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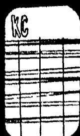
kansas city  public library
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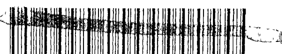
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Immortal Bohemian

An Intimate Memoir of *Giacomo Puccini*

Dante del Fiorentino

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NEW YORK

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Immortal
Bohemian

CHAPTER ONE

The Painted Corpse

When the olives were ripening at Christmas in the groves of Bozzano, Bargecchia and Massarosa I came home; and then again at Easter when Viareggio glowed in the hot Spring sunlight and the *caffés* were thronged with the Englishmen who came to stand mournfully round the monument which marks the place where Shelley's body was burned along the shores of the sea; and then again in the summer when the heat-haze hung over the rice-fields and the voices of village girls working barefoot in the flooded paddies rose like bird-song in the dawnmist—I came from the Seminary of San Martino in Lucca to my home in Quiesa.

Home was a simple house crowded with five children, three girls and two boys. We played in the piazza of the church or raced to the lake where we begged our way into the fishermen's boats or wandered with the olive-pickers in the groves, and when the men swung their long bamboo poles and tapped the branches to loosen the ripe fruit, we scrambled in the grass and filled the baskets with olives.

Home was the opportunity to see my great-uncle, Don

Antonio, a musician who became canon, though no one ever looked less like a church dignitary. It was not his habit to wear the Roman cassock. Instead, it pleased him to wear an eighteenth-century uniform, comprising a frock coat with black silk knee breeches, black silk stockings and black slippers ornamented with silver buckles. Dignified, but never aloof, he possessed a formidable memory for music: as an old man, he could still entertain his friends with the entire score of *Cavalleria Rusticana*. The venerable canon adored opera, and he was loud in his disappointment when Pope Pius X forbade playing anything in church which savored of the theater. Don Antonio was heard muttering: "As Pope I revere him, but as a musician he is unworthy."

My great-uncle knew many of the operatic composers of his time: some of them had been his classmates. In the village in the evenings, when the peasants sat round the wineshops, they would dispute whether the funeral march Don Antonio wrote for the popular *maggio, Gerusalemme Liberata,* was greater than Puccini's funeral march in *Edgar*. Of course these were exactly the kind of arguments which simple people enjoyed, for there could be no solution and therefore no end to the argument. As for my great-uncle, he would sometimes display embarrassment when some overly enthusiastic admirer addressed him as professor, but he would always cast modesty aside long enough to claim that he was one of the best composers of popular hymns. Today you can still hear one of his hymns composed for the pilgrimage to the ancient statue of the Volto Santo in the cathedral at Lucca. "O Lucca, the Lord chose you among hundreds of cities," sing

the pilgrims; and the echo resounding from the olive and chestnut groves answers: "The Lord chose you . . ."

So while my great-uncle spoke about music the summers followed one another, with little to break the slow rhythm of those languorous days when the grapes are swelling and sweetening on the vines, and the noons are charged with the dry chatter of the cicadas, and in the hot breathless nights thousands of frogs in the rice-fields croak to the moon. And though the name of Puccini was often mentioned, and I associated the name with his operas, I associated it still more with the roaring devil of a motor-car he owned, a car which fascinated and terrified the simple people accustomed to the slow pace of oxen and donkeys. This car tore over the unpaved roads between Torre del Lago and Viareggio, and around the lake to Quiesa and Massaciuccoli and on to Lucca, sending the peasants scuttling like rabbits, causing the pious to cross themselves devoutly as they escaped with their lives. I had never set eyes on Puccini, and more than anything else I longed to see him.

One day I saw him face to face. It was during my summer vacation from the seminary, and I was fifteen. It happened in this way: I had been requested by my pastor in Quiesa to take a group of altar-boys on a little walk after Mass. During the walk I would put them through their apprenticeship for the priesthood. I remember how we paused near the fountain of the village square, where the girls were waiting to pour water into their jugs and the air was full of the sweet smell of *buccellato,* a pastry-ring flavored with anise. All round the square there were small groups eagerly discussing a rumor. It seemed that there had been a terrible motor accident during

the night. It was said the gas-tank of a car had exploded, and the car together with the three passengers had been devoured by flames. This, of course, was delightful news, to be relished by the peasants who adore these interludes of macabre excitement in their quiet and uneventful lives.

One rumor said that the explosion had taken place at Monte di Quiesa, but there were many other rumors. A hunchback blacksmith told us with the authority of one who wields a twenty-pound hammer that the accident had taken place at Ponte San Pietro, three or four miles from Lucca. There was no explosion. What had happened was that the chauffeur failed to observe a treacherous curve, with the result that the car plunged over the embankment and overturned. A woman was thrown clear, unhurt, though her nerves, according to the blacksmith, were "torn to ribbons." The chauffeur and the owner of the car were both pinned under the wreckage, though neither of them had lost consciousness, for they kept shouting vociferously, and their shouting, together with the woman's screams, attracted a passing peasant. The peasant went in search of a doctor. In due course the doctor arrived from Maggiano. He discovered they had both broken their legs and must be taken to the hospital in Lucca immediately. All this meant that there had been no tremendous explosion and no one was killed. Disillusion settled on the people loitering beside the fountain. Now that there was no longer any high tragedy to talk about, the girls made their way home and the sellers of *buccellato* resumed their street-cries more loudly than ever.

I, too, went on my way. With my altar-boys clustered around me I took the road to La Piaggetta, which is a sleepy

little port beside the lake, consisting of a single imposing villa and rowboats that are always elbowing each other in a stretch of half-stagnant water. That morning there was a sense of excitement in the air. Two launches had just arrived from Torre del Lago, on the other side of the lake. When I asked what was happening, a boatman said, "They're bringing him down here."

"Bringing whom?"

"The fellow who was hurt in the car accident. The doctor wants him to go to the hospital in Lucca, but he won't go. He says they'll have to take him to his own house on Torre del Lago."

Soon we saw the ambulance coming round Minutoli's farmhouse. It was a Green Cross ambulance, and for this I was sorry. We had two welfare organizations in Lucca: the Misericordia and the Green Cross. The Misericordia was supported by the Church, and the Green Cross by the socialists. There was always rivalry between them, for both were determined to boost their record of humanitarian achievement. The ambulance reached the pier. A tall, pale woman was assisted down. She was evidently the woman whose nerves had been "torn to ribbons." She was very beautiful, and she kept scolding everyone in sight, and no one paid her the slightest attention. From inside the ambulance there came groans and sharp, piercing yells. Here, evidently, was the man who was most severely wounded. The attendants lifted him down on a stretcher, and then proceeded to carry the stretcher to one of the waiting boats. At that moment, wearing my long black *gonnella* (cassock), I pushed and wriggled my way through a small crowd of onlookers. Pietro, Alessandro

and all the other altar-boys were wild with excitement. The injured man was now lying at the bottom of the boat, hidden from view. All the time we could hear him groaning to the boatman: "*Ahi, ahi fate a modo*—Take it easy!"

Something told us that this was the voice of Puccini. That he should be lying there, invisible to us and deprived of the aid we could give him, was more than we could bear. The rowers were standing up and thrusting their oars in the grass, to set the boat free from the jetty. This was the moment when we caught hold of the gunwale and did everything in our power to scramble aboard. The boat gave a sudden lurch, there were more groans from the wounded man, and suddenly we saw him brushing aside the boatmen with an immense sweep of his hand, and then he leaned up on his elbows and shouted: "Get out of here! Don't you see you are killing me? Go away! As for you, *Gonnellone,* get back to your church!"

I was rooted to the spot. Puccini, the great maestro, had actually spoken to me, even though he had only called me by a name which meant "big skirt." It didn't matter what he said. What mattered was that he had spoken to me.

None of us could move. Heavy hands fell on our shoulders and threw us out of the boat, and there were harsh voices saying: "Didn't you hear the commands of the maestro? Go on! Get out!" I was dazed and at the same time pleased, because I had acquired a new name, though the name had been spoken in anger and anguish. With the long-limbed Puccini lying in the bottom of the boat, the rowers swept across the lake, a lake as smooth as glass with the morning mist curling like feathers. We all gazed at the boat with

longing. On the opposite shore we could make out the little pier and the maestro's house shaded by trees.

Afterwards, when the villagers came to talk about what had happened, it occurred to them that the accident was fated ever since the day when Puccini first brought the motor-car from Milan. They said the reason for his journey to Lucca was to see Narciso Gemignani, the husband of his mistress Elvira. Gemignani was reported to be dying.

Everyone knew that Donna Elvira had long ago abandoned her husband, who had never forgiven her for breaking her marital vows, nor had he forgiven Puccini for having stolen her from him. And now Gemignani was seriously ill and near the end of his life. All this, of course, was true. Now the rumor-mongers said that Elvira had gone to him, hoping he would change his will and leave this world without bitterness. So she had driven with Puccini to Lucca, but as soon as they reached Gemignani's house they were set upon by a host of angry relatives, all intent upon seeing that the will was written in their favor. They barred the door and refused to let Elvira in and asked her why she wasn't cringing with shame for all the harm she had done her husband.

This was the story told by an old crone whose sympathies lay with Puccini.

"Now why should we blame him?" the old woman was saying. "Everyone knows what these artists are. If they are good artists, well, we should forgive them their sins. But that good-for-nothing Elvira . . ."

Another *Cavalleria Rusticana* was in the making. It was like an opera: the deathbed, the lovers pleading to be allowed

to see Gemignani, the refusal and the long ride on a moonless night.

The chauffeur recovered quickly in the hospital. Puccini, however, refused to enter a hospital and insisted on treating himself. He was laid up with his leg in a cast for eight months, and to make matters worse he began to suffer from diabetes, an illness which remained with him for the rest of his life. Meanwhile the broken leg refused to knit. It was set by a local doctor. Professor Ceci, the distinguished specialist, was sent for, but he never arrived. In his hurry to board a tram to take him to the railway station, he slipped and broke his own leg.

The accident and the new name which Puccini had so providentially given me stirred the flame of my love for the maestro. I could not whisper the name without excitement. I felt for him an intense and unremitting affection, and I knew it would remain with me for ever.

I returned to the seminary. Don Antonio had suggested that I should study music. Had not my grandfather and father been celebrated choristers? Had not Puccini studied in the same seminary in Lucca? I haunted the music stacks in our library. One morning the rector of the seminary came into the library accompanied by an older student, one of those students who are frequently entrusted with errands of a confidential nature. They came to a cabinet full of miscellaneous papers concerning former students in the seminary. The old rector looked through the papers, removing them one by one after only glancing at them. Here was the most august personage in the seminary acting like a conspirator. He had come to the library at nine o'clock in the morn-

ing, when no one else was present, on some secret errand. I was behind the stacks, and he did not see me. Suddenly the student handed him a folder. The rector gazed at it excitedly, leafed through the first few pages with the air of someone immensely pleased with his discovery, then he made a pencil notation on the cover and whispered, "Oh, this must go in the glass case." Shortly afterwards the papers were placed in the special case reserved for important documents, and the rector left the library as mysteriously as he had entered.

I tiptoed to the case, and with fumbling fingers extricated the document. There was nothing on the outer cover to suggest its importance, but inside I read:

PUCCINI, Giacomo
son of Michele

1867–68	First Gymnasium	Elementary Grammar
1868–69	Second Gymnasium	Advanced Grammar
1869–70	Third Gymnasium	Advanced Grammar
1870–71	Fourth Gymnasium	Advanced Grammar
1871–72	Fifth Gymnasium	Advanced Grammar
1872–73	Repeat	

Examinations:

August 25, 1871.	Oral Examination in Humanities. Approved with minimum marks.
August 26, 1872.	Oral Examination in Rhetoric. Not approved.
August 25, 1873.	Oral Examination. Approved.

This barren document was supplemented by marginal comments from the teachers. They were not flattering. One teacher wrote: "He comes to school only to wear out the seat of his pants. He pays no attention to anything and keeps tap-

ping on his desk as though it were a keyboard. He never reads a book."

I came to the conclusion that the rector was a secret admirer of Puccini and had placed the records in the glass case as a mark of distinction; and now more than ever I found myself dreaming and thinking about Puccini. I began to wonder what happened to him after he left the seminary. What kind of man was he? Where did he draw the sources of his inspiration? There were a hundred questions to be answered. At the first opportunity I put the problem to Don Antonio. I told him about the extraordinary behavior of the rector.

"There's no doubt about it," Don Antonio said. "Like everyone else he came to the conclusion that Puccini is a genius. He simply wants to be sure that the documents will be carefully looked after. One day they will be regarded as valuable in the history of music."

"Tell me some stories about Puccini."

"I know many stories about Puccini. There are sad ones, and a few happy ones. You understand, Puccini is not like ordinary mortals. He suffered a great deal. There was a time when only his father and mother had faith in him. Poor Professor Michele—he would take son Giacomo to the organ loft and set him up on a bench, and this was at a time when the boy was almost too young to walk. He scattered pennies on the keys and watched while Giacomo reached for them, but the boy seemed to have no delight in music, and his old uncle, Fortunato Magi, would shake his head and say no good would come from the boy, there wasn't any music in him, the family tradition of musicians had come to an end. Even later in the seminary they had no faith in him. *Opiniones homi-*

num fallaces sunt—The judgments of men are sometimes wrong. Only his mother and father had faith in him. There is one thing about Giacomo. When the time came, he was desperately determined. He would do anything short of stealing—and sometimes he did a little stealing—so that he could see operas. Yes, he was very determined."

Don Antonio ruminated for a while, and then he said, "Did I ever tell you the story of Puccini and the Painted Corpse?"

"No."

"I'll tell it to you some day."

"Please tell me now."

It was some time before Don Antonio embarked on the story. The old man in the black frock coat and the buckled shoes was putting his mind in order, trying to remember Giacomo at the age of sixteen, a pale long-haired boy with burning eyes who was a failure in the seminary and who was consumed with the ambition to be as great as Verdi. It began one day in August 1875 when Giacomo read an advertisement announcing the performance of Verdi's *Aïda* in Pisa. The advertisement seemed to say: "Now listen, Giacomo. The great Verdi was a poor innkeeper's son. There was a time when he sold cheese and mousetraps, rice and oil, but he became in the end a great composer. Go and do likewise." Giacomo had no money. He decided to walk to Pisa, and that meant climbing the huge mountain of San Giuliano, but he didn't care. He walked up the mountain, sustaining himself with a couple of *panini* (bread rolls), and then he saw the valley of the Arno below him, and there was the river crawling like a silver snake and the Leaning Tower and the Cathedral. He told himself

he would go to the Teatro Verdi, introduce himself to the impresario, obtain a free ticket on the strength of the magic name of Michele Puccini, and enjoy the opera. And this is exactly what he did.

Don Antonio told this little story very well, and then leaned back and closed his eyes.

"You haven't told the story of Puccini and the Painted Corpse," I said.

"I'm coming to that," Don Antonio answered. "You see, I want you to understand that Giacomo struggled a great deal. Even while he was attending the opera in Pisa they were doing everything they could to prevent him from becoming a musician. Fortunato Magi was his mother's brother. That very night Fortunato came roaring into the Puccini house, saying the way Giacomo behaved was a disgrace. Signora Puccini was knitting in the feeble light of a kerosene lamp when Fortunato came storming in, roaring at the top of his voice. She looked up and said, 'In God's name, what has happened now?' 'It's altogether terrible, the way he behaves,' Fortunato was shouting. 'You're too kind to him, too tolerant. He'll never come to anything. I've wasted my time giving him piano lessons. Do you know he smokes a pipe? It's terrible. Of course he can't afford tobacco. He goes about with his bosom friend Zizzania, that broken-down painter, and picks up all the cigar stubs he can find. You can see him any day in Via Fillungo and Piazza del Giglio doing exactly that. And he doesn't care about the condition of these stubs—they may have been trampled in the mud or soaked with rain, he still collects them and somehow he manages to light them. And that's not the worst . . .'

"Signora Puccini put down her knitting and prepared to hear the worst.

" 'The worst is that Giacomo is becoming a criminal, inspired by a devil inside him or perhaps by the devil inside Zizzania. Why, last week they had the audacity to present themselves to a simple-minded priest (I won't divulge his name) and they asked permission to practice on the church organ. Permission was granted, for you know that the mere mention of the name Puccini brings good results. And do you know what the rascals did? In the intervals of pretending to practice on the organ, they removed some lead pipes and later sold them for half a lira, and on the strength of their inordinate success, which went to their heads, they treated themselves to a *poncino* (punch) and a fat cigar. It is pure criminality, and mark my words, they will be brought to justice!' "

"Is the story true, Don Antonio?" I asked.

"It happened a long time ago, and no one knows for certain," he answered, "but that was the story told by Fortunato Magi on the night when Giacomo attended the opera in Pisa."

"You still haven't told me the story of Puccini and the Painted Corpse."

"I was coming to that. You see, everything came to a head on the night when *Aïda* was performed, and Fortunato kept the story of the Painted Corpse to the last. He was sorry for Giacomo. He wanted to shame Signora Puccini into preventing the boy from taking any further lessons in music. He had learned the story of the corpse for the first time a little while before, and he thought it would clinch the argument. He was terribly worked up. You see, Signora Puccini did not entirely

believe him. She told Fortunato Magi that Giacomo complained of being kicked by his music-teacher until he was black and blue from the knees to the ankles, and all he had done was to sing a note out of tune."

" 'It's not true,' Fortunato Magi said, 'and besides, even if it were true . . .' "

It was time to interrupt Don Antonio. Memories were crowding upon him, and the painted corpse was drawing farther and farther away.

"Please tell me the story you were going to tell me," I said despondently, for I feared he would never come to it. "You remember, the one with which Signor Magi used to clinch the argument."

Don Antonio closed his eyes and leaned back again, and after a long pause he began the narration.

