering
While at the table, but totally forgot.
To appease the devil,
What better time than now?

MAGDA: I have only one answer:
My heart is not for purchase.

RAMBALDO: Thus rejected.

PRUNIER: *(The Doretta I saluted in song*
(With a touch of irony.) Was unshaken.
But so it would seem,
The living heroine before us
Tends to waver back and forth,
Now this way, now that way.)

(Lisette rushes in, takes Rambaldo aside, and whispers at a breakneck pace.)

LISETTE: Pardon, but the same young man, sir,
Back again, he's down below, sir.
"Calm yourself," said I. "Hold steady."
"Tell me how much longer," said he.
"Must I wait to get an answer?
Half an hour here already!
All I want is yes or no."

RAMBALDO: I haven't caught a word you're saying.

LISETTE: At your door, sir.
Stubborn, though by now impatient,
Sir, he said he sent a letter
Not so very long ago.

RAMBALDO: A letter?

LISETTE: Like a statue he is stationed.

RAMBALDO: Below?

LISETTE: Yes, and waiting down below,
Stationary as a statue.

RAMBALDO: Like a statue?

LISETTE: Waiting, hoping, sir, to catch you,
Down below.

RAMBALDO: *(to Magda)* Dear, if convenient,
Would you allow an addition to our party --
The son of a friend I once knew so well?
For hours he has patiently been waiting.

LISETTE: For hours?

MAGDA: Why even ask it? Is it not your own house?

RAMBALDO: Thank you. *(to Lisette)* My door is open.
Go down and show him in.

PRUNIER: *(to Magda, referring to Lisette)*
So uncouth! How can you stand her?
An ignoramus!

MAGDA: No . . . Sincere, kind and good-natured.
Somewhat outspoken, but simpatico,
Lending my life a small ray of sunshine.

BIANCA: But your life is so fabulous!

YVETTE: Rambaldo so unstinting!

BIANCA: Oh, the gowns I could purchase
With even half your fortune!

MAGDA: Is money all that matters?

SUZY: Life without it is difficult.

BIANCA: And it's not easy to come by.

MAGDA: Again, money, money, only money!
 But come, now just between us,
 I am convinced we are all birds of a feather,
 And like myself, you envy
 The lovers in a garret,
 Ecstatic with only each other.

BIANCA: You are dreaming!

MAGDA: As always . . . A special dream
 I never shall forget.
 Ah! On the one night I escaped
 From the eagle eye of my old auntie!
 Like only yesterday!
 Perhaps it could happen again tomorrow.
 Perhaps . . .



Oh, the sweet, hap-py hours of look-ing & be- long-ing

Oh, the sweet, happy hours
 Of looking and belonging
 In the crowded confusion
 Of a night at Bullier!
 How I came? There I was!
 How I left? Ask me not!

Unseen, someone sang to a rhythm subdued but insistent,
 And the voice in the dark of the night
 Seemed to say to me:



“Your seas- on of love is in flow- er. Eyes o- pen for dan-ger, oh chil-dren be-ware!

For honeysweet smiles and caresses
 You’ll pay later on with your tears of despair.”

Seated after rounds of dancing,
 I was happy though exhausted,
 So dry and thirsty,
 Yet my soul with delight was brimming over.
 Doors opened, life grew larger
 As my small world expanded.

“Two beers,” he said to the waiter.
 I stared in amazement at such carefree spending.
 Then throwing down some gold,

He added, "You keep it!"

YVETTE: A fool and his money . . .

BIANCA & SUZY: (*laughing*) Are easily parted!

BIANCA: So lavish!

SUZY: So reckless!

YVETTE: So on with your story!

BIANCA & SUZY: With beer it got started.

TRIO: With beer it started, but how was it to end?

MAGDA: "My enchanting lovely darling,
Cannot I know your name?"
So I wrote it down for him;
He in turn beneath it wrote his own.

Spellbound amid the madness,
The rush of fire and frenzy,
We gazed at each other,
Silent, never speaking.

YVETTE: Amazing! No conversation?

BIANCA: And then what?

MAGDA: Was it fear? Who can say?

Then I fled. Who knows why?

Unseen, someone sang to a rhythm subdued but insistent,
And the voice in the dark of the night
Seemed to say to me:
"Your season of love is in flower.
Eyes open for danger, O children beware!
For honeysweet smiles and caresses
You'll pay later on with your tears of despair."

If only once more I could savor
The joy of that brief, shining hour,
Again rediscover
The joy of that magical hour!

SUZY: Thank God he's not reading mine!

Lisette enters and gives a letter to Ramblado, who peruses it.

RAMBALDO: Ah! Ruggero Lastrouc.
Tell him to join us. *(Ruggero enters.)*
Ah, my young friend! I must beg you
To pardon my bad manners.

RUGGERO: No, it's I that beg excuses. Here, sir.
My father sends a letter by way of introduction,
Including his regards.

RAMBALDO: Sit down while I read it.

PRUNIER: *(to Magda)* This line foretells the future,
Revelation of nature's guarded secrets.

Y, B, S: Incredible!

PRUNIER: Still murky,
I dare not delve more deeply.

MAGDA: Let's be venturesome. Continue.

PRUNIER: Driven onward by destiny . . .
Like the migrating swallow,
You will soar across the sea
Toward the golden horizon of dreams
And the sunlit island of love.
Be warned!

MAGDA: You foresee troubled waters?

PRUNIER: No. Fate withholds the end of the story.
Maybe heaven, maybe hell.
Her secret!

RAMBALDO: *(to Ruggero)* This truly is the first time
You have visited Paris?

RUGGERO: My first time.

PRUNIER: *(after examining Bianca's hand)*
This labyrinthine maze conveys a straight message,
And it tells me, "Et ultra!"

BIANCA: (*astonished*)

In Latin?

PRUNIER:

Translated, we would say “Sell dearly!
Go for the highest bidder.”

RAMBALDO: (*to Prunier*)

Emancipated poet,
Help us out. Where would you send a young man,
A stranger new to the city,
For a night of exciting adventure?

PRUNIER:

To bed.

RAMBALDO:

Very funny.

PRUNIER:

Honest to God!
The first magic evening in Paris
Is purely a fable of fiction.
High time it's returned to the shelf.

LISSETTE: (*reappearing*) Ah, no, no! A thousand times, no, no!

Ah, what a lie!
Here in Paris I was born;
I am part of Paris,
And I'll defend it till I die.

PRUNIER:

See here!

LISSETTE:

Ignore that poppycock!
For Paris inspires song and poetry,
Full of wonders, full of surprises.

OTHERS:

Brava!

LISSETTE:

The first evening in Paris

PRUNIER:

Do something about her!

LISSETTE:

. . . Is like catching sight of the ocean
For the very first time.

PRUNIER:

Fiddle fiddle!

LISSETTE:

I could not imagine any place on earth
Even half so exciting.

As I surrender to temptation.

LISETTE: No, no! Bullier!

TRIO: Bullier! Of course, Bullier!

SUZY: Who could do better than that?

LISETTE: Write it down.

TRIO: There's your answer.

LISETTE: There love is found, laughter as well.
So take the plunge -- no one will tell!
And dare declare a victory where,
Blindly shot into the dark,
Love's arrows hit the mark.

TRIO: Blindly shot into the dark . . .

LISETTE: Love's arrows hit their mark.

(Ruggero leaves, followed by Lisette. Magda, with Prunier, comes forward, apparently indifferent to the pearl necklace that dangles in her hand.)

MAGDA: *(to Rambaldo)* So bashful, so naive!
Have pity on the boy!
He appeared rather flustered.

RAMBALDO: He'll grow up soon enough.

BIANCA: Bullier can manage miracles.

MAGDA: *(wistfully)* Bullier

PRUNIER: *(comically sniffing)* I noticed right away
The balmy fragrance of youth.
Even now it fills the air.
Sniff and savor.

RAMBALDO: I sniff and scamper!
Time to leave you.

MAGDA: So good evening.

YVETTE & BIANCA: Till tomorrow.

LISETTE: But my purse?

PRUNIER: Here on the floor. (*Handing it to her.*)

LISETTE: For the lips a touch of red.

PRUNIER: Ah, the color I adore!

LISETTE: For my cheeks. . . .

PRUNIER: Budding roses.

LISETTE: Touch of shadow

PRUNIER: Teeny tiny, teeny tiny

LISETTE: Lovely!

PRUNIER: Ready?

LISETTE: Ready!

PRUNIER: Ah! (*a sigh of satisfaction*)

LISETTE: Oh, so quiet!

PRUNIER: Awe inspiring!

LISETTE: Who is calling?

PRUNIER: The voice of love.

LISETTE: Someone loves me?

PRUNIER: Someone close.

LISETTE: Will he kiss me?

PRUNIER: Here is your answer!

LISETTE: What are kisses for? And why?

PRUNIER: Just to tell you once again
I'm yours, yours alone.

Angel!---Tyrant!
Come, my darling!

SOPRANOS: Time is flying! Stop the stalling.

MEN: Here the drinkers!

SOPRANOS: There the dancers!

STUDENTS: *(as they pass a model back and forth)*
Love is not the issue.
Come and let me kiss you.

SOME DRINKERS: Till the dark fades into light,
On wine and song intoxicated
Here we'll revel out the night.

TUTTI: Join our society!
Scornful of sobriety,
Here the wine of rapture flows
And laughter blossoms like the rose.
Until the final trumpets sound
Stay and pass the glass around:

Blessed with powers transcendental,
Wine is friendly, warm and gentle,
Ray of light when darkness hovers,
Ever shielding, ever guarding
Fond illusions dear to lovers!

While others go out into the garden, Georgette and Gabriella surround a young man admiringly.

GEORGETTE: Say, is the pearl for real?

YOUNG MAN: Fully as real as love.

GABRIELLA: Are you rich?

YOUNG MAN: At times.

BOTH GIRLS: That should do for a meal.
Their attention turns to Ruggero, still seated alone at his table. They are soon joined by Lolette and others.

LOLETTE: *(observing critically)* Armed and eager,

They're out to hunt the quarry.

VARIOUSLY:

Alone, subdued and silent --
One can't help feeling sorry.
He keeps his distance.
A timid soul,
But handsome,
Well worth the watching.
A friendly smile
Would meet with no resistance.

GIRLS:

Come, you must have a name.
Armando, no? Abelardo?
Marcello? Enrico?
Alberto? Tommaso?
Ernesto? Dario?
Domenico? Giovanni?
Carlo? Mario?