"As far as I remember it, it went like this. I won't reproduce Fortunato Magi's gestures—you must imagine them. He was terribly worked up. A great crime had been committed. He loved the name of Puccini, and he did not desire it to be desecrated—"

"Please keep to the story, Don Antonio."

"Well then, it happened that Giacomo and Zizzania were hard up. They were always hard up, but now they were more so than they had ever been. It was Zizzania who hit upon a new way of making money. He was a sculptor as well as a painter. He had dreamed up a brilliant new idea and he ran to share it with Giacomo. The idea was to make a clay mask of himself and then paint it so vividly that it would look exactly like him, and then he would go on to make a clay mask of his own hands and paint them. What he intended to

do was to reproduce himself as a dead man. He could make the body out of an old jacket and a pair of pants stuffed with rags. Then all that was necessary was to decide where to put the corpse. They discussed the matter for some time and agreed that the best place was Signora Santini's cellar near Piazza Napoleone. It was an old damp cellar, the proper place for a corpse. Naturally Signora Santini knew nothing about the affair. She spent a few days each week in the country. That gave them the opportunity to creep in one evening, force open the cellar door and set the stage for a masterly suicide—Zizzania's suicide.

"I said it was masterly, and believe me, there has rarely been such a magnificent corpse. There was Zizzania hanging from the cellar beam—a ghastly sight! His neck was swollen by the tightening of the cord, his eyes were bulging and his hands hung limp at his side. Whoever entered that chamber of horrors would obviously run away screaming. Zizzania, having performed his task to perfection, removed himself from circulation and took up his abode in an attic.

"During the following days Puccini could be seen walking disconsolately through the streets of Lucca. He looked desperately alone. For months he and Zizzania had been inseparable. People asked about Zizzania. 'Where's Zizz?' asked Luigi, the art student. 'Where's Zizz?' asked Maddalena, the young widow who lived a few doors from Puccini. Anna, the dark-haired girl who worked in the cigar factory, taunted Puccini. 'So Zizz has gone away and deserted you for one of his fifty sweethearts?' she said. Giacomo shook his head. He said he didn't know what had happened to Zizzania. He looked depressed, pale and anxious.

"On the third day he confided to one of Zizz's friends at the academy that he was worried. He sighed. 'Something terrible may have happened,' he said. 'Poor Zizz. You know his financial circumstances, and then the poor boy has lately been having such strange ideas in his head. I remember he was even talking of suicide.'

"The rumors spread. Everyone became concerned over the fate of Zizzania. The strangest rumors floated about, the wildest stories gained currency, and the most improbable questions were asked. 'Where's Zizz?' became the wonder of the hour. Finally, one of the instructors at the art academy decided that the mystery should be reported to the *Carabinieri*. The Carabinieri decided that the matter was within their province, and they went in a body to console the weeping Maddalena. 'We'll find him,' they said. Just about that time Signora Santini returned from the country. Chance took her down to the cellar. She gave one hideous scream, and then fell in a dead faint. Someone heard her scream and investigated.

"Soon there was a whole crowd of neighbors in the cellar, looking open-mouthed at what seemed to be a dead woman lying on the floor and a dead man hanging from a beam. There was no doubt that the man was dead, but they were not so certain about the woman, and eventually they revived her with smelling salts. Then they crowded round the hanged man, barely recognizable in the dim light. It was Zizz! Poor Zizz! He was a good fellow, a capable artist, and everyone knew he was poor. Please don't touch the body. Wait for the Carabinieri. And then the Carabinieri came down the cellar steps and it was not long before they had cut down the corpse

and discovered that it wasn't a corpse at all. Some of the people in the cellar were laughing, others cursing. Who played this trick on us? Who has been trying to fool us? Zizz and Puch—it couldn't be anyone else. Zizzania and that long-necked, droopy-eyed Puccini who was always running around with him! The Carabinieri had become laughing stock. In revenge they sought the order for the arrest of Zizzania on the charge of faking a suicide. Puccini was forced to reveal the hiding place of his accomplice. Zizzania surrendered. A trial in court followed. The judge gave Zizzania a severe reprimand. Then he said to Puccini: 'Young man, remember who you are. In Lucca we are proud of our tradition of serious musicians, Boccherini, Pacini and your ancestors among them. They were poor men, but they were law-abiding, except of course for Paganini, who was the only black sheep. He sold his soul to the devil and stabbed his rival in love, but he was punished with a term of imprisonment—remember that. Except for Paganini all the musicians of Lucca have been gentlemen. Let this be a warning to you and your friend Zizzania.'

"The case was dismissed. Puccini and Zizzania were allowed to go home after promising to comport themselves with dignity in the future. Before they left the courtroom they requested a parting favor from the judge. Might they have his permission to re-enact the scene for the benefit of the public? The permission was granted.

"So once again the dummy was suspended from the cellar-beam and everyone who had heard the story came crowding into Signora Santini's cellar on payment of half a lira. Puccini collected the admission fee at the door, and Zizzania acted the

part of the barker. 'Here you are, ladies and gentlemen! I'm alive and dead. See me dead and see me alive!'

"When the last visitor had left there was a huge pile of coins in Puccini's hat. Zizzania allowed the coins to trickle through his fingers and said, 'Well, we ought to celebrate.'

"Celebrate they did over good food and good wine, until both of them were gay and they went out to serenade the statue of Matteo Civitali which lies near the church of San Michele, Puccini singing in a voice which revealed no exceptional talent while Zizzania played on an imaginary mandolin, till the Carabinieri came and chased them to bed."

"Is that the end of the story?" I asked.

"No, it's not quite the end," Don Antonio answered. "You see, Fortunato Magi was perplexed. All the time he had been telling the story Signora Puccini was smiling. He did not understand it. He thumped the table and said, 'Mark my words, the boy will never come to any good.' Finally he left her. It was eleven o'clock. Like everyone else in Lucca she knew the story, but she was pleased to listen to it again. Signora Puccini took up her knitting. She could hear the heavy breathing of her youngest son, Michele, who was sleeping upstairs, a quiet boy who studied music but had none of Giacomo's furious gifts. She spent a little while rearranging the downstairs room in the Via di Poggio, seeing that everything was in good order, as she did every night before retiring, and she glanced affectionately at the portraits hanging in a row along the wall, as though she were bidding them good night. There were the familiar portraits of the Puccini ancestors going back for two centuries: all of them were musicians. She knew by heart the most minute details of these por-

traits hanging on the faded walls. She glazed at them with the mild, languid, cowlike eyes which Giacomo inherited, and she glanced for a moment at the three-volume diary in which all the Puccinis had described a part of themselves, so leaving a memory of themselves for posterity, and then she went upstairs to bed."

"But that has nothing to do with the story of Giacomo and Zizzania," I objected.

"It has a great deal to do with it," Don Antonio said. "When you are older you will learn that stories have to have a beginning and an end. What I have told you is what came at the end of the story of Puccini and the Painted Corpse."

CHAPTER TWO

Portraits on the Wall

The time came when I was able to examine the portraits on the wall and was allowed to turn over the pages of the diary in which the Puccinis recorded their history, their earnings, what music they had written, what sacred and profane feasts they had attended, the dates of their births, marriages and deaths.

I learned that the Puccinis came originally from the small village of Gello which nestles high up in the mountains of Val di Roggio. When they came down to the plains they seem to have brought with them like a viaticum of eternal life the echo of the rustling chestnut leaves and the howling of the winds, the songs of fountains and the chirping of the mountain birds.

The first Giacomo Puccini who achieved fame as a musician was born in Lucca in 1712. Lucca in those days was still enveloped in the splendor that reached its peak in the seventeenth century, when the churches were decorated with rich damasks and brocades and all kinds of theatrical lighting effects were introduced into the solemn ceremonies. At that time the

wealthy merchants took an active part in the life of the church. The fine arts were in decline, but music flourished in the seminaries of San Michele and San Giovanni.

Giacomo Puccini began his studies in Lucca, continued them in Bologna, and then returned to Lucca where he became organist in the Cathedral of San Martino and later maestro of the *Cappella* of the Republic. Bologna had a deep influence on him. It was the mecca of all musicians, the home of the famous Padre Martini and the Accademia Filarmonica, the bridge between Rome, the center of ecclesiastical music, and Naples, the center of melody. Giacomo would send his compositions to Padre Martini and ask him to run his "well-purged eye" (*purgatissimo occhio*) over them, which the learned priest did to the benefit of the compositions.

Let us look first at the painting of this Giacomo Puccini. The date is probably 1730. He gazes out of the frame with round rosy cheeks, his eyes are alive and deep-set, he wears his curly hair à la Pompadour, his clothes flow graciously and one sensitive hand holds a roll of music as if it were a royal scepter. The scroll, of course, signifies a baton, and on it someone has written the inevitable pompous epitaph: *Here is the true portrait of the great master who in the fullness of his genius was inspired to conduct his harmonious compositions.* Everything in the painting suggests the serenity of life in Lucca in the eighteenth century.

Look closer, and you will see how well fed he is. The nuns fed him well when they employed him to produce music on the occasion of the profession of young novices. Sometimes these services lasted four hours. At the end the concertmaster was rewarded with pigeons, fruit, wine, capons and sweet-

meats. Once when he complained about the inadequacy of this stipend paid in food, they added two bologna hams and a corset for his wife Angela. The lace-trimmed corset was very beautiful, for Angela said, "You must be satisfied now, Giacomo, the nuns have been very good to us."

Giacomo Puccini composed for the Church and the theater in a style like Pergolesi's. From 1741 to 1768 he composed librettos for the *tasche,* those musical performances which celebrated the election of the magistrates of Lucca. His *pieni* and fugues—the original scores are still preserved in the archives of the Boccherini Institute—are colorful compositions and show his innate musical skill. Unfortunately he was poor. The records show that he borrowed 200 scudi from the Comune of Lucca to send his son Antonio Benedetto Maria to Bologna to continue his musical training, and so inherit the position of cathedral organist from his father.

Now look at the portrait of Antonio Benedetto Maria, who was a composer of psalms, motets and Masses. He is painted at a moment of musical enchantment, so beautiful that he resembles a vision. The boy was so infatuated with music that he married a young organist, Signorina Caterina Tesei, who sometimes substituted for him in the choir loft at San Martino. They had a child, Domenico. He, too, studied at Bologna, where he came under the influence of Padre Mattei, a renowned director and composer. Later he went to Naples, where he studied under the famous Paisiello. This Paisiello wrote motets and symphonies and more than a hundred operas, among them the sparkling *La Serva Padrona,* which is still included in operatic repertoires. Paisiello also wrote *The Defeat of Darius,* which was staged at the San

Carlo Opera House in Naples in 1775 with a spectacular cast of five hundred actors and fifty horses.

While Domenico was studying under Paisiello, Italy was being overrun by Napoleon. When he returned to Lucca, there were new rulers, the sister of Napoleon, Princess Elisa Baciocchi, and her husband Felice. Happily, they were music-lovers. Recognizing Domenico's talents they appointed him director of the Cappella Musicale. But the political fortunes of the Baciocchi were short-lived. After Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo new rulers came to Lucca from the family tree of the Bourbons of Parma. Maria Luisa and her son Ludovico, known as Duke Leopold II, were also music-lovers. They appointed Domenico director of the Royal Orchestra, but they gave him only a miserable stipend, and sometimes forgot to pay his salary. Domenico became so poor that he was compelled to implore the benevolence of Duke Leopold. He wrote:

HIGHNESS,

I, your most humble servant and faithful subject, do supplicate your throne. Encouraged by the sovereign munificence and clemency with which you have at other times heeded my prayers, I take my courage in my hands to reveal to you my unhappy plight, being now deprived of the subsidy I received as Director of Music at the Court of Your Imperial Highness.

This deprivation has placed great difficulties upon me and my family, and prevents me from exercising the little ability I possess in the service of Your Highness, which is my earnest and sole ambition.

In expectation of Your Highness's favorable reply and consolation, I am Your Highness's most humble servant,

DOMENICO PUCCINI

A favorable reply came soon afterwards from the Chancellor of the State of Lucca. The reply read:

> I am ordered to communicate to you that His Imperial Highness has appointed you Maestro and Director of the New Municipal School of Music with the stipend of eight hundred sixty-three francs.

This act of generosity enabled Domenico to bring up his large family in comparative comfort. Domenico proved himself worthy of the imperial benevolence. He wrote much religious music and two operas called *The Arrow of Love* and *The Capricious Woman.* The music critics spoke highly of his hymn to St. Joseph. Domenico died after drinking sherbet. They said he was poisoned because he showed his democratic leanings at a time when they were dangerous. At the hour of his death the Imperial Austrian Armies occupied Lucca.

Then there is the portrait of Domenico's son, Michele, who was born in 1813 and who became the father of our Giacomo. The portrait is a miniature painted about 1855, when he was in the fullness of his strength. There is a great tenderness in the mouth and the eyes, and he has something of the expression of his son. He, too, inherited the family traditions, studied in Bologna and Naples, where he was taught by Mercadante and Donizetti, and returned to the organ loft at San Martino. There he played his grandfather's compositions and gave lessons to supplement his organist's stipend. In time he became a celebrity. People loved to call him "professor." The Lucchesi historians linked his name with Pacini and Boccherini, those great luminaries in the musical sky of Lucca. Then he married Donna Albina Cerù, who gave him eight

children. Six of them were girls. He gave them the most beautiful names he could think of—Tomaide, Nitetti, Iginia, Ramelde, Macrina, Otilia. The two boys were Giacomo, born on December 22, 1858, and Michele, born three months after his father's death. After her husband's death Donna Albina was faced with long years of struggle. She had been born poor, now she was poor again, with eight children to care for and an old sick mother-in-law.

I think she knew her son Giacomo would become more famous than his ancestors, perhaps even more famous than all the other Lucchesis, in a way more famous than San Davino or San Frediano, though it should be remembered that neither of these two great saints was a Lucchese by birth. San Davino, according to the legend, was an Armenian who gave his wealth to the poor, forsook his family and traveled the world over with a heavy cross on his back, fasting continually. Eventually he came to Lucca. He stayed in the house of Donna Atha, fell ill, and died in the odor of sanctity. Every year on his feast day the priest of the Church of San Michele, where the saint lies buried, touches the heads of the worshippers with San Davino's skull-cap, reputed to heal all the ills of the spirit and the body. Then there is San Frediano, an Irishman who changed the course of the Serchio with a little rake, because in spring the river was swollen with the melting snows of the Apennines and threatened to inundate the town. He went to the river, knelt in prayer, then rose and began walking, trailing the rake behind him, and the river followed, and never since that day have the waters of the Serchio threatened the city.

Like everyone else, Donna Albina knew the stories and

legends of Lucca. It was her prayer that there would also be legends and stories concerning Giacomo.

Yet in the beginning there were few signs that Giacomo would be renowned throughout the world. He played like all the other children on the bastions. He was full of pranks. He was lazy and temperamental and well shaped, and so were all the other children. They did, however, tell one story about him which people remembered long afterwards, because it was so entirely characteristic of him. He was playing hide and seek. Sent out to hide, he concealed himself in an old century tree, covering his face with his hands. There he stayed, and when they came to find him the tears were streaming down his cheeks and he was shaking with grief.

"What happened?" they asked.

At first Giacomo refused to say, then he told how he had seen a funeral procession while he was hiding.

"An old woman was being taken to her grave in Sant' Anna, and I couldn't stop crying because I remembered my aunt was buried there. I am playing in the sun while she is in the dark grave alone."

Donna Albina used to say she had detected his talents very early. "He is quick-tempered and unruly, but terribly affectionate," she would say. "There were ten of us in the family after his father died, and so I couldn't care for him as much as I wanted to, but he loved me and always listened to me. When he was ten he started to sing soprano in Martino's choir and for the feast of Santa Croce he earned two lire. Then his voice changed, and he sang contralto. He made rapid progress under Carlo Angeloni's patient teaching at the Istituto Musicale."

This is what Donna Albina said when Giacomo was sixteen and had already won the first prize for performance on the organ. In fact, the people said he could have been the official organist of the cathedral if the three judges had been fair to him.

His teacher Angeloni was the type of musician once described by Ouida in one of her novels: he was the musician who is born, is reared and dies in the shadow of his campanile. He was excessively modest, never thought about fame and his reticence was such that he never permitted himself to trespass beyond the limits of his beloved city. In all this he resembled the famous Amilcare Ponchielli, the humble bandmaster of Cremona, who spent ten years trying to muster the courage to go to Milan and present his opera *I Promessi Sposi*. Later, of course, with his *Gioconda* he blazed like a star in the sky.

Meanwhile Giacomo was always poor. Occasionally on Sundays he was summoned by the proprietor of the Buon Gusto, a caffé in Lucca where music was played for the guests, and there he accompanied Signorina Rustici on the piano. For this he received five lire and as many pastries as he could gather from the tray which the good proprietor prepared for the visitors. Frequently, too, Giacomo played at the more fashionable casino at Bagni di Lucca, where the young bloods of Lucca flirted to their hearts' content. He was also invited to play at the bathing pavilion at Lerici called Venere Azzurra. On these occasions he arranged that the piano should be placed in such a way that he could look out over the sea while he was playing. For some reason the sight of the sea always made him melancholy; and he returned to the old

house in Via di Poggio depressed, taking refuge in his room where he threw himself down on the bed and refused to receive any of his friends.

Then, too, like his ancestors before him, he accepted engagements in the village churches and convents. He went as far as Mutigliano, Pescaglia and Gello whence his ancestors came. The priests of Val di Roggio had a particular fondness for him, and invited him to stay for dinner after High Mass, whereupon they presented him with roast kid and wine from the vineyards of Ponte a Moriano.