See, we are well acquainted
With rosters of the sainted,
Though in combing through the list
Your name we might have missed.

MEN:

Waiter, waiter! Over here! Beer!
And we want it right away -- now!

GIRLS:

(He comes in search of pleasure
Yet the man remains a riddle.
Though very much at leisure,
Our allure he dares belittle.)

When Ruggero responds with only a gesture, the ladies leave in great amusement.

LOLETTE:

Any chance you could spare me
A touch of powder?
I have turned quite purple.

Magda enters, and looks about uncertainly. She is noticed by several students.

STUDENTS:

Who's that? . . . Someone new here . . . Hesitant . . .
You can tell she's a lady.
A working girl but lovely.
Hardly the sort we're used to.

A STUDENT: (*approaching her*)

May I offer my arm?

MAGDA: No, thank you.

STUDENTS: We, though students, seldom study,
At times audacious,
Loud and loquacious,
All buddy-buddy.
Would-be Casanovas.
Alert and eager . . .
Money all too meager . . .
As companion, friend or lover,
If you find nothing better
We invite you to come over.

MAGDA: Thank you, but no.

STUDENT: An engagement?

MAGDA: Yes . . .an old acquaintance.

STUDENT: What more have you to tell us?

MAGDA: You ask too many questions.

STUDENT: Madly jealous.

MAGDA: So soon?

STUDENT: Life moves along.

OTHERS: Who is this lucky fellow?

MAGDA: A friend . . . he knew my brother.

STUDENT: Loath to lead you unescorted,

MAGDA: Let us lead you to each other.
(Too helpful!)

Looking around, her eye falls on Ruggero, who at that moment looks up at her.

STUDENT: Ah, there he is!
(Though students, not stupid;
We also play Cupid.)

They lead the reluctant Magda to Ruggero's table, then exit laughing.

MAGDA: My liberty do pardon.
 A lady in distress and surrounded,
 I had to get away in a hurry.
 I told them, "Someone is waiting."
 Many thanks for the safety net I needed.
 Now that they have disappeared, I'll leave you.

RUGGERO: No. . . . Stay with me.
 A lady so refined, so refreshing!
 Though barely acquainted,
 I feel I know you already.

MAGDA: Do you mean it?

RUGGERO: Most sincerely!

MAGDA: *(smiling)* Go on.

RUGGERO: Rather shy, unassuming,
 You remind me of the girls back in Monteban,
 As they dance to the throb
 And the caress of our old-fashioned music,
 So full of life and the joy of youth and beauty.

MAGDA: *(a bit ironic)* A flattering portrayal.

RUGGERO: You laugh, but let me say it:
 In the village where I'm from
 The girls are lovely,
 In harmony with nature.
 No jewelry is needed.
 Like yourself, they require
 Only a plain and simple flower ---
 Like your own.

MAGDA: If I only could dance
 The way they dance back in Monteban!

RUGGERO: No time like the present!

MAGDA: For learning?
 You may find me an ungifted pupil.

RUGGERO: No, no! I will show you.

MAGDA & RUGGERO: Two hearts beating as one!
Spring is the season when love is born.

OTHERS: Tell me, what is the spur
Still driving you onward
When the flame of love burns high?
Feeling two melting hearts
Consumed in a single fire,
When lips meeting
Burn with the same desire.

Prunier and Lisette enter.

PRUNIER: Here's hoping you'll behave. Pretend you're a lady.

LISETTE: (*a bit irritated*) You have my love and my admiration.
But when I show a bit
Of vim and vigor,
When I let go a bit
And flaunt my figure,
You jump all over me.
Instead of laughing or at least ignoring,
You stop the happy little bird from soaring.

PRUNIER: With great exertion, despite frustration,
I try to upgrade your education.
A task for Hercules!
Though almost impossible,
Look for the lover
To achieve a miracle.
I have just begun!

LISETTE: Forever scolding me
When I let go a bit and flaunt my figure . . .

They join the crowd outside. Magda fans herself with a small handkerchief as she and Ruggero return to their table.

MAGDA: I'm burning up! So thirsty!

RUGGERO: (*to a passing waiter*) Two beers!

MAGDA: Yes, and hurry!
May I ask a tiny favor?

RUGGERO: Name the deed and I shall do it.

MAGDA: Give the waiter twenty soldi;
 Tell him he's to keep the change.

RUGGERO: Nothing else? An odd request.

MAGDA: A whim, a recollection
 Of a night unlike the rest.

 "Running off for adventure,
 Beer, after dancing.
Leaving old auntie at home all alone,
 Watching the hours advancing,
 Handsome with elegant whiskers
 Silencing conversation . . ."

RUGGERO: You're talking in riddles.

MAGDA: Merely dreaming aloud.

RUGGERO: To your health and good fortune.

MAGDA: To your future lovers!

RUGGERO: Don't say that!

MAGDA: Because? . . .

RUGGERO: Were I so lucky, my love would be for one alone,
 And last forever.

MAGDA: Ah! Love whole and exclusive!

RUGGERO: From the heart we speak of love,
 And yet you've not even told me your name.

MAGDA: I'll put it down in writing.

RUGGERO: Paulette . . . How pretty!

MAGDA: And yours?

RUGGERO: Ruggero, like my father.

MAGDA: Here a small part of us we leave behind.

RUGGERO: No . . . What is in a name?
 But there remains something larger . . .

The mystery of who you are.

MAGDA: Why seek out to solve that mystery?
 What matter the trail that has brought me here?
 Question no longer; accept a stranger
 Who from the unknown appears.

RUGGERO: Never mind the how or where!
 Why should I care by what trail you were brought to me?
 And yet I feel a throbbing all too real,
 Infinitely sweet, its message soft but clear.
 Surely it's telling me you're no stranger,
 But the kindred soul that my heart has waited for.
 You're the kindred soul that my heart has waited for.

MAGDA: Music to my ears! Speak on and on!
 Oh, tell me more! Oh, tell me more, my . . .

RUGGERO: Life has a meaning,
 Beyond self-doubt and fear, my . . .

(Their duet dissolves into a long kiss. Various people return from the garden, stopping short at the sight of the two lovers.)

YOUNG MEN: Quiet! Do not disturb the two.

RABONNIER: Two hearts that beat in unison.

TENORS: Not a note of intrusion!

SOPRANOS: Render homage to lovers!

YOUNG MEN: Quiet! And no tomfoolery!

OTHERS: Mustn't break the illusion.
 Render homage to love,
 To love, to love!
 Render homage to love!

(Lisette, entering with Prunier, sees Magda, who wishes to remain incognito, thus signaling to Prunier.)

LISETTE: Lord! Her!

PRUNIER: Who?

LISETTE: Look at her! My employer!

PRUNIER: Ridiculous! The wine's made you tipsy.

LISETTE: I know the man as well.

PRUNIER: You are mistaken.

LISETTE: It's him and her. No question!

PRUNIER: (*approaching Ruggero*) Sir, good evening.
 (*to Lisette*) As for him you may be right.
 As for the lady he is with,
 You are wrong. Too absurd!
 Your eyes should be examined.

LISETTE: Am I her maid, or have I just gone crazy?

PRUNIER: A maid, this I concede,
 But you work for someone else
 When you're not so blotto.

 (*to Ruggero*) You remember Lisette.
 She wants to know if the place she recommended
 Does her credit.

RUGGERO: (*indicating Magda*) There's your answer.

PRUNIER: Very charming. Would you care to introduce us?

RUGGERO: Meet my new friend Paulette.

PRUNIER: (*to Lisette*) Have I proven my point?

RUGGERO: (*to Magda*) Meet a scholar and poet . . .
 He is a friend of a friend of my father.

PRUNIER: And thus a friend of yours.

RUGGERO: I am honored and grateful.

MAGDA: (*to Lisette*) Is anything the matter?
 The funny way you are staring!

LISETTE: (Am I hallucinating?)
 I know a certain lady
 Like yourself as two eggs in a basket.

MAGDA: Who could she be?

PRUNIER: *(to Lisette)* Watch out!

LISETTE: The lady I work for.

PRUNIER: *(nervously)* She often gets these ideas.

RUGGERO: Is your lady as lovely?

LISETTE: Is she ever! You should see the way she dresses.

MAGDA: Ha ha ha! In clothes worth a fortune!
Like your own, I imagine.

LISETTE: Ha! Costing me not a flicker!

MAGDA: So well selected!

LISETTE: All hers.

MAGDA: Who would guess it?

LISETTE: Every stitch, top to toe,
I have taken from her closet.

MAGDA: But so risky! Suppose someone told her!
Prunier explodes with a laugh.

LISETTE: *(angrily)* So! Prunier, why the cackle?

PRUNIER: Sorry! It's no laughing matter.
Ruggero quietly summons a waiter and places an order.

MAGDA: *(softly to Prunier)* Salome, or Cleopatra?

PRUNIER: *(chagrined)* Must you remind me?

MAGDA: Lucky man! Dear Lisette can perform either role.
The waiter returns with champagne.

RUGGERO: *(lifting a glass)* Luck has brought us together,
And may love be the goal!

ALL FOUR: Celebrate life itself

That offers the gift of love.

RUGGERO: Here's to a smile that caresses;
 Here's to your eyes, full of sparkle,
 And to your lips and the kiss even sweeter.

MAGDA: Overcome, I surrender.

RUGGERO: In return, I can offer
 Only love, overwhelmingly tender.
 Take the body and soul of a lover
 Who is destined to adore.

MAGDA: Is my dream about to happen
 After waiting and hoping?
 Safe in your arms, well contented,
 There I shall find the repose I have wanted.
 And if the moment could flow on forever
 Even death I could face calm and easy.
 Till the end of our journey together
 I shall hunger for nothing more.

RUGGERO: Down with distrust and foreboding!
 Safe in my arms, rest contented,
 For though with laughter and banter surrounded,
 A silent dawn of delight we can savor.
 Like a river that flows on forever,
 Rain or shine, we shall journey together,
 Asking heaven for nothing more.

LISETTE: Whisper those sweet pretty phrases
 That bring to life fairy tales reinvented.
 Tell me of castles enchanted,
 Of ladies risking all for a lover.
 Tell of valor and adventure,
 Hidden caves to explore.
 As before, speak! As once before, speak!
 Tell me the tales that I adore.

PRUNIER: I find a song in your kisses,
 Immortal rhyme in your eyes, of all places.
 By day and night I am haunted;
 In your smile, love of life I at last discover.
 Old and foolish, how I suffer
 As I love all the more!
 By your beauty am I tormented --

As I disparage and adore!