It was during these journeys, according to his sister Ramelde, that Giacomo came to learn the songs of the countryside and became attentive to the beauty of bird-songs. Tramping along the olive-groves and rice-fields, he would stop to listen to the voices of the peasant girls, who sang the true Tuscan folk songs—the *rispetti,* which are made up of six or twelve lines, and the *stornelli,* which are songs where the name of a flower is announced and followed with a simple little rhyme, as in Browning's lines in "Fra Lippo Lippi":

Flower o' the broom,
Take away love,
And our earth is a tomb.

Tuscany is full of these songs. Many sound very modern to our ears, though in fact they date from the Middle Ages. They are the native product of our mountain villages and valleys moistened by the Serchio and the Arno rivers. There is nothing extraordinary in the fact that Tuscany should be the fertile home of poetry, for since Dante Alighieri's time, Italian in its purest form has been spoken here. These *stor-*

nelli are the spontaneous expressions of a Tuscan's love of his soil; and so these songs burst from him as he labors with his plow behind the great white oxen, or tills the soil between his vines. These songs echo the voices of the nightingales among the acacia trees and the sharp screams of the swallows: they are all love-songs, and the images they use are the simple ones which nature places before every Tuscan.

These peasant songs entered into Giacomo's consciousness when he was very young: they entered even into his organ music. He had a style of his own. Under his impatient fingers the old instrument found new voices, new experiences, new life. More than once, when he was playing in the convent chapels, the nuns listened restlessly during the Mass when, at the high solemn moment of the Consecration, the *vox humana* or the *unda maris* of the organ played a melody which had more in common with the passionate dialogues of Romeo and Juliet than a conversation between the naked human soul and God. And people remembered how occasionally the old bellows pumped by Giacomo's brother Michele groaned with an insufficiency of air, while Giacomo's fingers raced over the yellow keyboard. They remembered too that at the end of the Mass, when the people left the church, they were often greeted with a recessional march shocking to their liturgical ears for the triumphant display of drums, cymbals and bells.

Giacomo's sister Iginia, who was preparing to become an Augustinian nun under the name of Sister Giulia Enrichetta, complained bitterly.

"Our learned and saintly Cousin Don Roderigo Biagini says

it is not proper," she told him. "You should play in the solemn style appropriate for divine worship."

Giacomo disagreed.

"During Mass and Benediction—yes," Giacomo argued, "but when the service is over there is no reason why the recessional shouldn't be joyous and happy."

"You are trying to outdo the theater," Iginia commented.

To the end of her days she remained a staunch defender of the liturgical style. Professed when she was nineteen, she taught music to the novices and became a reputable pianist and organist, and was always running for advice to her cousin Don Roderigo. According to Giacomo, Don Roderigo's tastes were unswervingly pedantic. The old canon was one of those who insisted on safeguarding "the purity of the ancient traditions." When some citizens proposed the opening of a fifth gate in the historic wall of Lucca to cope with the increased traffic, Don Roderigo joined the archeologists and politicians who cried: "No fifth gate! We have four gates, and they are enough! Let us not interfere with the sacred linden trees along the wall! Let us preserve the fragrant shade for those who stroll round our walls!" And so the operation on the wall was never performed.

At the age of seventeen Giacomo was on fire. He had seen Verdi's *Aïda*. It was not an especially good performance, but the miracle was accomplished—he knew at least where his life's work lay. Sister Iginia was right when she said his genius led to the theater, not to ecclesiastical music. All his zest for life, his unquenchable interest in human beings—their loves, their hates, their sorrows—and all his humor and deep pity for the frail, and even his love for practical jokes, all these could find

an outlet in writing for the theater. As he returned home, with the strains of *"Celeste Aïda"* echoing and re-echoing through all the nerves of his body and through his heart, his mind was made up.

But Pisa was only a step along the way. He was no longer the same person after the journey to Pisa. He would go further. The next journey would lead him to Milan, the musical center of the world. He would study until he had exhausted every detail of the theater. He who hated study and shirked it would place himself under the best masters, as Verdi had done—that incredible Verdi, now verging on seventy, who was still in full vigor of his musical genius. What Verdi had done, he—Giacomo Puccini, the son, the grandson, the great-grandson, the great-great-grandson of composers—would do. He made his pledge on the night he left the theater. Years later he remembered that the night sky above his head was soft and warm. In it he read the eternal promise of the stars.

He set himself to studying with desperate seriousness. He studied literature, wrote essays on Ariosto and Tasso, and filled pages with his music, and sometimes he would insert little prayers for food on the ruled paper, such as: *Che fame . . . maccheroni* . . . and these little notes complaining of his hunger for macaroni are studded through his music. He outdistanced his brother Michele; but he also outdistanced another student of great promise called Alfredo Catalani, another Lucchese. He obtained his diploma from the Istituto Musicale Pacini in organ and harmony. He started a course in counterpoint, composed an elegy called *Crisantemi* in memory of Amadeo di Savoia, a cantata called *La Speranza,* three minuets, some religious hymns, and a Mass in honor of San

Paolino. He gave lessons, for which he charged sixty centesimi, fifty centesimi more than Verdi received for his lessons when he was a young man. But though money passed through his hands he remained poor, most of his earnings going to Donna Albina, who allowed him a few soldi for cigarettes. He had a passion for cigarettes and was miserably unhappy without them.

The time had come for the leap to Milan. Very solemnly, Giacomo presented his case to Donna Albina. He must go, just as his great-great-grandfather Giacomo had gone, but how? When faced with the same problem great-great-grandfather had borrowed money from the Comune of Lucca and returned it later with interest. The investment had been considered a good one. Exactly the same thing had happened when grandfather Domenico wanted to help his son Michele. But Donna Albina shook her head. She was not sure the money could be raised. She consulted the relatives. Everyone knew that Giacomo was something of a scamp, who played all kinds of tricks to keep the money which was handed to him in a sealed envelope by the Mother Superior of the Barbantine Convent, where he played for the nuns. In the end it had been arranged that the money should go directly to Donna Albina, otherwise it would all be squandered on tobacco. Hadn't he stolen the organ pipes with Zizzania, and provoked the fury of the priest, who would have brought the two culprits to court if Donna Albina had not begged for pardon and Don Roderigo had not offered a purse of ducats? Everyone knew that Giacomo was not dependable. You could see him any day arm-in-arm with Zizzania, both of them enshrouded in smoke from their detestable cigars, which they cut in half,

so that they would last longer. Everyone in Lucca knew of their nocturnal wandering, their uproarious behavior, their clowning and their spicy conversation. Don Roderigo was especially emphatic concerning Giacomo's morals.

"What I deplore most," said Don Roderigo sententiously, "is his association with that girl Lola, who lives in what is undoubtably a questionable house in the Via della Dogana. Of course, Giacomo says he goes there to play music, but we know . . ."

Giacomo had many friends, but he also possessed powerful enemies, the Carabinieri among them. It was out of the question that he should obtain a loan from the municipality. Then where would he obtain one?

"We must think of some way," he said earnestly.

Donna Albina, who had never been able to resist the wiles of her son, wrote down the names of all their relatives, even to the most distant cousins, but these lists offered little encouragement.

"There's Fortunato Magi," said Donna Albina hopefully.

"No use," Giacomo replied grimly. "He hates me. He won't ever forget that he used to kick me. Besides, he has been overgenerous to us. He has already given us six hundred lire, half of his stipend. What about Dr. Cerù?"

Dr. Cerù was a physician, a bachelor, tall, lean and nervous. He was the brother of Giacomo's grandmother. The newspapers always lampooned him by showing him lighting his cigar by the flame of a street lamp. He was reported to have excellent taste in music. Shrewdly, Giacomo had picked on the likeliest bird of the covey. Even by mentioning the name he seemed nearer his goal. Yes, he must go to Milan and Dr. Cerù would help him to bring honor to Lucca. Lucca

had done well by the early Puccinis. And in return, the great ones of the past, Giacomo, Antonio Benedetto Maria, Domenico and Michele had all settled down in Lucca, teaching choristers, taking on a few private pupils to eke out their salaries, composing Masses, motets, anthems and hymns and playing divinely in the old organ loft at San Martino. Giacomo presumably would do the same. But now he was six feet of restless energy and curiosity. Yes, first he would go to Milan.

He went at once to Dr. Cerù's office, which smelled of ether and was so low that the tall doctor's head was always in danger of crashing against the ceiling.

"Uncle Cerù," Giacomo said, "I have brought you a patient who is badly in need of an operation."

"I know, I know," the doctor replied, straightening himself out and growing taller in the process. "Your mother was speaking about it. I understand it's a financial operation. Well, I am wholeheartedly in sympathy with any young man who wants to improve himself. Obviously the best way to improve oneself lies in going to another city, among strangers, where the prodigy can pit himself against his peers. I don't deny you have talent, Giacomo. I was very proud to hear your latest work, the Mass in honor of San Paolino. I felt that the Cappella Comunale did not do justice to your work, but on the whole the critics were good to you. You can't deny that. And then there were your '*Cantata a Piena Orchestra*' and your '*Minuetto per Instrumenti ad Arco*,' and it seems to me they contain some evident signs of musical ability. Now I want to talk to you about your Mass."

Saying this the doctor began to shuffle the papers and med-

ical prescriptions on his desk, and finally he found a copy of *Progresso.*

"I want to read to you what it says here," he said. "They say the Mass is a work of intelligence with a good distribution of parts and well-balanced instrumentation. So far so good. They applaud the Kyrie, the Qui Tollis, the Agnus Dei and the Motet. Of course they refer also to its faults, they even go into considerable detail about the faults, but on the whole it is clear they approve."

Giacomo was on the edge of his chair. He did not know what the doctor was driving at. The doctor folded the paper and continued:

"Naturally I am not surprised, not in the least. Everyone knows that the Puccinis come from musical stock. *I figli dei gatti prendono i topi*—The offspring of cats always catch mice, as they say. Of course you won't accomplish anything if you stay in Lucca. Well, you'll have to go north. Pack your bags, say good-by to your friends, go to Milan and add splendor to the names of Lucca and Puccini. Yes, you had better go to the *Conservatorio.*"

Uncle Cerù was quite final in his decision: he would help Giacomo, but at the same time he refused to be recklessly generous. At the very lowest estimate tuition, board and lodging for a year at the Conservatorio would cost more than Uncle Cerù could afford. So there were more family conferences, sometimes with the doctor and sometimes without him. There was still no solution. "Patience," said Donna Albina, "we'll find some way."

Find a way she did. She decided to write to Queen Margherita. To honor the occasion she wrote on a sheet of paper

which might have been used for wrapping sausages, and she employed a brilliant scarlet ink squeezed from the berries which Giacomo picked outside Porta Elisa. She wrote:

MAJESTY!

You are the Queen and the mother of all the poor, and you are also the patroness of artists, while I am a poor widow with two children, whose ambition in life is to give them the best education. My children are students of music, and the older of them, Giacomo, shows great promise. For five generations the Puccinis have formed a dynasty of musicians, and if the opportunity should arise, Giacomo will continue the glorious tradition. He has terminated his studies at Lucca; he desires to proceed to Milan, the capital of music. I cannot myself pay his expenses at the Conservatorio, for I have only a meagre monthly pension of 75 lire allowed me by the City Council. The Duchessa Carafa, who knows me well, has encouraged me to write to Your Majesty. Will you therefore in your immense generosity come to the help of a poor mother and an ambitious boy?

Kissing your munificent hand, I am

ALBINA MAGI-PUCCINI

A long silence followed. Margherita di Savoia showed no signs that she had heard of a widow's plight. Then quite suddenly Donna Albina received a reply which promised a small scholarship at the Conservatorio in Milan. There was rejoicing in Via di Poggio. Giacomo's friends came to congratulate him. There was Zizzania, Carlo Carignani, Ferruccio Pieri and the beautiful Maddalena, and they all exclaimed on his good luck, which was no more than a man of his temperament and good looks deserved. From them he received advice on how to take the great world of Milan by the tail and swing it round his head.

CHAPTER THREE

Adventure in Milan

It was the evening of September 13th in the year 1880, and all Lucca—the city of silence—came to life with the annual feast of Santa Croce. In every window tapers burned brightly as dusk settled over the ancient city. Throngs of children lined the narrow streets, watching the colorful procession. The *gonfalonieri* passed in their seventeenth-century uniforms, flanked by bearers of huge votive candles, unfurled flags, and lanterns; they were followed by rows of Carmelites in black, Capuchins in brown, and Dominicans in white. And after them came the seminarians in their red robes and the monsignors in their golden copes, while at the very end of the procession came the Archbishop, blessing the people with his upraised purple-gloved hand. After the religious procession came the civic group, led by the town band, and the municipal officers carried their standards, accompanied by trumpeters with long silver trumpets and by halberdiers. Bells pealed from the church towers all over the city, while the procession wound its way through the tortuous lanes toward the Church of the Volto

Santo where Dante and Catherine of Siena as well as innumerable emperors, soldiers, rulers and popes had worshiped. It was the last feast of Santa Croce which Giacomo was to see in Lucca for a little while.

The Puccini children, gathered in the house in Via di Poggio, spent the day before Giacomo's departure in sorrow. Not all the children were present: Macrina was dead, Iginia was in her convent. Michele, Giacomo's younger brother, was there, sunk in misery, saying over and over again: "I want to go too," and Donna Albina was saying: "Well, so you do, but you are too young, you haven't even begun your course at the Istituto Musicale and how should I be able to keep two boys in Milan?"

On the day when Giacomo set out for Milan the trees on Lucca's wall were turning yellow and the leaves were falling.

A little crowd gathered at the railway station: the children, Donna Albina, Carlo Quirici, Achille Adorni. Ugo Franceschi was there, singing the aria *"Ritorna Vincitor"* (Return Conqueror) from Verdi's *Aïda,* and Ferruccio Pieri was staggering under the weight of Giacomo's baggage, which included jugs of wine and oil, bread, cheese, and a large sausage to sustain him on the journey. As the train drew away, Donna Albina uttered her final plea: "Write soon and often."

Giacomo was a good letter-writer, and soon the letters came flocking from Milan, and Donna Albina would read them to her brother Fortunato Magi, to Dr. Cerù and to Don Antonio, who became a great expert on those early years of Puccini's struggle with fame. They learned he had passed the examination for admission to the Conservatorio with flying colors. All he had to do was to write the accompaniment for a bass con-

sisting of a single line and develop a melody in D major. He liked Milan. "You may think I am starving," Giacomo wrote, and this particularly frightened Donna Albina until she read the following line: "No, I am not starving. The truth is, I even eat a great deal. I fill myself to the brim with thick soup."

In another letter he wrote:

I've just been to see Madame Donadio in *Stella del Nord* and the famous tenor Naudin in Auber's *Fra Diavolo*. I didn't have to pay much to get a seat in the *piccionaia* [peanut gallery] for the first one, and as for the second it cost me nothing—I managed to get a free ticket from Francesconi who used to be an impresario in Lucca. If I have any loose change in the evenings I go to a caffé, but the truth is that I go rarely—a *poncino* costs forty centesimi. So I go to bed early, for otherwise I am bored walking up and down the arcade. I have a tidy little room, with a distinguished-looking polished walnut stool. In a word I stay here willingly. I don't suffer from hunger. I don't eat very much, but I fill up with *minestrone* and watery soup, and the stomach is satisfied.

On month later he wrote:

Yesterday Bazzini gave me my first piano lesson. It went along very nicely. So far, this is all I have been doing, but on Friday I begin aesthetics. My schedule goes like this: I get up at 8:30 A.M., then go for my lessons, or if there are no lessons I practice on the piano. All I need is a little exercise, but I have to study. Soon I shall get "Angelieri's Method": it's one of those autodidactic methods which leave you free to study by yourself. This lasts till 10:30, when I have breakfast. After that I go out. At one o'clock I return home to study Bazzini's lesson for a couple of hours. From three to five some more piano playing and a little reading of classical music. For the time being I am reviewing

Boito's *Mefistofele,* which a friend has loaned to me. At 5:00 P.M. I enjoy a frugal meal, and it's a very frugal meal indeed. I eat a *minestrone alla milanese* which, to tell the truth, is delicious. I have three servings, some cheese and a half-liter of wine, then I light a cigar and take a stroll through the arcade. At nine I return home dead-tired. I do a little counterpoint without putting my hands to the piano, because we are forbidden to play the piano at night. Then I go to bed and read seven or eight pages of a novel. Such is my life. I beg of you to send me some Lucchese oil: with it I'll season my beans. I can't eat the beans I get here because they are seasoned with linseed or sesame oil.

My informant about the early days of Puccini's life in Milan went on to say that there were always rumors about the pranks he was playing. Even at the Conservatorio the boy was up to mischief. As he told these stories Don Antonio laughed uproariously, rubbed his hands together and threw back his head. It was always easy to make him talk about music and musicians, for there was nothing in the world he liked so much as to discuss the young men of Lucca who acquired fame in music.

So one Easter, when I returned from the seminary to stay in the new house which my father had built on the piazza at Quiesa with the money he earned in Brazil, Don Antonio told me how Giacomo lived in Milan, together with two others, for soon Michele joined Giacomo, and later they were joined by an unknown young music-master from Livorno called Pietro Mascagni. They were all students at the Conservatorio. Michele, the youngest, played the part of servant; and wearing threadbare tweeds, carrying an English traveling bag, he was always being sent out to buy a few kilos of kin-

dling wood. They said Michele always looked as though he had just returned from London. In the evenings the three of them wandered down to the Osteria Aïda. They paid by the month, but it was some months since they had actually paid their bills. This meant that they had to eat what was set before them, and mostly it was little bits of meat hard as hippopotamus rind, and some soup and beans. Although Mascagni was five years younger than Giacomo and did not enter the Conservatorio until sometime later, they became bosom friends.