CHORUS: Quiet! Listen! Over there!
Love that knows no rhyme nor reason.
 Nor call for caution.
 Stay alerted. Pay attention.
 To the poet, lyric power . . .
 To the lady, toss a flower
We must not be seen or heard.
 At the center of creation
Bow your head, say not a word.

MAGDA: Ah! If only, if only
The enchantment could flow on forever,
The flame never flicker, never waver!
A magic moment has brought two wanderers together.
 And looking back on this brief hour,
We shall remember when love came to flower,
 When I knew I was meant for you
On that night when my dream came true.
Ah! We shall remember the hour
 That love came to flower,
 Asking nothing more.

RUGGERO: May the spell never end!
 By confusion surrounded,
A silent dawn of delight let us savor,
The moment of magic that brought us together.
 And looking back on this brief hour.
We'll remember when love came to flower,
 When I knew I was meant for you
 My dream came true.
We shall remember the night that we knew
 That our love was forevermore.

LISETTE: Whisper sweet, pretty phrases,
Bringing to life days of old reinvented.
 Tell me of castles enchanted,
 Of ladies pining for a lover.
Receive the few small talents I can offer
 And I shall desire nothing more:
A life together with the man I adore.
Life together! I ask nothing more.
 Ah, receive the gift I can offer
And I'll long then for nothing more.

PRUNIER: There is song in your kisses;
 Your eyes tell a story.
I go tormented as never before,
By beauty tormented as never before.
But fortified with your talents,
My own genius will soar.
 Driven by passion,
 Despair and jubilation,
My inspiration will soar.
My own genius will soar.
Then fortified with your talents,
My inspiration on wings will soar.

CHORUS: A quartet of eager lovers!
 Over here! Over there!
Smother them with bright bouquets.
More bouquets! More bouquets!
For the poet, a crown of laurel.
More than just a passing phase.
With his choice, who could quarrel?
Let us not be seen or heard.
Not the moment for a greeting.
Step aside for lovers meeting.
Quiet, quiet! Not a word!

More! More! More bouquets!
On the lovers let them pour.
Shower more and more!

The chorus showers the lovers with flowers, then leaves. Rambaldo appears, and enters slowly, his eyes on Magda and Ruggero.

PRUNIER: *(to Magda)* Rambaldo!

MAGDA: Ah! Heaven help me!
Ruggero mustn't see him.

PRUNIER: Depend on me.
(aside, to Lisette) Lisette! Watch out, here comes the master.

LISETTE: What for? What for?

PRUNIER: Hold steady.
(to Ruggero) My wife has found me!
Get Lisette out of here!

RUGGERO: I understand, so trust in my discretion.

PRUNIER: *(to Lisette)* Keep him well out of sight in the garden.

Ruggero takes Lisette by the arm and they leave together.

MAGDA: Did he see me?

GIRLS: *(to a reluctant gentleman)* Come along with us.
We can have some fun.

OTHERS: But why so timid and shy?

PRUNIER: Rambaldo I'll handle.
You'd better go.

MAGDA: *(with determination)* I shall stay where I am.

PRUNIER: You play with fire!
Try to reason

MAGDA: Those in love never reason.

SOPRANOS: So late, it's nearly morning.
(to an agitated waiter) Simmer down, we'll pay.

PRUNIER: *(approaching Rambaldo and trying to block Magda from view, he takes the hand that Rambaldo silently offers and notices his ring.)*

Ah, good evening, Rambaldo!
What a pleasant surprise!

RAMBALDO: Don't try to interfere.

Seeing the futility of protest, Prunier leaves.

RAMBALDO: *(to Magda)* May I ask what you're up to?

GIRLS: I am simply dead.
I can barely move.

RAMBALDO: Would you care to explain?

MAGDA: I would not. What's the point?
You can draw your own conclusions.

RAMBALDO: *(more gently)* I assume nothing serious.

Just an adventure. Shall we go?

STUDENTS: Are you still around?

GIRLS: Waiting just for you.

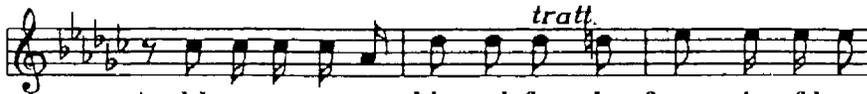
MAGDA: Too late, too late! I'm staying.

RAMBALDO: You're staying?

MAGDA: I love him, love him, love him!

RAMBALDO: Have you gone stark raving mad?

MAGDA:



And have you nev-er thirst-ed for the foun-tain of love

As you stumbled through a barren desert?
Never found food and shelter
After long privation?
Can I refuse the gift that heaven offers?

Face up to it!
Our tawdry game is over.
Understand and forgive me.
You are hurt and I am sorry,
But love allows no stepping backward.
I shall follow my star!

SOME STRAGGLERS: Long live Bullier!
In this tiny kingdom
Lovers wear the crown.

RAMBALDO: May it lead you not to misery!

With a quiet bow, he leaves.

A DISTANT SOPRANO VOICE:

In the pale glow of morning, you appear
Clad in garments of pearl and of roses,
Spry of foot, sweeping stars out of the way
Thus to capture the sun's golden ray.
Won't you tell
Who you are?

I am dawn, spreading floods of crystal light
To dispel the enchantment of night,
Love as well,
Come and gone.

RUGGERO: (*returning*) Paulette! Our loving couple
Has left already.
Dawn is breaking . . .
Shall we go also?
MAGDA: In a moment . . .
RUGGERO: In tears?

MAGDA: Nothing . . . nothing . . .
I love you! I love you!
But I'm afraid, so afraid!
Maybe superstitious. I'm far, far too happy!
You are all I have wanted!
Yet I tremble, tremble in terror.
My darling, O my love!

RUGGERO: My darling, O my love!

END OF ACT II

ACT THREE

A small villa on a hillside overlooking the Mediterranean provides an idyllic setting where Magda and Ruggero have spent two blissful months of seclusion, surrounded by flowers and golden sunshine, lulled by warm, gentle breezes and the soft murmur of the sea . . .

Their love has continued to grow and deepen, but as it does so Magda's inner struggle intensifies: whether to shatter his illusions by revealing the truth about her past, or to go on living a lie? A crisis lies in wait. He has written to his parents asking for their blessing on their coming marriage. Magda faces the painful truth, and her resolve is clear: she can be his lover, but not his wife. She cannot, will not dishonor his mother. He protests that the past doesn't matter. She knows that he deserves better, and that peace will emerge from sorrow.

But there is no rest for the swallow, whose flight must continue.

A Villa on the Riviera, late afternoon of a glorious spring day. Magda and Ruggero are seated at a table, absorbed in the beauty and intimacy of the hour and the landscape.

MAGDA: Listen, as the sea so submissively whispers
To a breeze sweetly scented with flowers.

(as she hands her lover a cup of tea)

Master magician,
I have brewed a potion
Famous for setting in motion
Dozing adoration.
Tell me again, love is still thriving.

RUGGERO: Growing stronger and richer each day.

MAGDA: You are not bored with quiet seclusion?

RUGGERO: Never alone, with love ever present,
Love reignited whenever you're near me,
A fire of grace and mystery.

(She puts her arms around him.)

Softly surrounded,
By your arms encircled,
Willingly I am your captive,
Bound to you forever.

MAGDA: My love, do you remember
How, when and where it began?
I saw you . . . It was love at first sight . . .
I knew! I knew!

RUGGERO: From probing eyes we fled
To this hide-away.

MAGDA: Our love was born
Among fragrant flowers.

RUGGERO: Where now we flourish!

MAGDA: Entwined with garlands
 Of folksong and dancing.

RUGGERO: With springtime beauty
 Of life unfolding!

MAGDA: Lay on garlands again,
 Day by day fresher and sweeter.
 Crown with wreathes of flowers
 Love in its blissful surrender.

 Wrapped in tender caresses,
 Only that gold can I offer,
 Dearest treasure on earth,
 Love in its glory and splendor.

RUGGERO: You alone are my treasure,
 All that a man could desire.

MAGDA: Hush! No words are needed.
 You are all I desire.

RUGGERO: You are all I desire. yet today is special.

MAGDA: Why special?

RUGGERO: Ah! I have a secret!

MAGDA: A secret?

RUGGERO: A step I have taken on my own.
 And in deference to my family
 My tongue I've held in check
 Awaiting word from my father.
 Three days and still no answer.

MAGDA: You wrote him?

RUGGERO: I should mention,
 Partly asking for money.
 We have debts by the dozen,
 In each and every pocket
 Another bill overdue.

MAGDA: Because of me!

RUGGERO: We both can claim some credit.
But the torrent continues.
Tactful to a fault, I avoid our landlord.

MAGDA: Oh, my poor Ruggero!

RUGGERO: *(laughing)* No matter! We'll go begging.
"Have pity on two lovers
Cast out in the cold!"

MAGDA: *(distressed)* How dreadful!

RUGGERO: Don't worry! For I still have my secret.

MAGDA: Share it . . . Tell me . . . What is it?

RUGGERO: You surely have guessed.

MAGDA: I can't imagine.

RUGGERO: I wrote a letter asking my parents
For their blessing on our marriage.

MAGDA: Ruggero! Ruggero! What have you done?

RUGGERO: You're not unhappy?

MAGDA: I'm speechless . . . I thought . . . So unexpected.
Getting married . . . Are you certain?

RUGGERO: You thought I didn't want it?

MAGDA: No, not that.
Only tell me what you told them.

RUGGERO: What you already know:
I said we are both in love,
And know this will be forever.

MAGDA: Forever! I remember
How you said it back then.

RUGGERO: Long before I realized entirely

Who you were --
No ordinary mortal, but love itself.



Not far a-way, we'll set-tle in the coun-try,

A house and barn surrounded by a meadow,
Sheltered by hills that catch the glow of morning,
Fading only when dusk has spread its shadow.

Our simple house that may seem like any other
Tender love will transform into a palace.
There hallowed by the spirit of my mother,
We'll live untouched by the curse of greed or malice.

Then some day, just a little later maybe,
I see us both in thrall and overpowered,
Turned captive by the cooing of a baby.

As it sleeps, angels smiling down from heaven
Will provide loving guidance and protection,
With a shower of blessings on the tiny dreamer.
Make it so! Make it so!

Magda slowly tears herself away from his embrace. He kisses her hair tenderly, then departs, leaving her in agony and confusion

MAGDA:

Must I tell him? How can I?
But to continue this deception, remaining silent?
Yes . . . truth would be so cruel!
With a word, I can crumble his illusions,
Poison our dreams,
Put out the sacred fire.