The room where they all lived was provided with a closet. The closet served a useful purpose: you could always hide in it when creditors were announced. If a creditor came and knocked on the door and said, "I wish to see Signor Mascagni," then Mascagni immediately darted into the closet and pulled the door behind him. At that moment Giacomo would advance to meet the creditor, saying with great politeness, "I deeply regret that Signor Mascagni is not here." And if it was Giacomo who was being pursued, then Mascagni would say the same thing to Giacomo's creditor. This plan happily disposed of creditors who came to their room: it did not dispose of the creditors outside. To avoid these, Mascagni and Puccini drew up a map of Milan and marked in red pencil the streets and *piazzas* where they might be waylaid. Alas, the red marks on Milan were many and the free areas became increasingly rare. It was Don Antonio, too, who told me of the bitter letter which Giacomo once wrote to his sister Iginia. In the letter he said: "My diet is certainly stricter than the diet in the convent, for it consists of rice, bread, herrings and a little coffee after the Sunday dinner. I also have one herring and some Roquefort cheese for my Sunday supper."

Giacomo was reasonably happy in Milan, even though he often complained that since his landlord was also the postman, his letters were opened and the postman would extract the money for the rent and offer it without the slightest compunction to himself as the landlord. Giacomo worked well. Antonio Bazzini, who taught him composition, was a celebrated violinist, so celebrated that Paganini had once encouraged him to make a tour of Europe. He lived in Germany for five years and fell under the spell of German music, composing his opera *Francesca da Rimini* in a compact German style, of rigid aristocratic development, good thematic work and violin virtuosity. It was quite natural that a violinist should give importance to melody when he became a teacher of composition; the gift for melody was prominent in the works of his numerous pupils. Amilcare Ponchielli, who also taught Giacomo, had long ago set his face against the German school and more than anyone else was responsible for maintaining the Italian musical traditions, taking the middle course between the traditionalists who regarded even Verdi's *Falstaff* as revolutionary and the modernists who loudly extolled *Lohengrin* and Boito's *Mefistofele*. Don Antonio used to say: "Giacomo is surely to be envied. Why, when he was a struggling student, living on a diet of beans and herrings, he was granted the immense good fortune of mingling with the immortals." And if I asked Don Antonio who the immortals were, he would answer, "Every fool knows they are Ponchielli, Boito and Verdi. At any rate those are the gods in my resounding heavens."

Don Antonio was not however my only informant concerning the doings of Giacomo in his youth. There was my old

piano-teacher in the seminary, Signor Tramonti, a shabby man with a blond mustache and two bulging eyes, who never walked but seemed instead to make little dancing steps. One morning when I came into the cold classroom without my coat, he said, "That reminds me of the story of Puccini's coat."

"Please tell us the story," we pleaded.

Signor Tramonti suddenly realized the enormity of his crime.

"No, I am afraid the story is a little indelicate, it certainly shouldn't be told to young seminarians."

With that he ordered us to resume our lessons.

There came a time when Signor Tramonti relented, though he warned us that we must never let the rector know he had related it. In fact there was very little that was indelicate about the story. As Signor Tramonti told the story it went like this:

One evening in Milan Giacomo fell in love with a beautiful ballet-dancer at La Scala. He was determined to receive her favors, but he had no money and he knew she would look unfavorably upon a penniless student. The only thing he could put in the pawnshop was a new coat which had recently arrived from his mother. After much debating with himself he pawned the coat, for which he received seventeen lire. With this money he returned in triumph to the stage-door of La Scala. Giacomo decided to take her to the most fashionable restaurant and press his case. He was also under the illusion that a thin little ballet-dancer would have a small appetite. He was wrong. She had a voracious appetite, with the result that all the seventeen lire melted away in a single evening. But Giacomo had his reward. After pouring out in-

numerable glasses of *malvasia,* he passed the night very splendidly indeed.

The next day the wind blew cold from the Alps, and all Milan shivered. Giacomo huddled in his thin jacket and tried not to think too longingly of the beautiful coat in the pawnshop. To keep warm, he fed the open fireplace with old opera scores and manuscripts, but when the cold grew unbearable he wrote an urgent appeal to his mother. But it came at the wrong time. Donna Albina had just finished writing an appeal to the Mayor of Lucca which read:

HONORABLE MAYOR:

The undersigned is writing to you humbly to explain as follows. Receiving an allowance of only 67 lire a month to support my family, and being deprived of the help of my married daughter, and due to the fact that I am keeping my son Giacomo at the Conservatorio in Milan, I find myself in dire need, and therefore I beg you most humbly to grant me an allowance sufficient to enable me to overcome my present difficulties. I am encouraged by the nobility and munificence of your soul, and I trust to your benevolent disposition to heed this petition.

In answer to Giacomo's appeal Donna Albina made a copy of the letter, adding the postcript: "You will now understand why it is impossible to give you a new coat this year. I am very sorry, but you must use the old one. Multitudinous kisses. Mother."

Giacomo was compelled to resign himself to the cold. It occurred to him that his own multitudinous kisses were having frosty consequences, and he began to sing: "O multitudinous kisses . . ." With a shock we all realized, and so did Signor

Tramonti, that kisses had been mentioned for the first time in the seminary.

Hard times came to Giacomo. If money was hard to find in Lucca, it was even harder in Milan. At the end of Giacomo's first year at the Conservatorio, Queen Margherita's subsidy stopped. Donna Albina once more appealed to the municipal council. A vote was taken. By six votes to one, the motion to subsidize Giacomo was rejected. It was Uncle Cerù who came to the rescue of Giacomo's fortune. He told Donna Albina: "I was going to leave my money to the Puccinis, but I can see now that Giacomo must be supported. Very well, he will have his share today, but he mustn't expect anything later on." So it was arranged. With the money from Uncle Cerù Giacomo was enabled to spend his remaining year at the Conservatorio, so continuing his study of composition with Amilcare Ponchielli, his study of the philosophy of music with Amintore Galli and his study of poetry and drama with Ludovico Corio. He was greatly attracted to the last two courses, but concerning Ponchielli he wrote to his mother: "My teacher is so absent-minded that I bring him the same homework I prepared for Professor Bazzini. I even submitted to him the same fugue three or four times over with only the smallest changes." Donna Albina was distressed by this conduct, but she consoled herself with the thought that if her son had sinned, he was prompt in confessing his sin.

One day toward the end of June 1882 Giacomo returned to Lucca. It was a miserable rainy day. He was drenched through. There was no one on the street to welcome him, and it was only when he came to the old faded house with the green shutters on Via di Poggio, a house exactly like all

the others, that Michele, who had come home earlier, ran out and helped to take the knapsack from his back. His sister Ramelde was home. Nitetti had sent some wine from the hills of Pescia. Donna Albina had baked some *pizzas*. That morning she had received word from the Conservatorio that Giacomo had passed his second year examination with flying colors, and so when he came in she was altogether too overjoyed to speak, she could only kiss him in silence. Soon a feast was prepared. Friends came. Everyone was talking at once. Giacomo learned that Iginia was happy in her convent, Ramelde's husband was dutifully collecting taxes, Otilia was staying in the country with her husband the doctor, and Nitetti, who was now Signora Marsili, would be coming home during the week. Giacomo also learned with sorrow that his uncle Fortunato Magi had died in Venice, where he had been sent to direct the Liceo Benedetto Marcello. Until late at night they exchanged news, and then at last Giacomo said, "Now I am going to sleep in a soft bed—those beds in Milan can be very hard."

But when the celebrations were over the old demon faced them: it was still necessary to get money. Uncle Cerù's money went some way, but it did not go far enough. Donna Albina said, "I'll simply have to go begging again." But this time Giacomo made it quite clear that if there was any begging to be done, he would do it himself. So it was Giacomo who wrote to the mayor:

MOST ILLUSTRIOUS MAYOR OF LUCCA,

After two years of studying composition in the Conservatorio at Milan with happy results, as testified by the honorable mention granted to me during my first year and the extraordinary mention

granted to me this year, I still need another term to complete my course. Mindful of the many benefits bestowed on my family by the Council of this City, now I, the son of Michele Puccini, taking the place of my mother who no longer dares to beg—and remembering how Michele Puccini was held in high honor by the Honorable Council—do plead with you directly for the first time that I may be able to return to Milan and so complete my studies.

With great confidence I address you, Honorable Mayor, in the hope that you will lay my case before the Honorable Council. A favorable reply will ensure my future and the future of my family, which I am most eager to help and sustain.

The letter, written on the feast of the Volto Santo, received no reply.

In despair Giacomo went once again to the doctor who had helped him out so many times before. Dr. Cerù had given Giacomo all he could afford; now he gave more than he could afford, a sum of money which amounted to 150 lire a month.

When Giacomo wrote that his third year at the Conservatorio would ensure the future of his family, he was saying no more than the truth. In this third year his genius flowered. The first product of his flowering was his *Sinfonia-Capriccio.* Ponchielli at first declared, "I can't make anything of it. It's just a *pasticcio* [a mess]." Soon enough he learned to change his opinion. This pasticcio became so famous that Giacomo knew even then that he had retrieved the family's good name.

Of this wonderfully mellow composition, the critic Filippo Filippi, writing in the newspaper *Perseveranza,* wrote a whole column. He said:

Puccini is a charming young Tuscan from Lucca, the son of the brilliant and erudite chapelmaster of the Cathedral. This courageous young man, who for personal and family reasons is compelled to return prematurely to his native city, has been granted a diploma even though according to strict academic rules he lacks a year toward the completion of his studies. But with his great knowledge he has easily complied with the academic requirements.

Together with the *Capriccio* he has submitted a dissertation that gives such ample proof of his mastery and artistry that he has surprised the most sensitive connoisseurs, and has won the favor of the general public, which is guided in its reactions only by its personal impressions. Giacomo Puccini unquestionably possesses the rare essentials of a symphonic composer. I am certain he would be equally successful in the vocal field and in dramatic expression, but his orchestral composition contains so much unity of style, personality, character and brilliant technique as is rarely found among the most mature composers or those who are frequently heard in modern programs. Puccini's *Capriccio,* which is a fiery *allegro* sandwiched between calm digressions, distinguishes itself according to my judgment by its unity and the continuity of its style and color. There are no hesitations in the young composer. Having marked out his theme, he does not wander or vacillate. His ideas are robust, translucent and effective, sustained by the variety and boldness of his harmony, and the different movements are connected according to logical, clear and coherent relationships. The predominant color is strong, sharp, pungent and charming. The reprises are ingenious. The diverting perorations serve as contrasts to the clever harmonies and the intricate weaving of the basses. There is a beautiful predominant conception in the middle tempo which is developed and repeated with increasing effect.

Capriccio has aroused fervent enthusiasm and will take its place among the prize-winners of the year.

"Capriccio" did in fact receive a certificate of merit and a bronze medal after its performance at La Scala. But the last word was not spoken by the critic in *Perseveranza*: it was spoken by Ponchielli, who wrote to Donna Albina: "Those who deserve honors sooner or later receive them. In time your son will achieve his just reward. Remember, with faith and courage the Way of the Cross becomes the Way of the Resurrection."

Meanwhile, there was Giacomo at home in Lucca, sporting a long flowing mustache, conscious of his recently acquired fame, a long-legged handsome man with sleepy eyes. You would see him walking the streets in the company of his friends, striding along in a cloud of tobacco smoke, and sometimes you would find him walking beside a surprisingly beautiful creature called Elvira. Everyone was gossiping concerning her. Who was she? Well, quite a number of people knew she was the wife of a traveling salesman for the Martinazzi Liquor and Wine Company. They remembered she had once sung in a caffé owned by her sister. She adored music. And Giacomo adored her.

About this time he was offered a position at the Istituto Musicale in Lucca but he turned it down with the impatient remark, "Schoolrooms give me claustrophobia." When anyone asked him what he intended to do, he answered by saying he was going to write an opera, which he would submit in the contest that the publisher Sonzogno had announced for the year 1884. Time was running short. He had not yet found a libretto. Donna Albina confided her anxieties to Ponchielli, who in turn approached the poet Ferdinando

Fontana. At that time Fontana, who already had a reputation as a librettist, was poor. He wrote to Ponchielli:

> I should be very happy to be of use to Maestro Puccini, but you know how I am always sailing in shallow water. I have managed to keep the wolf from my door even without resorting to the boring task of writing librettos, and if I write one now I expect to make a profit at least. Therefore I shall write no more librettos for less than 300 lire per act.
>
> However, since I consider myself an intelligent and not unattractive young man, and you know that I am not intransigent and the fee I am quoting is the minimum within reason, and much less than I would earn at some other task though it might be one less glamorous than that of librettist, yet writing a libretto is an appealing occupation and very amusing and more in keeping with my intellectual tastes. Therefore I propose to follow your suggestion, and I ask 100 lire to be paid on the completion of the libretto with an additional 200 lire to be paid if Puccini wins the contest. Surely this is sufficiently reasonable!

So Giacomo went to work on the opera, but he was still preoccupied with Elvira and he worked slowly. The contest closed on December 31, 1883, and still he had finished only one act of the opera by December 18.

He could work quickly when he wanted to. By the end of the month the opera was completed. It was called *Le Villi.* He took it to Milan. There followed the long days of waiting. Donna Albina nearly went out of her mind. Finally the prize-winners were announced. Their names were Tuelli and Mapelli. Giacomo did not even receive an honorable mention.

He was broken-hearted when he returned to Lucca. For a while he believed he had no future. He knew the reputation of the judges: no one could accuse them of incompe-

tence. He was on the verge of losing confidence in himself, had almost decided to abandon composition forever. It was his mother who once more came to his rescue.

"Courage," she said. "The world does not belong to cowards. Return to Milan, the battleground."

She collected two hundred lire, and from the Mayor of Lucca came letters of introduction to influential citizens of Milan.

Giacomo set out for Milan with a heavy heart, soon spent the two hundred lire and once more found himself at the end of his resources. One of the letters of introduction was addressed to Signora Giovannina Lucca, Via Carlo Alberto. One night he went there. A party was going on. He stood in the doorway. From outside he could see the blazing chandelier shaped like a cluster of grapes and the guests wheeling about in the drawing room. He could see Arrigo Boito, the composer of *Mefistofele,* surrounded by a group of young men eagerly listening to his jokes. He rang the bell, and when Signora Lucca introduced him to her guests, the great Boito advanced upon Giacomo who stood there trembling with his hat in his hand.

Glaring at Giacomo through his spectacles, Boito said, "Are you by chance the young man who entered the Sonzogno competition?"

"Yes, Maestro."

"Then let me warn you—the next time you enter a competition write legibly. I was one of the judges. The score of your opera, my dear fellow, was such a labyrinth of notes that I could not decipher it, and may I say this was very unfortunate—I am told you are quite a capable fellow."

At the party there was a guest called Marco Sala, a composer of dance-music and popular songs. He asked Giacomo whether he remembered any part of his opera. Giacomo immediately slipped a roll of music out of his pocket and went to the piano. The more he played the more interested Boito became.

"Go on, go on," he insisted.

When Giacomo reached Fidelia's aria, Boito turned to his friends and said, "I must talk to Stefanoni, the impresario at the Dal Verme Theater. I believe *Le Villi* absolutely deserves to be put on the stage."

Another guest, a Signor Vimercati, said, "I agree with you entirely. Stefanoni will do it, if he can get the right backing."

"I'll contribute fifty lire," Boito exclaimed.

Vimercati offered another fifty lire, Marco Sala promised sixty, Signora Lucca promised forty and there was also an anonymous contribution of fifty lire. This made two hundred and fifty lire. A toast was drunk to the success of *Le Villi,* and Giacomo rushed to his lodging to write his mother:

DEAR MOTHER,

My operetta is going to be performed at the Dal Verme Theater. I did not write about it before because I wasn't sure. A group of local gentlemen, including some very great people like Boito and Scala have subscribed money to cover the expenses. I am writing to our relatives and to Dr. Cerù to raise money to help me print the score. I need at least 200 lire or more, if possible. I hope things will change. How are you? Michele feels fine and sends you his love. I shall write you more, but now I am terribly busy. Imagine not having time to write to my dear good Mama. Be cheerful. A kiss.

But Giacomo wrote too soon: on the day before the opera was scheduled to be performed, Stefanoni was still short of one thousand lire and on the walls of Milan there could be seen a huge poster which read: "On account of unforeseen difficulties the performance of *Le Villi* is indefinitely postponed."

This was more than Giacomo could bear. He summoned his friends to the rescue. Everything that could conceivably be pawned, jewelry, coats, watches, walking-sticks, even opera scores, were taken to the pawnshops until the requisite thousand lire were obtained.

Le Villi was staged at the Dal Verme Theater on May 31, 1884. Its success was extraordinary. The music critic of the *Corriere della Sera* wrote: "We believe Puccini to be the composer Italy has been waiting for." Marco Sala wrote in *Italia*: "Puccini's work is a masterpiece, and we have a great composer among us." Giacomo, overcome by his success, telegraphed to his mother: "Amazing success beyond all expectation. Magnificent orchestral ensemble including Toscanini Buzzi-Peccia Tirindelli Campanini. Eighteen curtain calls. Three encores after the first finale."

Still more important, the attention of the great music publisher Giulio Ricordi was now riveted on the young composer. Ricordi, who published Verdi, offered to publish Puccini. Giacomo was overjoyed, immediately accepted the offer and found himself commissioned to write a second opera. When the contract was signed, Giacomo received a thousand lire and the promise of a monthly allowance which would at least take care of necessities. With the thousand lire in his pocket Giacomo rushed off to the Osteria Aïda.

In a loud imperious voice he shouted: "Waiter, waiter, come here. Now listen carefully. I don't want any more hippopotamus meat. Give me chicken broth, roast beef *all' inglese,* mushrooms and asparagus; then I shall want the best salad with garlic drowned in Lucchese oil; and then my favorite Roquefort cheese—I want it ripe enough to see the maggots—and that's not all. I want a bottle of muscatel and a basket of the wild strawberries which are grown in the fields above Lake Como . . ."

The waiter thought he was playing some kind of joke and beckoned to the proprietress. Giacomo made her a low bow and pressed a thousand lire banknote in her hands: *"Riverisco, signora.* Kindly take away the three hundred lire I owe you, and have the goodness to remove my name from your idiotic blackboard." Saying this, he threw his arms around her and bussed her on both cheeks. "And let me have the best table in the restaurant," he concluded.

The opera *Aïda* had given him his first taste of spiritual satisfactions; the Osteria Aïda in Milan gave him his first gargantuan meal. A few hours later he gathered all his friends together at the Caffé Biffi, waved a fistful of banknotes at them and shouted like any soapbox orator: "Death to poverty! Everyone shall be rich today! Come on! Advance to the Biffi—." To his brother Michele he said, "You can't wear your wretched coat any longer. Buy a new suit, and I might add that Dal Pino of Lucca is the very best tailor."

The triumph was short-lived. A few days later he heard that his mother lay dying at Lucca.

He rushed to her bedside, gave her the laurel wreath he had won and watched her dying in his arms. Before she died

she slipped her ring on his little finger. It was a token between them; for the rest of his life Giacomo wore the ring which always symbolized for him the moment when he experienced simultaneously his greatest joy and his greatest suffering.

Bewildered, not knowing where to turn, he spent a few days in Vicopelago near the convent where his sister Iginia was a professed nun. In memory of his mother he promised to provide the little chapel with a new organ.

Then where? He did not know. He wanted to be alone. Elvira Gemignani and her husband offered him the hospitality of their home in the Piazza Bernardini, but it was too close to his own home. In the end he went to a small fishermen's village called Torre del Lago on the shores of Lake Massaciuccoli, and there he buried his grief.

CHAPTER FOUR

Scandal

When I was born no one knew what to call me. Someone suggested I should be called Antonio after my great uncle. "I absolutely refuse," Don Antonio said. "One Antonio in the family is enough. Besides, everyone in Italy is called Antonio." One of my aunts suggested the name Domenico, but I was never called Domenico because another aunt remembered she had once met a drunkard who was called Domenico. There was a cousin from Brazil who suggested Pedro, but that was howled down. Then Don Antonio suggested Edgar. He had good reasons for the choice—that very night the opera *Edgar* by Giacomo Puccini was being produced in Milan. Unfortunately, Don Antonio could not remember whether there was a Saint Edgar, for it was clearly understood that my baptismal name must be mentioned in the Calendar of the Saints, so Edgar was dropped, but not before one of the women loudly complained to Don Antonio:

"What a lamentable idea! I'm ashamed of you! To call this poor innocent lamb Edgar—everyone will know he is named after the opera by that Giac—"

She could barely mention the abhorred name, for by this time everyone knew that Giacomo was living in sin with someone else's wife. A terrible blight had fallen on Lucca. Giacomo had disgraced our town: only Don Antonio had words to say in his favor. In the end I was called Dante, "because," said my father, "Dante is everything; he visited Hell, Purgatory and Heaven, founded Italian literature, was a perfect philosopher, a perfect theologian and a perfect patriot. What is more to the point is that no one else in Lucca has that name."

The fever against Giacomo was widespread, but Giacomo too suffered from a fever. He was restless and miserable. He stayed for a while in Torre del Lago. He was like a ghost. Old Nofori, the fisherman, who used to take me across the lake years later, remembered the time when Giacomo first came to stay in the fishing village. Nofori asked him his trade. "I'm a composer," Giacomo replied, "but after the death of my mother I became a corpse." He returned for a few days to Lucca, and then to Milan, where Ricordi was waiting for him, and Ferdinando Fontana was preparing a libretto. From Milan, Giacomo wrote to his sister Otilia: "I am always thinking of Mamma and last night I dreamed of her. Today I am more melancholy than ever. Whatever triumphs I achieve, I shall never know happiness without her."

He did know some passing moments of happiness. Fontana may not have been an exemplary librettist, but he did everything he could to lighten Giacomo's burdens. It was Fontana who brought him to the beautiful house belonging to Ghislanzoni at Caprino Bergamasco on Lake Como, where half

the musicians of Milan were accustomed to stay in an atmosphere of wild contentment.

Ghislanzoni's chief claim to fame was that he wrote the libretto for Verdi's *Aïda,* an amazingly difficult task, for Verdi would write the music and then order the librettist to produce verses which exactly corresponded to his music. Ghislanzoni was an extraordinary character: a contrabass player, a baritone, a student of medicine, a journalist, a writer of comedies and novels. Above all he was an amusing raconteur. Years later Giacomo remembered how Ghislanzoni had come to the end of a professional career on the stage. As Ghislanzoni told the story: "I was playing Briano in the opera *Templario* by Nicolai. It was the first performance at the Carcano Theater. I was magnificent. No, I was appalling. At the end of my performance there was such a storm of whistles and catcalls that I decided regretfully to retire from the stage, and on the very next day I renounced forever the title of baritone, and I didn't for a moment regret my decision—I felt like a new man."

Giacomo laughed at his jokes and took every advantage of the house on the shore of the lake. His friends were almost absurdly kind. Tirindelli, a classmate of Puccini's, had been appointed professor of violin at the Liceo Benedetto Marcello in Venice. Mascagni suggested a farewell celebration at Ghislanzoni's house, and Giacomo was invited. Ferdinando suggested they should play a game of charades. What should they play? It was decided that Ghislanzoni should be Romeo and Giacomo, disguised in a blond wig and bustle, should play the part of Juliet; and while Romeo serenaded Juliet, Tirindelli played the violin and Mascagni accompanied on the piano.

Originally they decided to come down to the house only for the evening, but the last train for Milan had already gone when they were finishing supper. Nothing to do but stay the night. Fontana shrugged his shoulders and disappeared into some remote recess where he set his mind to the libretto for *Edgar*. Giacomo, removing his stays, his bustle and his blond wig, also retired to the seclusion of a room upstairs. Tirindelli, Mascagni and Buzzi-Peccia arranged to sleep on the floor downstairs. The lights went out. The house was silent as the grave. And then suddenly Mascagni threw a shoe across the room, and Tirindelli threw two shoes, and Buzzi-Peccia groped his way to the piano and sent the candlesticks crashing across the room. The whole place was in bedlam. Giacomo kept shouting: "Beastly little pigs, shut up! I have to work on *Edgar* tomorrow. Let me have some rest. By heavens, if I live through this night I'll take the first train back to Lucca!" The gang from downstairs was then invading Fontana's room. They were shouting happily, and Fontana was bellowing: "O God, save me from this inferno!" All the time Ghislanzoni was hugely enjoying himself. He was always enjoying himself. When he lay dying, he summoned his maidservant Nina to buy him a basket of cherries, and then he begged to be taken out on the balcony where he called to the children on their way to school. "Antonio, Pietro, Beppina, Giovanni, come here, I've got something for you . . ." And shyly, eagerly the children came running up the stairs to receive from his wasted hands the ripe cherries.

The work on *Edgar* lasted five years. There were constant journeys back and forth between Milan and Lucca, interminable correspondence between Ricordi, Fontana and

Giacomo, endless heartaches. It seemed as though *Edgar* would never be finished, would never see the light of the stage.

It was during one of these visits to Lucca that Giacomo fell madly in love with Elvira Gemignani.

He had met her before, and been attracted to her, but this time he was wholly at her mercy. He was desperately lonely. He was a man for whom the companionship of a woman seemed indispensable. He missed his mother terribly. He was in no position to marry, he had no money, and almost no prospects, but from the moment when he set eyes on Donna Elvira walking along the parapet of the medieval wall in the shade of the lindens he was determined to have her. Generally he did not stay in Lucca during the summer: he always complained of its fierce heat. But this summer he stayed. He could be seen leaning against the parapet, smoking cigarette after cigarette, his warm eyes appraising those who passed by. His eyes lit up whenever they fell on Donna Elvira. Gemignani was completely unconscious of his wife's attraction for Giacomo. He would say: "Good morning, Giacomo, how is your music today? Myself, I earn my living by selling the practical necessities of life, but my avocation is music. I am a baritone, and sometimes it occurs to me that there runs through my veins the blood of the illustrious Francesco Geminiani who, as you know, is one of the great lights of music in this ancient city—"

Giacomo would smile and say, "Yes, indeed, and one day you must sing for me. Last night I put a few finishing touches to a *romanza* for baritone, and it might be just the thing for you."

"Well, yes," Gemignani would say, "as soon as I come back from Turin we must get together. There's something I want to tell you. Elvira says she would like to take piano lessons from you two or three times a week. I hardly dare mention it, but if you could afford the time . . ."

Shortly afterwards Elvira was playing scales on the third floor of the house in Piazza Bernardini, with Giacomo watching over her shoulder. She even took singing lessons from Giacomo until her husband interrupted, saying, "I want you to get on with your piano lessons—you have much more talent for piano than for singing." When Gemignani asked Giacomo how she was getting along, he answered, "Tremendous progress." But in fact there was very little progress. After a short lesson they encountered more diverting pastimes, and soon they fell into the habit of going for walks together in that gentle, harmonious landscape filled with sixteenth- and seventeenth-century villas. The very stones hinted at romance. There, not far from Lucca, lay Monte San Quirico: from a palace on its slopes Paolina Buonaparte, the sister of Napoleon, had cried in despair to her lover Giovanni Pacini: "I am weary and miserable. I am very sad to think you have not told me the truth." There, too, was the great aqueduct which stretches for miles across green valleys; and in the dark roads of the pine forests of Viareggio, Shelley had thrown himself down on beds of pine needles to write his burning poems to Emilia Viviani.

Through that long summer Giacomo paid court to Elvira, and in the autumn he returned to Milan, to work on *Edgar*. Meanwhile, in Lucca, when Gemignani returned from a business trip, he was told by the nurse of his two-year-old son that

his wife had fled with Giacomo to Milan. His daughter Fosca, old enough to sense that something had gone wrong, was weeping desperately.

The scandal burst on Lucca like an explosion. Nothing like this had ever happened to the Puccinis before. For generation after generation they had been law-abiding, virtuous and honorable men. Giacomo had brought disgrace upon the whole family. Uncle Cerù wrote saying that if Giacomo could afford to keep a mistress, he could afford to repay the money lent to him for his musical education: the money would be better spent in helping Michele to set up in business in South America. The monthly allowances from Ricordi were insufficient to support the new expenses. Worse still, Elvira was expecting a child. The libretto for *Edgar* involved unforeseen difficulties. Giacomo wrote to Don Roderigo: "I am in despair, so I have said a prayer to San Giacomo asking pardon for what I have done." In reply Don Roderigo pointed out that San Giacomo had been catapulted from the roof of a temple, "and as for you," he added, "you should be catapulted from the roof of the Milan Cathedral." In later years the charitable Don Roderigo regretted these words. They were not, he thought, as charitable as they should have been.

Long before the opera *Edgar* was born Elvira gave birth to a boy. He was called Antonio. Fosca hurried to her mother's side. And now Giacomo's difficulties became so great that he began to dream of emigrating to South America. He had heard that musicians there earned fabulous fees and became millionaires overnight. Michele had already gone to South America and Giacomo wrote: "Dear Michele, I am desperate. It is a miracle that I am alive. I had to move from

my lodgings in Vicolo San Carlo, and from there I went to Via Solferino and then to a place outside Porta Monforte. Now I am being thrown out of this place because of my piano playing. Now you know why I must come to South America, and believe me I am coming soon."

From Michele there came a long letter explaining the vicissitudes of life south of the equator. He wrote:

I warn you—do not come here! You cannot imagine what I have been through. What a life! I left Buenos Aires, where I worked like a slave, with nothing to show for it on account of the high cost of living. Then they told me that in the province of Yoyoy I would receive a position teaching voice, piano and Italian for 300 scudi a month. I crossed the Andes, and after innumerable sufferings came at last to Yoyoy. Of course, as you might expect, the place is full of Lucchesi. There is Signor Franceschi from Benabbio, and Dr. Baldi from Barga, and the Italian Consul promises to employ me as his secretary. These enthusiastic people are continually selecting a wife for me; the news of my engagement is being repeatedly announced in the local newspapers. If I go visiting, and if I talk with one girl for a few minutes longer than another, then of course we are immediately engaged. So far the newspapers have "married" me three or four times over. But America does not suit me. If the gold market improves I shall return to Lucca. Meanwhile I am a little worried by the epidemic of influenza. My classroom is empty. I eat spaghetti, risotto and roast beef to keep myself strong. The minister of education has ordered the school closed.

Probably Michele did not keep strong enough: it was the last message that anyone received from him. Nothing more was ever heard from him. Giacomo cherished the letter, and whenever the name of his brother was mentioned tears came to his eyes.

Meanwhile work went on in a relentless atmosphere of frustration. The task of hammering *Edgar* into shape seemed to be beyond him. Even Ricordi lost patience. He wrote: "Unless you show some results soon, you will have to look for another editor." There were quarrels with Elvira, who threatened to leave him and return to Lucca. She begged him to work. "People will say that you ruined your career over me," she complained. "Don't you know that Verdi composed *Il Trovatore* in twenty-eight days. Then why do you have to spend five years on *Edgar?*" Sometimes she locked him in his room with the piano. Much of this is recorded in the diary Giacomo kept faithfully during these days. Once he wrote: "Worked last night till 3 A.M. Had only onions for supper." This was not however a despairing entry; on the contrary it was probably a very joyful one. Above and beyond all the gifts of the earth Giacomo loved onions.

At last *Edgar* was finished. With Verdi present in the audience, it was played at La Scala on April 22, 1889. And it was a failure.

Giulio Ricordi had complete faith in Giacomo's genius, but not all the members of the Ricordi firm agreed with him. They pointed to the large advances he had made. They reminded him that the critics were almost unanimous in condemning the opera. Then why should they continue to support the boy? Ricordi replied, "If you condemn my faith in him, then you condemn me. If you deny Puccini your protection, then I am ready to sever all connection with the firm. If Puccini does not eventually succeed, then I shall personally reimburse the firm for every penny advanced to him.

My faith is unshakable!" To Giacomo he said quietly, "Forget *Edgar* and get to work on a new opera."

The vast influence of the Ricordi family was now more than ever behind Giacomo. They had the power to make and break composers: at least half of a composer's success might depend upon his publisher. The Ricordi family had been a publishing dynasty ever since the first Giovanni Ricordi bought up the old music-sheets at the Conservatory of Milan and received the title of copyist at La Scala. Then, in the dusty offices under the portico of the Palace of the Archives in Piazza Mercato, innumerable sheets of music were copied by hand. This, however, was a slow process. Giovanni decided to find a faster way. He went to Leipzig and studied German printing methods. In 1880 he returned triumphantly with a printed edition of four sonatas for the French guitar. This was the beginning. He became the publisher of Bellini, Rossini, Mercadante and Verdi. There was no copyright law in those days, and the music was bought outright from the composer. Tito, the son of Giovanni, became the publisher of Verdi. It was Giulio, the son of Tito, who discovered Puccini.

As for Giulio he was a subtle, caustic, good-natured, uncompromising and supremely confident man, a musician in his own right, who published his compositions under the extraordinary name of Bugmein. His failure with *Edgar* had at least one important consequence: it was directly responsible for the production of *Cavalleria Rusticana.*

It happened in this way: Sonzogno was Giulio's rival. Immediately after *Edgar,* Sonzogno announced a competition open to those who were not under contract to Ricordi. For

this contest Pietro Mascagni entered the opera *Cavalleria Rusticana,* which easily received the prize. Giacomo was delighted, and sent Mascagni a letter of congratulations. Elvira remarked, "If Pietrino can do it, so can you. The sensible thing is to go to the country for a while and get busy with a new opera. This time you must write a *real* opera."

Giacomo agreed. He promised himself he would write his own libretto. He took no part in the endless disputes which followed the production of Mascagni's operas. The critics were on the war-path; and Franchetti provided a new turn to the controversy by suggesting that neither Puccini nor Mascagni was the original source of the new music: that honor belonged to Catalani. He noted that the German reviews spoke of *Cavalleria Rusticana* as an offshoot of *Le Villi,* and he suggested that in time *Le Villi* would be seen as the offshoot of the *Elda and Deianice* of Catalani. The battle was waged bitterly. Everyone seemed about to jump on the Mascagni bandwagon. When shareholders of the Ricordi company threw out the suggestion that Giacomo should follow the pattern of *Cavalleria Rusticana,* Giacomo replied with exquisite politeness, "Let me alone. I know what I want to do."

CHAPTER FIVE

La Bohème

Now is the time to tell the story of *Manon* and *La Bohème.* Some of the story I heard from Don Antonio, some I heard from the fishermen of Torre del Lago, and much more I heard from Giacomo's lips.

In those days Torre del Lago comprised only a few fishing huts, each containing a single room which served as living room, bedroom and kitchen. The smell of laurel and rosemary which were sprinkled on the roasting fish, hung over the huts. You would come upon the fishermen's wives warming the yellow corn-flour over the hearthstones until it turned into *polenta.* There was no church and no cemetery in the fishing village: for baptism and burial the newborn and the dead were rowed to Massaciuccoli, a village three miles away buried in the hills facing Torre del Lago. There was nothing stern about Torre del Lago: it was quiet, cut off from the world, very beautiful. Here Giacomo worked and played, hunted wildfowl, rowed in the lake, arranged mysterious assignations with beautiful women in the pine forests, and spent the most contented years of his life. The village was run by the

painter Ferruccio Pagni. Giacomo introduced himself: "I am Giacomo Puccini of Lucca, hunter of melodies and wild duck." Ferruccio Pagni nodded pleasantly. "Well then, you have come to your paradise: you will have good hunting."