No! No! I'd best say nothing!
But to live by pretending . . .
Compelled to lie and lead him onward
Just to preserve a facade?
By the past I am haunted;
With remorse, broken hearted.

She slowly enters the house, consumed with grief. From offstage, a pair of familiar voices is heard.

LISETTE:

She's here!

PRUNIER: Perhaps.

LISETTE: We meet again!

PRUNIER: You hope.

He enters, followed reluctantly by Lisette, an apparent victim of unidentified terrors.

PRUNIER: Come on, step forward!
Why such a coward?
Are you in fear
That here you'll be devoured?
You shake! You shiver!
As if assaulted and overpowered.

LISETTE: My reputation! My life in ruin!

PRUNIER: Fine compensation for long devotion.
Fool that I am, I had a notion
That I could pass you off here as a singer.
My little star was soon discovered,
But faded even faster.

LISETTE: Humiliation! Total disaster!
Out on the stage, what was I doing
To warrant hissing,
To warrant booing?

PRUNIER: Some harmless whistles, misguided laughter --
What's the calamity
Now it's subsided?

LISETTE: Give me peace and quiet!
My career is over.

PRUNIER: Ungrateful woman!
The pains I've taken.

LISETTE: No, no! Enough of that!
We were both mistaken.

PRUNIER: I failed to make a superstar
Out of the maid that in fact you are.

LISETTE: After the indignity I have suffered

I prefer living undiscovered.
(with sudden terror) Listen! A man creeping up,
Pursuing . . .

PRUNIER: A case of nerves. You've got the jitters.

LISETTE: Coming to taunt me with boos and titters.
Again! You hear it?

PRUNIER: What now?

LISETTE: A snicker.

PRUNIER: The aftershock of recent events.
I must admit, I thought you had more sense.

LISETTE: Mercy! How far we have walked already,
Hoping to find my missing lady.

PRUNIER: Luck is not with us.

LISETTE: I'll go no further.

PRUNIER: Childish hysteria.

LISETTE: First you must comb that wooded area
Through thorn and thistle;
See that no one's there to hiss or whistle,
Go see no heckler's there to hiss or whistle.

PRUNIER: You will recover before you know it.
Here in this quiet, secluded oasis
Where lovers bill and coo between embraces,
The world long vanished, leaving no traces,
Rest in the arms of your amorous poet.
Safe in this hiding place made for embraces,
Lovers can bill and coo.
The world has vanished and left no traces.

LISETTE: Someone is there! I was not mistaken.

PRUNIER: Only a servant, nothing alarming.

SERVANT: *(after an unobtrusive entrance)*
Shall I go tell the mistress she has callers?

PRUNIER: To the lady I want you to say

That a couple of her old Parisian friends
Are just passing by.

LISETTE: A social blunder! I'm her maid, not her friend.

PRUNIER: Do you imply? . . .

LISETTE: What I mean is my own business.

PRUNIER: What new folly has sprung from your wild imagination?

LISETTE: To hell with you! I've reached the end. Oh,
Keep your pompous innuendo.
Scorn and insult I could swallow
While I took you for Apollo,
But my eyes at last are open.

PRUNIER: Your rebuke I fail to follow.

LISETTE: Though to you it hardly matters,
I have feelings! After trial and error,
I need calm and quiet;
I need time for reflection.

PRUNIER: Thus you repay my indulgent affection.

LISETTE: Why did I listen so long to your drivel?

PRUNIER: Why did I love beneath my level?

LISETTE: Pompous old poet! Go, go to the devil!

PRUNIER: You insult me!

LISETTE: About time!

They are locked in mutual contempt as Magda makes a gracious appearance.

MAGDA: So there you are! As amorous as ever,
Two loyal friends from Paris.

LISETTE: *(collecting herself, with tenderness)*
Still devoted.

PRUNIER: We come here to ruffle up your nest.
First of all, are you happy?

MAGDA: *(with a trace of sadness)* Completely happy.

PRUNIER: You're the talk of the season --
 Reports and rumors.
 And yet -- may I be candid?
 None believe them.

MAGDA: None believe them? Why not?

PRUNIER: The simple life is not your destination,
 Its daily, dull routine of house and garden.
 Worst of all, the stagnant isolation
 That stifles love inside a narrow coffin.

MAGDA: No, my friend,
 And you hurt me very much.
 What you say is so untrue.
 Dropping that, tell me what
 Has brought you here.

PRUNIER: A lamentable hour!
 At Lisette's grand debut
 The crowd decreed
 That her career is not to flower.
 Dear, oh dear!
 Roundly hooted and heckled
 Her claim to fame bespeckled,
 The cry so fierce and fervent,
 She returns, your humble servant.

LISETTE: Your maid if you will have me,
 Back to the apron!

MAGDA: Of course!

LISETTE: What relief!

PRUNIER: Welcome someone who's happy
 Where she belongs,
 Letting go of a dream of wine and roses.
 As for you . . . Look and learn ...
 Look and learn.
 This life uprooted
 I predict you will abandon.
 Based on illusion

It is bound to crumble.

MAGDA: No more!

PRUNIER: I have a duty,
And a *sotto voce* message to deliver.

MAGDA: Who from?

PRUNIER: From someone waiting,
One whose help may be needed,
Who is eager and ready still to serve you.