Pagni discussed what should be done. First, Giacomo must pay his respects to Venanzio, the caretaker of a neighboring estate, an authority on the customs of the place, and a divinely skilled musician. Then, with regard to food and drink—Ferruccio Pagni at this point stressed the importance of drink—he must pay his respects to the cobbler Stinchi di Merlo, a great connoisseur of wines, who had transformed his shoe-shop into a restaurant and winery. Now if Giacomo proposed to play cards, there was the gifted painter Tommasi from Livorno who would be only too delighted to share the glories and heartbreaks of card-playing. Also (here Pagni lowered his voice) there was another painter called Fanelli, an excellent man, though it was doubtful whether he could properly be called a painter. This fellow was living in the house of the woman Pandora, a *paesana* who was once his model when he was a student in Florence, but now she had lost her figure and occupied her time gathering firewood and peddling fish in Quiesa, Massarosa and some of the neighboring villages, helped out by Fanelli who ocasionally sold one of his paintings. Finally, should he desire the company of some huntsmen, there were Foraboschi, Pipo, Gengino, Ciabatti, Ceci . . . and at this point Ferruccio Pagni reeled off an endless list of names.

So Giacomo made his way to Venanzio's house, rented a floor from him and prepared to continue his career as an operatic composer. Tonio was growing up, looking like a

Donatello angel. Stinchi di Merlo's caffé was near by: it opened directly on the lake, and Giacomo liked to point out that this offered an advantage proper in a place which otherwise provided no toilet facilities. While Tonio played with the children of the boatmen and the peasants, Giacomo played cards with their fathers in the low-ceilinged caffé where the rafters were blackened by smoke and adorned with hanging salami and hard round cheeses. Barefoot or wearing rope sandals, clothed in disreputable trousers and shirts, the inhabitants of Stinchi di Merlo's caffé were admirably fitted to waste their lives away.

There were two victims: Stinchi di Merlo and Elvira. The proprietor of the caffé was reduced to penury, for no one paid for anything. He went off to Brazil, leaving his caffé to the mercy of the artists, the peasants and the fishermen. Elvira was reduced to misery because Giacomo was producing no music and his talent for laziness was now at its height. She would glare in the direction of the caffé, saying over and over again: "Well, they're doing their best to ruin him." Which was true. The caffé, after the departure of Stinchi di Merlo, received the name of Club Bohème—the name was to have considerable influence on Giacomo later. When Elvira taunted the bohemians for not letting her husband alone, they decided to make a peace-offering—they found an upright piano, miserably out of tune, and promptly installed it in the caffé for Giacomo's benefit. So Giacomo played on the piano looking out over the lake, spent most of his time joking with his companions, and lived on fish and wildfowl, though occasionally a scrap of meat would be brought in by friends from Viareggio or Lucca. Giacomo was happy, or at least he gave

the appearance of being happy, but Elvira probably summed up the situation correctly when she said, "Here we eat very little and Giacomo doesn't do a damned thing."

The failure of *Edgar* produced one great good for Giacomo: he was no longer dependent upon the librettos of Ferdinando Fontana. It happened that during the intervals of playing a card-game called *scopa* Giacomo found a copy of the Abbé Prevost's novel *Manon Lescaut*. Basing his libretto on the novel, Massenet had composed his opera *Manon* seven years before. Giacomo went to hear the opera. He was not in the least discouraged by the fact that there was already one opera based on the book; he determined to write another.

He wrote to Giulio Ricordi:

> If you continue to have faith in me, and if you still want an opera from my pen, I have found the perfect subject. Manon is a heroine I believe in, and therefore it cannot fail to win the hearts of the public. No idiotic librettist must be allowed to ruin the story—I shall certainly put my hand to the making of the libretto.

He was completely sanguine about his success. When he was reminded that Massenet's opera had been a huge success, and the new opera would inevitably be compared with it, Giacomo answered, "Why shouldn't there be two operas about her? A woman like Manon can have more than one lover."

The libretto presented the usual difficulties. Giacomo was incapable of writing one. Ricordi sent for Marco Praga, a writer of some eminence. Praga worked on a draft of the libretto, and then gave up. The poet Domenico Oliva was next asked to prepare one. Giacomo was delighted, promised all his assistance, and sat down to wait for a finished

libretto, while all the time providing an avalanche of minute and detailed instructions. When any scene was completed, Giacomo sent it back with such voluminous notes, additions, erasures and recommendations that Oliva was reduced to impotence. "Take your *Manon*," he exclaimed. "I can't go building and destroying over and over again according to your whims!"

That was the end of Oliva's efforts. Giulio Ricordi thereupon summoned the dramatist Giuseppe Giacosa, a man with a warm mocking humor and a rare literary ability. He agreed to prepare a script in prose, provided that the prose was put into verse by the Milanese poet Luigi Illica. It was an extraordinary situation, but strangely enough everyone was satisfied; and Illica, who had heard of the vicissitudes of *Manon* among the gossips of Milan, threw himself into the task, promising a libretto which would rival anything accomplished up to that time.

With Illica, Giacomo was to have a long and successful partnership; but the poet was not a man to be trifled with. Tall, slender, his long beard parted in two, stiff as a ramrod, Illica possessed an aggressive spirit. His steely blue eyes were the visible tokens of an extreme tenacity. He was a good poet, a prolific writer, a humorist, a gourmet and the owner of an enchanting castle not far from Firenzuola d'Adda, where he would receive his guests in a painted cart drawn by a horse named after an opera singer. He had a passion for rising early, and no one was ever able to sleep late in his castle, for he would go from door to door, shouting: "Get up, lazy ones! Work comes first!" And it was not surprising that his friends called him Signor Perpetuum Mobile. Canon Biagini, Puc-

cini's cousin, knew Illica well, and thinking of those mornings when the poet worked like a whirlwind in his studio crammed with every manner of book, drawing, statue and curio, he would say plaintively to a pupil, "If only there were a little of Illica's blood in your veins . . ." But there was tenderness in Illica's sternness. The poet was a loyal patriot, too, for when he was already at an advanced age, he volunteered during the First World War.

Sometimes Giacomo complained of Illica's methods. He complained especially of Illica's habit of sending him only a few verses at a time. The pace was desperately slow. Giacomo was out of patience. He would send off his own unpolished verses to Illica with a note: "Little swine, look over my verses, and see that you do not ruin them." To placate Illica he would send food.

"Deliver to me," he wrote to Vandini, "a blood pudding sausage, two Lucchesi salami and some soppressata [a thick salami made of lean pork] so that I can send these things to Illica. Forgive me for the mental anguish which must come with my letters. As for the gastronomic anguish . . . this will come with my cooking."

Giacomo worked hard on his music, but sometimes fortunate accidents occurred to speed his journey, and one of his most beautiful effects arose as the result of the work of a mental patient at the hospital at Mombello, a few miles from Turin. Once Giacomo went to the studio of a painter called Menessi. The painter was at his harmonium, trying to decode a particularly difficult piece of music. "Bravo, you have come at the right time," Menessi said. "Come and look at this music, composed by a poor devil of a hospital patient."

"They look just like sparrows hanging on telegraph poles," Giacomo said when the music-sheet was in his hands. "Good God," he exclaimed a moment later. "Here is just what I have been looking for. It's just the right dark, ghostly and imperious motif which I need for *Manon* when they proclaim the roll call of the prostitutes who are to be shipped to America."

Manon began to show signs of progress, and Giacomo decided to have a holiday.

"I know just the place," he confided to Elvira. "It's called Vacallo, and it's in Switzerland. I'm tired of the lake."

So they traveled to Switzerland and found a small apartment at Vacallo. Tonio and Fosca accompanied them.

When the landlady was showing them round the apartment Giacomo stepped out on the balcony and noticed a banner hanging from a house nearby. On the banner was painted the outline of a clown.

"Excellent," exclaimed Giacomo. "We have a restaurant almost next door."

"No restaurant," said the landlady. "As it happens there is a musician living there with an extraordinary name—Lionhorse, if I remember rightly."

"You mean Leoncavallo."

"Yes, and he says he is going to write an opera about a clown."

That gave Giacomo an idea. While Leoncavallo displayed the portrait of Pagliaccio, he would display the portrait of Manon. But how? He removed a large towel from the washstand, and with one of Tonio's crayons drew an enormous hand, for in the Tuscan dialect the word for "large hand" is *manon*.

Here, where the two banners challenged one another, Giacomo completed his opera. Leoncavallo boasted that he had composed the music and the libretto for *I Pagliacci* in five days. *Manon* on the other hand had taken Giacomo several years. The first performance was given on February 1, 1893, at the Teatro Regio in Turin. The opera was immediately acclaimed, the *Gazzetta Piemontese* saying: "The performance of *Manon* was splendid, enthusiastic, and at the end of the third and fourth acts triumphal, a genuine achievement brought about without artifice or pretentious fanfare, a success which could be measured by the spontaneity of the applause rather than by the number of curtain calls."

With *Manon* Giacomo had leapt ahead. Now only Catalani and Mascagni remained as rivals. Alfredo Catalani, living with a tremendous hunger for life, burned himself out at the age of thirty-nine, a victim of tuberculosis, having survived long enough to see the first performance of his opera *La Wally*. Only a few friends attended his funeral. Giacomo held him in high honor, often went to his deserted grave in the cemetery at Lucca and never hesitated to defend him. "When Alfredo was alive," he wrote to Vandini, "what did Lucca do for him? I am amused when I hear what the hypocrites have to say about our beloved Catalani." And when Bazzini, the director of the Conservatorio, in Milan, wrote a letter of congratulation for the success of *Manon* and at the same time offered him the position of teacher of composition left vacant by the death of Catalani, Giacomo answered bitterly: "I am not fit to be a professor. The chair of composition has already lost one victim from Lucca . . ."

With Mascagni, Giacomo remained on good terms. After

the performance of Mascagni's opera *Ratcliff*, Giacomo joined the musicians who were gathered in the Trattoria Savini to honor him. For some reason the waiters forgot to bring him anything to eat.

"I am being starved to death," Giacomo shouted indignantly. "It is terrible—terrible! Give me please at least a little crumb of bread!"

Mascagni ordered an immense plate of oysters to be set in front of him, and Giacomo, who had a passion for oysters, bolted them down without taking his eyes from the plate.

"I hear *Manon* will be presented at the Opera Theater in Livorno," Mascagni said. "It's my town, and I have certain privileges there. If you will allow me, I shall direct the opera."

Giacomo was overwhelmed. He rose from the plate of oysters and planted kisses on Mascagni's cheeks.

"I have finished with music," Giacomo told Elvira some days later. "I shall become the best hunter of wildfowl in the world. Enough of Milan! We return to Torre del Lago at once!"

"Then at the very least you will be able to reduce your weight," Elvira commented, gazing at the two hundred twenty pounds which had earned him the title of *uomo palla* (the ball-shaped one).

"I thought of that," Giacomo answered. "The first thing I shall do is buy a bicycle."

"Ha, and how will you pay for it?"

"On the installment plan."

No sooner had they arrived at Torre del Lago when the bicycle, a beautiful Humbert, costing 900 lire, arrived from Milan. Giacomo was overjoyed. There was a time when he

was hardly ever off the bicycle. All the year round he could be seen racing it along the road which led from the Club Bohème to the center of Torre del Lago, the new bicycle becoming the symbol of progress invading an obscure fishing village. Zenzena opened a new caffè in the heart of the village, where a punch called "torpedo" could be bought for a few centesimi. New faces were seen. There was now more animation in Stinchi di Merlo's caffè. The bohemians were in their glory, and to the original company there were added Plinio Momellini, a painter, and Giovanni Papasoli, a hunter. The game of scopa was played increasingly, and the painters began to amuse themselves by painting frescoes on the walls of the caffè. In one of these frescoes Giacomo was shown as the King of Hearts, Giovanni Papasoli as the King of Clubs, Ferruccio Pagni as the Knave of Spades and Angelo Tommasi as the King of Spades. Perhaps because he was tall and held himself so stiffly Giacomo called him "Candle." Giacomo was perfectly happy. He was recapturing the spirit of those days when he roamed the streets of Lucca with Zizzania and did exactly as he pleased. In the caffè he found comfort far away from Elvira's scolding.

In justice to Elvira, it should be explained that Giacomo was not the easiest man to live with. He was not married to Elvira, who felt continually insecure. Also, he was by nature deeply interested in women and nothing delighted him more than to play the gallant. Now thirty-five, handsome, overflowing with vitality, successful, he traveled to London to attend the production of *Manon* at Covent Garden in the summer of 1894, receiving the acclaim of music-lovers and an accolade from no less a person than George Bernard Shaw, who wrote: "Puccini

looks to me more like the heir to Verdi than any of the others." When he returned it was rumored that he was accompanied by a young Englishwoman, but they said she remained in Torre del Lago only long enough to discover there were no fogs in which the lovers could hide.

The best stories of Puccini's amours were told by old Count Ottolini, a nobleman who lost his fortune and retired to live peacefully among the fishermen of Torre del Lago. Sitting under the thatched pagoda of Gragnani's pier with a cigar in one hand and a stick in the other, he announced that he knew all that could be known of the private life of the great Puccini.

"There was that pretty little school-teacher from Turin," he would say. "Giacomo invited her to come and stay at Viareggio. Of course he had not the slightest intention of meeting her there: the place is fashionable, full of people in the summer and therefore a hot-bed of gossip. No, Giacomo had better ideas. He summoned Ferruccio Pagni to his presence and asked for help. Pagni is an expert in these affairs. He suggested the woods at Migliarino, which are after all not far from the main road between Viareggio and Pisa. And this is exactly how it was arranged. Giacomo would go hunting in these woods after woodcock every day, and one of his faithful friends would row him over in a boat. Donna Elvira knew he went hunting, but she did not know what he was hunting for. She did not know that her Giacomino was making his way through the marshes to a place called Chiesaccia where the young lady was waiting for him. Ah, the silence of the pine woods! Ah, the beauty of these romantic places where only the songs of the birds . . ."

At such moments the voice of *il signor Conte* grew high-

pitched, and he kept making circular movements with his stick.

The meetings became more and more frequent, until at last even Donna Elvira grew suspicious. Perhaps she learned from the village women of *la donna misteriosa* who made her way every morning to the pinewoods in a carriage, a veiled woman on a mysterious errand. All we know for certain is that one day Donna Elvira hired a coach and traveled to Chiesaccia armed with an umbrella. It was raining. She peered out of the coach and saw another coach coming towards her. She jumped out and stood in the path of the oncoming carriage. It was a very dangerous thing to do. She knew she was too late to surprise the lovers at their tryst. This infuriated her. She began to poke at the pretty young schoolteacher with her umbrella until the coachman, hearing the teacher's cries, whipped up the horse and nearly ran over Donna Elvira, who thereupon fell into a ditch. When she came home she was just in time to receive Giacomo on his return from his hunting expedition. She asked him whether he had good luck hunting.

"*Macchè,* no, no, absolutely nothing," Giacomo answered. "All I got was one little woodcock."

"Nothing else?"

"No."

"And you were hunting all the time?"

"Of course. Why do you ask such questions?" Giacomo answered innocently.

At that moment Donna Elvira came to the end of her resources. Her self-control vanished. She suddenly sprang at him, screaming out accusations and clawing at his face with

her fingernails. Giacomo did the best he could. He ran to the bedroom and tried to lock the door, but Elvira was too quick for him. For days afterwards the urchins in the village street pointed to the enormous scars on his nose.

"Sor Giacomo," they asked, "what happened to your face?"

Giacomo answered: "Haven't you ever seen the nettles in the thickets where we go hunting?"

The boys dissolved in laughter.

Such was the story which old Count Ottolini told on Gragnani's pier, and when he came to the end of his story he would wipe the sweat from his brow and say, "Come to think of it, we might go along to Stinchi's caffé for a glass of wine, eh?"

Most of the stories told by the Count were true. There were furious battles between Giacomo and Elvira. Giacomo would say of these battles: *"In fondo io sono un buon diavolo e non porto mai a lungo vendetta*—I am a good kind of a devil; I don't harbor grudges for long." Gazing at the lake he would add: "I'm like that. A gust of wind, a great turmoil and then calm."

The scopa players did their best to increase the turmoil, and Ferruccio Pagni was always suggesting violent means to put an end to the conflicts between Giacomo and Donna Elvira.

"Why don't you just send her away, the old witch?" Ferruccio asked.

"Why don't you drown her in the lake?" Fanelli suggested.

"Well, what happens then?" Giacomo inquired.

"Well, you can take another one."

"No," Giacomo answered slowly. "No, it's no use. The next one may be worse than the first."

During one of these conversations Elvira overheard them; and henceforth Fanelli and Pagni were refused admission to her house.

Meanwhile a new opera was brewing. Giacomo was brooding, but he was also picking the brains of his friends. You would see him pedaling down to the post-office on his bicycle. In his letters to Ricordi there were continual references to his need for a libretto as well as continual requests for money. "Have you anything for me?" he wrote to Illica plaintively. "A plot? A libretto? Some verses? My dear man, I want to work." And on the way back from the post-office he would stop to buy oil and beans, cartridges for his shotgun, immense quantities of cigarettes. Years afterwards, when people thought of those days, they remembered him furiously pedaling.

Ricordi was working hard. He commissioned Giacosa to prepare a plot based on Russian life, but Giacomo promptly tore it up. "It's no use," he reported to Ricordi. "Russian subjects don't suit my temperament. To tell you the truth, Russia scares me."

Having disposed of Russia, Giacomo turned his attention to Sicily. He remembered that *Cavalleria Rusticana* had a Sicilian setting. He fell upon Giovanni Verga's story *La Lupa,* which tells of a Sicilian peasant woman who falls madly in love with a young olive-crusher, but forces him to marry her own daughter. The "she-wolf" really wants to keep the lover for herself. The story ends when her suitor kills her during a Good Friday procession. Giacomo fell in love with the story. He decided to visit Giovanni Verga, then living at Catania. He was welcomed with open arms, there followed detailed discussions, the Sicilian was delightful and pleasant, he agreed

with all the changes Giacomo suggested, and for a few months everyone believed that the opera *La Lupa* was on its way to becoming a part of the repertoire of La Scala. "Now at last I have found something big," he wrote. He went on from Sicily to Malta, where he was arrested by English soldiers for taking photographs of the fortifications, but freed shortly afterwards. On the ship returning to Italy he met the Marchesa Gravina, the daughter of Hans von Bülow and Cosima Liszt. Giacomo talked at length of *La Lupa*. The Marchesa frowned.

"No, maestro, this is not for you. This is not at all the kind of thing you should do. After all, La Lupa is a vulgar and lascivious woman. It would be much better if you worked at something nobler."

He was oddly impressed, decided to abandon the play and wrote to Ricordi that he was no longer so certain he could write a good opera on so vulgar a theme. The visit to Sicily was an amusing interlude. He had taken pictures of the people, their cottages, hedges full of figs. He promised to show them to Ricordi. As for music: "I found nothing there of much use to me."

All of Torre del Lago was waiting for him. There were banquets and celebrations. At one of these Ferruccio Pagni complained that Giacomo had no reason to leave Torre del Lago in search of characters for his operas: why not find them among the artists and fishermen who live around the lake? "It's all here," he exclaimed. "We are real, and worth writing about. Write about the bohemians . . ."

This was the seed from which *La Bohème* flowered. Giacomo asked his friend Carluccio Caselli to lend him a copy of *Scenes of Bohemian Life* by Henri Mürger. Reading it, he

saw the answer to all his problems. Of course the book was too long, there were altogether too many situations, too many characters, but somewhere in the book lay the heart of an opera. The character of Francine particularly delighted him, perhaps because she was said to be in love with a young sculptor named Giacomo.

In Murger's book Mimi is fickle and is not in love with Rudolphe. In the opera she acquires the qualities of Francine, who dies of tuberculosis and warms her hands in a little muff. Some episodes which occurred to the original Mimi were also included. To these he added a few more episodes which occurred to Musetta, Luisa, Sidonie, Juliette and Eugenie, compounded them all together and announced: "Here is my heroine."

He wrote to Illica: "Hurry. I must have a libretto. I shall importune you every day and every hour until I have verses which express the character of my creation. I shall start tomorrow—believe me, *tomorrow!*" There followed three years of enthusiasm and misery, of long nights spent at his desk, of hours spent in weeping and recrimination, of endless anxieties and intolerable strains for everyone around him.

Illica wrote from Milan: "I will not stand it a moment longer! To work for Puccini means to go through a living hell. Not even Job could withstand his whims and his sudden volte-faces. I cannot keep up with his constant acrobatics. As for the libretto, it has been rewritten in its entirety three times, and some passages have been rewritten as many as four or five times."

In the end, with the help of Giacosa, the libretto was finished. Most of the music had been written. Occasionally Gia-

como found himself in a corner of the Club Bohème, sitting in front of the terrible upright piano, scribbling musical algebra on scraps of paper spread out on his knees. There were constant interruptions. Ferruccio Pagni would come bellowing over his shoulder, saying: "We are not going to keep quiet, whatever you say! Don't you know the by-laws of the Club? Don't you know that Article Seven specifically forbids silence. You need to be reminded of our by-laws, my dear Giacomone. Listen: the members of the Club have taken the pledge to drink well and eat better. No fault-finders, grouchers or people with weak stomachs are admitted to membership. The treasurer has the privilege of absconding with the cash. Legal games are forbidden. Wisdom is not tolerated, not even in exceptional cases. Above all, silence is prohibited!"

Giacomo was oblivious of the uproar. Bent over a sheet of music, chewing his pencil, he would hum softly from the last act of *La Bohème: "Che ha detto il medico?"*

"Go and drown yourself," roared Pagni.

"Shut up, you rascal of a Marcello!"

"I am not Marcello, I am Rodolfo, you promised I would be Rodolfo," Pagni complained, and shortly afterwards there would be a round of drinks, Pagni and Fanelli would be told that their characters had not changed, they were still a part of the opera, but where were the Mimis? Fortunately there were no Mimis in the place: the fishermen and painters had no fondness for tubercular girls, they were perfectly happy with the rose-cheeked peasant girls of the village. All the time Elvira was raging against Giacomo, asking how he could compose immortal operas in a filthy club.

"It is like this," Giacomo explained. "Mozart once lived in a

house crammed with musicians. There was a particularly noisy violinist on the floor above him, and a singing teacher next door. When Mozart was asked how he could live in such a bedlam, he replied: 'The noise is necessary for composition, because it gives me new ideas.' Personally I agree with Mozart."

More and more the village came to be associated with the Club Bohème. Even when I was a small boy I knew about the Club, and of course we all knew about Giacomo, though few of us ever set eyes on him. But we would row across the lake from Quiesa to Torre del Lago in search of the succulent watermelons which grow in the sandy soil, and sometimes, in the intervals of bathing or lounging on the shore, we would make an effort to enter the Club, only to face Stinchi di Merlo or Gengino armed with a gun, and though we knew the gun was not loaded we found ourselves running furiously away, shouting at the top of our voices: "Bohème! Bohème!"

But as always with Giacomo's works the opera was slow in coming to birth. In the end he deserted Torre del Lago and went to stay at the Villa Castellaccio in Pescia, and in this villa belonging to Count Bertolini he completed the second and third acts. Today, engraved upon the walls of Giacomo's studio in the villa, you may still see the words:

Completed Act II of La Bohème: July 23, 1895
Completed Act III of La Bohème: September 18, 1895

These words are now carefully protected under glass.

But it was the last act which reduced Giacomo to tatters. He wanted Mimi to die tragically and poetically, but there must be no emphasis. He imagined a quiet death which would

invoke the most profound and gentle emotions, and at the same time the death of Mimi was intended to pierce the heart like a knife. He wanted, in fact, two irreconcilable things: intense drama and solemnity, and at the same time something as unobtrusive as a sigh. How to reconcile them? Finally, after days of weary pondering, he decided upon the slow sustained chords which prepare for Rodolfo's heart-rending cry:

> *Che vuol dire quell' andare e venire,*
> *quel guardarmi cosi?*
> (What is the meaning of this coming and going?
> And these glances so strange?)

As he played, bent low over the keyboard, Giacomo fell to sobbing, not only because he was overcome by grief at the death of Mimi, but also because he was writing the last notes of the opera.

Some time later he summoned the friends of the Club Bohème and played over the last act for them. No one spoke. A macabre and funereal silence descended upon them, and the room seemed saturated with grief. It was Ferruccio Pagni who broke the spell. Suddenly he cried: "Mimi is dead, but it doesn't mean we are dead, too. No, gentlemen, our task is to concentrate on living and celebrating the completion of *La Bohème*. We must crown Giacomo—he is the Emperor of Music!"

And this was exactly what was done. They telephoned to Caselli, then in Lucca, to bring imperial costumes immediately; and when he arrived, loaded down with theatrical properties, Ferruccio Pagni and the rest dressed in the costumes

of Roman soldiers, Giacomo was dressed in the costume of a Roman Emperor and borne in triumph to his throne amid the resounding chorus: *"Ave Caesar, Imperator."*

At the Club Bohème they knew, as Giacomo knew, that the opera sprang from the little restaurant on the shores of the lake. They knew there were passages of sunshine and shadow in the opera which reflected the colors of Lake Massaciuccoli. They knew, too, where Giacomo derived his knowledge of the landlord who comes to the studio demanding his rent—it came from Giacomo's own life; and so it was with the freezing studio where Giacomo had lived in Milan, a place so cold that Schaunard could not practice on the piano and the hands of Marcello were too stiff to paint. They knew the source of the incident which occurs when Rodolfo offers to burn the manuscript of his play act by act to prevent them from freezing to death. Part of the play had grown out of the Club Bohème, the other part from the bare room where Giacomo and Mascagni had lived together in poverty.

But the opera was not an immediate success. At Turin, where it was first produced, the reception was lukewarm. It was next produced in Palermo with Leopoldo Mugnone as conductor on April 13, 1896. Mugnone and Giacomo were both intensely superstitious, and Mugnone even refused to go on. Giacomo quivered with fear. He believed implicitly in old wives' tales, the evil eye, every manner of superstition. But it was too late—either the opera had to be abandoned completely, or it must be played that night. The applause was deafening. The success, first achieved in Palermo, was repeated in subsequent performances. It was played in Buenos Aires; the Royal Italian Opera Company performed it in San Francisco; it re-

ceived its English première in Manchester. Giacomo was present. He groaned and shivered in the damp air of Manchester and wrote to Lucca that he would give everything to exchange the chill of England for the warmth of Tuscany. But in Manchester the opera was an undeniable success, though Giacomo could never understand a single word sung at the English performances. The libretto had been translated into English, and it was not presented in Italian until Nellie Melba appeared as Mimi at Covent Garden in 1899. Puccini was pleased with the sound of English applause.

With *La Bohème* he had reached the heights. The remittances from Ricordi, always liberal, became even more liberal. He breathed freely at last. Elvira was able to buy a little more cheese and wine. The apartment they had taken in Venanzio's house no longer satisfied them. More and more rarely did he venture to the Club Bohème. Finally the shack was sold to some fishermen, who sawed off the posts and carried it away to some waste land belonging to old Gragnani. The Caffé Bohème became nothing more than a fisherman's hut.

The valedictory was spoken by Ferruccio Pagni:

"Good-by to Bohème! They say Giacomo is coming to fame and fortune, and every kind of luxury. So be it! He is starting well. He has bought a new row boat, and soon he will be buying a new gun, and then he will be thinking of buying a new piano and a house. I'm sorry the old out-of-tune upright isn't good enough for him, though he wrote *La Bohème* on its yellow keys. They offered to sell it to me for a few lire, but I refused. And then there's Tonio with his new shoes, new trousers, new hat. And Elvira has a new fur coat, if you

please. It isn't very long ago since she made blouses for herself from her husband's cast-off shirts. Well, *La Bohème* on the stage has vanquished the real Bohème of the fishing village. *O tempora* . . . *O mores* . . ."

CHAPTER SIX

Gonnellone

In the soft air of Tuscany there is peace and contentment, a sense of the living earth, of bread and wine: *pane e vino.* The Tuscans are people who carry on through their lives a love affair with their native soil; and like the Tuscan earth they have a quality of vigor, even of coarseness, though this is mingled with a prevailing gentleness. They are good, honest, downright people who are very conscious of being the offspring of Mother Earth. They describe a good man by saying he is "pane e vino."

Giacomo was a Tuscan. He was this, above all. He was in love with the earth. I have known him to throw himself down on her, stretch out his strong limbs and with his long powerful hands take hold of the grass with the urgency of a lover. He loved wine and beautiful women and all the fruits of the earth. Above all, he loved Torre del Lago, that obscure fishing village named after a watch-tower once owned by Don Carlos di Bourbon, an old royalist who maintained a little court near Viareggio. In time the watch-tower came into the ownership of Giacomo.

For Torre del Lago Giacomo possessed an unchanging affection. When the sun rose over the mountains, touching them with silver, then throwing up a froth of white, then blazing gold, the enchanted lake trembled in the morning breeze, and all the drowsy villages of Chiatri, Bozzano, Massarosa and Montramito, nestling in their vineyards, sprang to life. The sun warmed the thyme which cloaks the hills of Quiesa. This small village, whose name means "rest," was once a place where the pilgrims halted on their way to the high shrine of Volto Santo in Lucca. But with the coming of the morning there was no rest in Quiesa. Its church-bells, and those of Chiatri, Compignano and Bozzano rang out across the lake and all the empty valleys, bell answering bell. And with the first crashing peal of the morning bells Torre del Lago also awoke. Then you would see Arnaldo Gragnani emerging from his house, stretching his arms vigorously toward the sun, drawing in deep breaths of morning air, then strolling down to the little pier which runs out into the lake like a thirsty tongue, there taking stock of his nets, and perhaps later you would hear a sudden whistle piercing the air among the pine woods of Migliarino—the Rome-Genova express among its clouds of smoke, and just as likely you would see Giacomo at his studio window gazing across the lake toward the hills of Chiatri, a cigarette dangling from his lips and a shabby felt hat cocked rakishly over his head.

When anyone asked Giacomo to describe Torre del Lago, he would say, "You will find it all in the Litanies of the Virgin. *Turris eburnea, domus aurea, foederis arca*—it is a tower of ivory, a golden house, the ark of the covenant. Let us leave it at that."

The old watch-tower on the shore was converted into a villa: the ripple and splash of the lake waters were heard in every room. His studio faced the lake. The walls of the studio had been painted by the artist Plinio Nomellini, a charter member of the Club Bohème, but dampness soon rotted the painting and disfigured the walls. In the end Giacomo devised a scheme by which this defect could be disguised: canvas was stretched an inch away from the walls and ceiling. On the canvas Nomellini painted a bright multitude of flowers springing from Florentine urns. In the studio the shelves were loaded with elaborate editions of operas and innumerable books in Italian and French, the only languages he ever knew. Then there was the new piano with a small table at the side. He would swing in his revolving chair from the keyboard to the table, and write down the music. While he was composing, the dogs would come in, to sit up in the chairs and gaze at him pityingly. They bore operatic names: Lea, Brunetta, Schaunard, Nello. Their soft eyes said: "Drop this silly music and come out after the ducks." Shrubs, palms and flowers surrounded the studio.

Giacomo was a man of strong affections and equally strong hates. If he loved Torre del Lago, he loathed most of the other towns in the world. He had a good word for London with "its intense and quiet indescribable life, its beautiful women and superb theaters." He found no pleasure in Paris. He wrote to Carluccio Caselli: "I am weary of Paris. I long for the free swaying of my big paunch floating in capacious pantaloons without the restrictions imposed by a shirt. I long for the breeze which comes from the sea. I hate city pavements, palaces, pillars and fashions. I am happiest among poplars and

pines." In Milan, which he described as "a useful place," he rented an apartment which he kept deliberately bare. There were only a grand piano, a divan where he would fling himself down after long hours at the piano, a few photographs, nothing else.

At Torre del Lago he was at his ease. He would stroll around with his coat unbuttoned, his left hand in his coat pocket, garrulous and genial, happiest when he was talking in dialect to those irresponsible artists who were the original inhabitants of the Club Bohème. He liked to gossip. He liked listening to stories about Ferruccio Pagni and Plinio Nomellini, who occasionally fell from grace and were punished by irate wives and offended husbands for their moral sins. They would come home sometimes with broken heads, the punishment of their daring. Above all he liked to hunt the wild ducks on the lake.

During the mild winters there would appear printed posters on the walls of Quiesa, Bozzano and Massarosa which read:

NOTICE TO HUNTERS

We hereby announce that the hunting season on Lake Massaciuccoli will open on the . . . day of. . . . Hunters are informed that the starting time is 11:00 A.M. and the hunt must close at sunset. Starting signals for the row boats will be fired at the following localities: Piaggetta, Gusciona and Torre del Lago. Admission 20 lire. Tickets may be purchased from special agents in the aforesaid localities.

Hunting is permitted on the lake and in the bushes, but is forbidden in the adjacent marshes. Hunters must show permits on request of the Carabinieri.

GIACOMO PUCCINI
Concessionaire

Giacomo, who possessed exclusive rights over all duck-hunting on Lake Massaciuccoli, would dress for the occasion in a bright yellow blouse and high boots: he looked like the sheriff in a story of the Wild West. Sometimes he himself hunted; at other times he would take a position on Arnaldo Gragnani's pier and watch the proceedings through field-glasses, looking exactly like a general commanding a campaign. He had obtained the hunting rights from the Marquis Ginori, who took feudal pride in his title and haughtily looked down on the residents of the region. "Yes, yes," the maestro would say, "he looks down on me at La Piaggetta, the kingdom of ducks, but I look down on him when we meet in Milan, the kingdom of music. There he is always the first to tip his hat to me."

Though Puccini always claimed a great respect for the laws of duck-shooting, he sometimes disobeyed them. On one famous occasion he was caught hunting out of season in a forbidden area. With his friend Beniamino Antonelli, a nineteen-year-old boy, he was brought to trial at Bagni di San Giuliano. The records of the court proceedings for the morning of October 24, 1894, can still be read. They state that one afternoon in August two Carabinieri patrolling Lake Massaciuccoli saw a row boat heading for the marshes of Malaventre, a place notorious because out-of-season hunters were frequently seen there. The Carabinieri followed them and asked to see their permits. Giacomo said he had left his permit at home, and the Carabinieri said he was lying and evidently was guilty of hunting during the closed season according to the law of Tuscany promulgated on July 7, 1856. The Carabinieri entered into their notebooks the fact that Puccini and

Beniamino were armed with shotguns and had four cartridges on their persons.

The defense did its best to embarrass the Carabinieri. Exactly what had happened? Was there any evidence that the accused had been really hunting? Yes, said the Carabinieri; the accused were discovered with the evidence of guilt in their hands, such evidence being provided by the shotguns which they were firing in full view of the aforesaid Carabinieri, who thereupon served notice that a particularly vicious crime had been committed. To make matters worse, the accused had attempted to hide their shotguns.