MAGDA: Enough! Enough!

PRUNIER: I've said it. Mission accomplished.
(*turning to Lisette*) Goodbye forever.

MAGDA: You are leaving?

PRUNIER: This minute. I don't associate with certain people.

LISETTE: I say good riddance.

PRUNIER: One final question.

LISETTE: If you ask, I may answer.

PRUNIER: (*to Magda*) You'll excuse me a moment?

(*sotto voce, to Lisette*) At what hour this evening are you free?

LISETTE: Ten o'clock.

PRUNIER: I'll be waiting.

He departs, dignity intact.

LISETTE: (*joyfully*) Without delay, I'm starting.
Oh, the disorder and disarray
When I leave you in control!

MAGDA: How very much I've missed you!

LISETTE: No crowd has ever hissed you,
Searing heart and soul.
Now eager to assist you,

I assume a supporting role.
With broom and feather duster
Life has taken on new luster.

She skips merrily off, while Ruggero enters in great excitement, letter in hand.

RUGGERO: I have to show you! My darling!
I have heard from my mother.

MAGDA: *(with apprehension)* Your mother?

RUGGERO: Darling, what have you to fear?
She has given you her blessing.

MAGDA: Your mother . . . your mother . . .

RUGGERO: Read it yourself.
But here, close by my side.
No, even closer,
With your cheek touching mine.

MAGDA: Your mother!

RUGGERO: Read it, read it!

MAGDA: *(reading)* “My dearest son, you tell me
You have found at last
The person you’ve wanted and prayed for.
Son, for a gift so priceless
Thank our father in heaven.”

RUGGERO: Continue . . . Onward! Onward!

MAGDA: “Truly, I weep for joy beyond expressing,
Thinking of her as mother of your children,
Firm in my own belief that motherhood is sacred.”

RUGGERO: Read on, my love.

MAGDA: “If you are certain
Your bride is pure and uncorrupted,
And worthy of your love,
Make her my daughter.

While I await your return with much impatience
In the house whose doors for you are always open,

Both my arms are extended
To receive your beloved.
Give her a kiss from me.”

RUGGERO: I kiss you for my mother.

He tries to kiss her brow, but she abruptly wards him off.

MAGDA: No, that kiss from a mother’s heart
Can never be mine.

RUGGERO: My darling!

MAGDA: No more lies and deception!

RUGGERO: You? You? You?

MAGDA: Ruggero! My former life
Comes back again to haunt me.
Your mother’s house I never am to enter.

RUGGERO: Never, never, never!
My love! But why?
What have you done so dreadful?

MAGDA: I have come to you contaminated.

RUGGERO: What does it matter?

MAGDA: Ah! You know nothing.

RUGGERO: I know I love you!

MAGDA: I’ve got to tell you.

RUGGERO: I’ll not listen.

MAGDA: My body and soul I traded
For cheap luxury and squalor.

RUGGERO: The past is unimportant.
We’ll start anew.

MAGDA: You gave all that I wanted --
Perfect love and devotion.
I’ve repaid you with falsehood.

RUGGERO:

We were happy.

MAGDA:

I can only be your lover,
Your mistress, not the wife
So unworthy of your mother.

RUGGERO:

Those words are worse than torture,
Worse than fire and damnation.
Can I live without the love
That has revealed a world beyond
My cramped horizon?
Am I now to see that world
Reduced to rubble?

MAGDA:

What surpasses the punishment
Of causing you to pay for my mistakes?
I am guilty; I knew what I was doing.
Your mother's house I shall never, never enter.

RUGGERO:

No! Reconsider. No, no!
Why bring further sorrow?

MAGDA:

Your mother I'll not dishonor.
I know that I must leave you
Because I love you.
Your life I'll not destroy.

RUGGERO:

No! We can still be happy.
We can start all over. No!
Love, how can you abandon what has barely started?
And why should life continue when we're torn apart?
Recall the glow of rapture
That first time we found each other.
Love, do not break my heart.

MAGDA:

Grieve not in desperation
Even though we've parted.
Your life is far from over.
Love, remember me.
Recall the glow of rapture,
The good times we had together.
My heart I leave here with you.

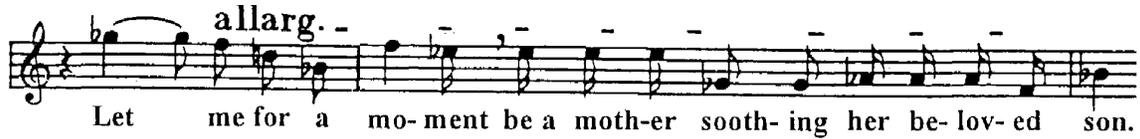
RUGGERO:

Do not leave me.
Love can pull us through it.

MAGDA: You seek your own destruction.

RUGGERO: No! Stay with me!
Love will make us stronger.

MAGDA: You invite your own destruction.
Love, you alone know me truly, heart and soul,
For they are yours alone,
Yours now and forever.



Let me for a moment be a mother soothing her beloved son.
You will in time recover;
Peace will emerge from sorrow.
Go back home to a calmer, brighter future.
No rest for the swallow
Whose flight continues,

RUGGERO: I love you!

MAGDA: Headed homeward,
Where no golden dreams dare follow.

With a last tender, lingering look at Ruggero, who has collapsed in grief, she slowly departs.

THE END