The defense replied that the Carabinieri were talking nonsense. What had really happened was this: the two huntsmen were harmlessly coasting over the marshes in search of a shelter they were thinking of renting. They had brought their guns along because they wanted to be sure they would be able to maneuver their guns from the shelter. The defense raised the question of the four cartridges—no huntsman would dream of hunting with such an incredibly small amount of ammunition. Then they asked whether the Carabinieri had seen any dead birds. No, they had not seen any dead birds, but they remembered that they had distinctly heard a shot. The judge turned to Giacomo and asked for an explanation.

"It is like this, your honor," Giacomo said. "I had just bought a new gun, and I wanted to try it out. I left my permit at home because it was not my intention to bring any birds down. Now if I had intended to shoot some duck, then the case would be entirely different, for you must know, your honor, that a hunter like Puccini never misses a bird." Turning dramatically to his friends from Torre del Lago in the

audience, Giacomo thundered: "Isn't that true, my fellow professional hunters?"

The audience roared out its agreement with Giacomo.

"Case dismissed," said the judge, banging on the bench with his gavel.

Giacomo was so overjoyed with the tactics of his lawyer that he gave him a beautiful copy of the score of *Manon*.

He was not always hunting wildfowl. Sometimes he went hunting in forbidden places after the deer and wild boar which abounded in the pine woods of Migliarino. Or else he went hunting after fabulous animals. There was one such animal which he called an "antilisca." The antilisca provided him with endless amusement. There was a streak of cruelty in Giacomo. Once he persuaded his boon companion, called Lappore, to help him play a joke on an ingenuous brother-in-law of his. He spoke to him at great length about the antilisca, described its habits, showed how it could be captured alive. "All you have to do is to stand with your legs apart and the antilisca will always try to run between your legs; therefore the proper method is to hold a canvas sack open between your legs and wait for the antilisca to appear. Lappore and I," Giacomo explained, "will do what we can. We'll act as beaters. When you see the antilisca coming, just pull the string of the sack and shout for us." There was one further piece of instruction: it was necessary to keep absolutely motionless and silent, for otherwise the antilisca would be forewarned.

Having given complete instructions to his brother-in-law Giacomo made his way through the pine woods, and vanished. He was next seen at his own villa. The poor brother-in-law

was left with the empty sack between his legs, waiting for an antilisca which never appeared. He waited all afternoon and half the evening, and he was only rescued when Elvira suspected that something had happened to Giacomo's brother-in-law. She complained bitterly. It was a long time before she forgave her husband.

Many stories were told of Giacomo's delight in hunting in forbidden places. One night, accompanied by Lappore, he went spear-fishing—a sport which was absolutely illegal in the lake. Giacomo stood in the boat with a spear in one hand and an acetylene torch in the other, all the time gazing down into the shadowy water.

"It's no use," said Giacomo. "We'll have to go farther out. There are only a few tiny fish here."

So Lappore kept rowing, and the fish were speared, and suddenly they heard a motor-boat bearing down on them.

"The guards are coming," Lappore exclaimed, and then he turned the boat round and raced to shore, but the motor-boat came faster and soon it was gaining on them. By this time Giacomo knew they were in shallow water. He removed his shoes and plunged overboard. Lappore followed him. Soon they were running barefoot down a country road, their feet torn to ribbons, two fugitives from justice wet through and humiliated by the knowledge that the guards could easily track them down. They were not pleased when they discovered that Ferruccio Pagni had hired a motor-boat with the deliberate intention of frightening them.

The lazy hunting days did not last forever. Though Giacomo sometimes forgot that it was his duty to compose operas, Giulio Ricordi never forgot. One winter day he closed his

desk in Milan, thrust a manuscript in his pocket, walked out of his office and took the train for Torre del Lago. When he arrived, he walked along the shores of the lake, hoping to surprise Giacomo at his hunting. But there was no sign of Giacomo on the lake. Ricordi went on to the Villa Puccini. Still no sign of Giacomo. Then he heard voices coming from the garden.

"Boys," Giacomo was saying to an invisible audience. "I have been informed by our good and learned friend Don Pié Panichelli that there is a Latin motto on the door of the Cathedral at Pisa—an admirable motto which conveys the sense of my secret ambitions. The motto reads: *Summa peto*. For those of you who are ignorant of Latin I should explain that *Summa peto* means 'I seek the highest.' "

There was a burst of derisive laughter, and Ferruccio Pagni made a vulgar noise. This was perhaps understandable since *peto* in modern Italian means an explosion of wind.

"You can laugh as you please," Giacomo continued. "The fact remains that I am weary of bohemian music and propose to attempt a higher art. *Summa peto*. I shall find my inspiration in Rome, and the new opera will bear the name of a famous woman—"

"Obviously, we all know that! Come, Giacomone, tell us the name of your woman."

"La Tosca."

"Then you have changed your opinion. Remember when you saw Sarah Bernhardt in Sardou's play at Florence? You were tremendously impressed by Sarah Bernhardt, but when someone said you could write an opera based on the play, you said it had no appeal for you."

"I've changed my mind. I've fallen completely in love with La Tosca."

"Excellent news," exclaimed Giulio Ricordi, as he leaned over the iron gate. "By a marvelous coincidence I happen to have a libretto called *Tosca* in my pocket."

There was a round marble table in the garden. Ricordi was summoned to sit at the table. Elvira came with drinks. They sat round, while Ricordi explained this "marvelous coincidence."

What had happened was this. The composer Franchetti had long been interested in writing an opera around Sardou's *Tosca*. Illica had composed a libretto, and when he had completed it, he accompanied Franchetti to Paris. The libretto was read to Sardou in the presence of Verdi, who was so overcome that he begged to be allowed to read it, and this he did in a trembling voice, especially when he came to Cavaradossi's farewell to art and life. Finally Ricordi and Illica persuaded Franchetti not to write the music for the opera; they felt strongly that Giacomo would be the ideal composer. And now the libretto was lying on the marble table.

Ricordi had hardly finished telling the story when the church-bells of Torre del Lago began ringing. "With those church-bells," said Ricordi, "you have the prelude to your *Tosca*."

Giacomo was enthusiastic, praised the libretto, decided to set to work at once. Torre del Lago had provided him with the calm sensual atmosphere necessary for composing *La Bohème*. For *Tosca* he decided upon a sterner landscape. He chose Chiatri, a tiny village which nestles high up in the mountains. He knew the village as a boy, when he stayed

there with his cousin, Don Roderigo Biagini. He remembered cool autumn mornings when he would watch for woodcock, while smoking cigars to keep the mosquitoes away. His cousin possessed an old ruined house. Giacomo had later bought the house and completely renovated it. A piano was brought from Lucca and the long rough journey was not salutary to the strings. Now he wrote an urgent message to Vandini: "Please send someone right away to tune my piano at Chiatri—he'll find the key hanging on a peg behind the door."

All that summer he spent in Chiatri, to escape the intense heat of the plains. He wanted to work, and though he would sometimes surrender to the heat as freely as the earth does, storing its generating forces within his body, relaxing in its strength and blessedness, still he could not work in the valley. Giacomo liked being in the hills. He paid no attention to Elvira's protests—she said the high altitude was bad for her lungs—or Tonio's complaints that he had deserted his companions at Torre del Lago. It was generally agreed that Chiatri was a good place for finding inspiration.

In those days, and perhaps now, Chiatri contained no more than a dozen families, 200 sheep, 10 cows, a handful of chickens and a solitary church. Because I knew Puccini would be there, I made it my business to climb the mountain from the direction of Quiesa and serve as altar boy. I confess to having been an inefficient altar boy. There were occasions when old Father Chelini heard me delivering the wrong Latin responses. There were other occasions when he felt compelled to raise his voice to a menacing pitch as he reminded me to ring the bell to transfer the missal from one side of the altar to the other. The explanation was simple.

Not only Giacomo was there. The whole brood was there; and you would find his brother-in-law Giusseppe Razzi, who wore a beard like Michelangelo's Moses, sitting next to Illica, that stern bearded prophet with steely blue eyes, and perhaps you would come across Carlo Garignani, who was entrusted with the writing of the piano reduction of Giacomo's scores. The small congregation whispered incessantly, overawed by the presence of the strangers, so that sometimes the gentle padre would turn from the altar and face the congregation, saying: "Good people, please remember the Blessed Sacrament is on the altar, and not elsewhere."

Life at Chiatri was pleasant, but lonely. Telegrams, of course, were unknown; letters arrived by the process of being relayed from one village to another, and they always arrived late. Giacomo wandered about on donkey-back or in a little cart: neither served to reinforce his desire for speed. He complained to Vandini: "The donkey is no good. The cart is a pile of junk. It is altogether too small, and there is not enough room for our backsides." The family also complained. Elvira was particularly bitter. "I can't see anyone, because there is no one here; and I can't buy anything. I can't sleep at night because of the strange noises. You know, the peasants say there are ghosts in the house. The "ghost" actually existed. He was Carlo Garignani, who had the habit of getting up in the middle of the night and knocking loudly on the walls in the hope of driving Giacomo away. But Giacomo delighted in everything at Chiatri—even the ghost. In desperation Elvira wrote to Ricordi: "Giacomo in giving life to *Tosca* is killing his family." Ricordi answered with a telegram which reached Chiatri by way of a goatherd who had received it from the

hands of a farmer who had received it from the hands of a postman, who forgot about it for three days. The telegram read: "Sardou expecting you in Paris. Wishes to discuss *Tosca* with you. Come quickly."

Nothing else could have driven Giacomo from his falcon's nest. He ordered Elvira to pack at once. The next day a cart drawn by two strong mountain ponies, piled high with their belongings, with Elvira and Tonio on top, came jolting down the rugged path which leads to Torre del Lago.

But though they were leaving Chiatri, Giacomo had lost his heart to the remote village among the clouds. Sometimes he would be seen looking out from the terrace of the villa at Torre del Lago, gazing at the brick house in the far distance, a house perched on a crag, remote and inaccessible. There were no motor-roads, otherwise he would have driven there. Later he talked of building such a road. Everyone laughed, but to Giacomo it was no joking matter. He wrote to the mayor of Lucca: "I beg to remind you about the road to Chiatri. As I have already told you, I am prepared to share in the expense if the project is put in hand very shortly. I hope it will be soon, for the snow is rapidly falling on my head."

Nothing came of the project and the mayor showed no sympathy for his plight.

Meanwhile, *Tosca* was still unfinished. Sardou received Giacomo kindly, but the visit was in the nature of a formal embassy from one king to another; and apart from suggesting that the Tiber should pass between St. Peter's and the Castel Sant' Angelo—a suggestion which Giacomo could not accept—Sardou contributed little. There is more of Giacomo in the libretto of *Tosca* than in any other opera he wrote. There is

the ecclesiastical atmosphere which derives from his own knowledge of the Church. The scene between the sacristan and the mischievous altar boys derived from his own experiences in Lucca and Chiatri. In the original libretto written by Giacosa and Illica, Cavaradossi is made to sing a pompous song of farewell to the world. With a sure instinct, Giacomo realized that a painter with only an hour to live would not waste the hour in formal hymns. The painter is in love. He therefore sings a song of love. The passage: *"E muoio disperato . . . ,"* in the famous aria: *"E lucevan le stelle,"* was written by Giacomo.

Some liturgical details came directly from his experience; others were discovered by research. He began to plague his friends for obscure scraps of information, usually demanding that it be sent to him at once. He wrote to Vandini from Torre del Lago:

> My opera calls for an *Ecce Sacerdos.* It is imperative that I have it. Go to some priest or monk, and get a copy. Then find out what prayer is recited by the Bishop when he proceeds from the sanctuary to the main altar for the celebration of a solemn *Te Deum* after victory. I want the *Ecce Sacerdos* murmured by the priests or perhaps by the people, but I am not sure this would be appropriate. I must have Latin sequences recited either by the people or the priests during Scarpia's soliloquy. Bear in mind that these prayers are uttered as the group proceeds from the sacristy to the main altar. Write to me. Many thanks. *Addio.*

Evidently Vandini had no success with his liturgical research, for shortly afterwards Giacomo repeated his request in an even more irritable tone:

I said I wanted some words to be murmured, therefore I want them. Go to San Martino. Go to the Bishop, if necessary, and ask him what would be appropriate for the priests as they proceed toward the altar for the celebration of the *Te Deum;* or as a final resort, you could ask what one of them might say. Find some verses for me, or at least one which will suggest the victory in a prelude before the great *Te Deum.* Tell the Bishop to invent something for me. If he doesn't, I'll write to the Pope and have him thrown out of his job on the grounds of his imbecility.

Still haunted by this murmuring of the priests which he heard in his own mind, though the words eluded him, he wrote postscripts in each corner of the letter, signs of his increasing anger and frustration. In the upper left hand corner he wrote:

Get the words for me or I'll become a Protestant. Tell this to the Dean.

In the upper right hand corner he scribbled furiously:

If you don't send me these prayers I'll compose "a funeral march for religion." Tell this to the Bishop.

In the lower right hand corner there are signs that his persistence was gaining momentum. He wrote:

Either you'll get these verses or I shall be foul-mouthed for the rest of my life. Tell the priest this is as true as my name is Giacomo. I mean it. This audible murmuring is absolutely essential, or else the effect will be lost. Go to Father Agrimonti, to Fathers Marianetti, Volpi and Pardini, go to the priest at Antraccoli. Whatever you do, find it, present it to me. Ask Caselli. He will be able to find it in some corner of his junk-shop.

In despair of finding a solution to these problems he wrote to Father Pietro Panichelli in Rome:

At the end of the first act in the Church of Sant' Andrea della Valle there is sung a solemn *Te Deum* of rejoicing for a victory. Now I want to know the words intoned by the priests as they pass in procession from the sacristy to the altar. Afterwards, in order to accentuate the contrast between the filthy desires of Scarpia and the mysterious atmosphere of the place, there should be a great *Te Deum*. Now please let me know the exact tone of the church bells in the neighborhood of Castel' Sant' Angelo, and the exact tone of the big bell at St. Peter's.

Father Panichelli succeeded in giving Giacomo an answer to the first question. Then from the composer Meluzzi he heard that the large bell at St. Peter's had the tone of E-natural. Puccini was not satisfied. He went to Rome, and spent some days sitting on the steps of the fountain in front of St. Peter's, a cigar in his mouth, music sheets spread over his knees. He was there in the early mornings when the lamplighter came to turn off the lamps. The lamplighter, whose name was Gardenghi, was puzzled. Day after day the strange man remained by the fountain. What on earth was he doing?

"I have come to Rome for inspiration," Giacomo explained. "I watch for the breaking of the dawn over this glorious city and listen to the tolling of the bells—"

"So you like the bells—you are an authority on bells?"

"No, I am a composer. I am writing an opera with a Roman background. I am Puccini."

The lamplighter stood there with his mouth wide open, repeating over and over again the sacred word: *"Bohème."*

At last, when the opera was finished in October 1899, Gia-

como wrote to a friend: "The music was written by God, then by me." To another friend he wrote: "If I am successful with this, I shall abandon myself to silence, peace, and the pursuit of hunting. Now everyone is talking about *Tosca,* but all I ask for is that there should be no *bataclan* about me."

There was more bataclan than he ever bargained for. When *Tosca* was produced for the first time at the Teatro Constanzi in Rome in January 1900, the organized claque was determined to bring about bedlam, particularly in the galleries, which were restless throughout the performance. Someone had deliberately spread the rumor that there was an infernal machine in the theater, timed to explode during the performance. The singers' nerves were reduced to tatters. The critics attacked the play. In spite of all these things the opera was a resounding success. Giacomo was pleased. After *Manon* he bought a bicycle. He decided to celebrate the success of *Tosca* in a more worthy fashion: he would buy an automobile—the most splendid, the most colorful automobile on the market. His choice fell on a Buire, "the evil-smelling demon of a Buire" which he mentions in his letters; and this powerful car terrified the villagers as nothing else had ever terrified them. In this car he went everywhere. It delighted him to take the car for a run to Viareggio and Lucca, though usually he was careful to go to Lucca only when Elvira's husband was out of town. He enjoyed going to Pisa to verify, as he said, whether the tower was still leaning.

I have already told the story of how he broke his leg. It happened shortly after the performance of *Tosca.* He took a poor view of his accident, and though he adored the car even when he was bedridden, he could also complain against it, saying,

"It's all *Tosca*'s fault. All these calamities have arisen on account of *Tosca*. Scarpia was stabbed, Cavaradossi was shot, Floria was drowned in the Tiber, Giacomo broke his leg . . ." The leg healed slowly. To make it heal more rapidly he decided to consult doctors in Paris. In Paris the leg was reset, but when he returned to Torre del Lago he was still confined to a wheel-chair. Then he declared that the work of the famous French doctors was overrated: the humble practitioners of Lucca were infinitely to be preferred. To his intense regret the resetting of the leg produced a permanent limp. This wounded his vanity: he had always been so proud of his strong body, his ability to move freely. He became the despair of tailors who were ordered to do everything possible to conceal the curve in his leg by the way they made his trousers. They solved the problem by sewing lead weights in his left trouser leg: this made the cloth hang straight and somehow gave the illusion that the legs were of equal size.

All this, of course, was current gossip at Zenzena's caffé and in all the wine-shops in Torre del Lago. The boatmen who had rowed him across the lake from La Piaggetta were especially concerned with his progress: they felt a proprietary interest in his recovery. Giacomo's handyman, who was called Gnicche, would make the rounds of the wine-shops and talk to the fishermen.

"Tell us how he is," the fishermen asked. "Will he drive again? Will he be able to go out hunting?"

Gnicche would nod, looking like a wise old peasant, and say in his soft voice, "Nothing to worry about. He'll go driving. Do you think a little thing like a broken leg will affect him? A broken leg won't stop him from making music, or careening

down the roads faster than God intended us to travel, or shooting wildfowl on a fine morning. Yes, and it won't keep him from running after women either!"

Another fountain of knowledge was Arnaldo Gragnani. I wanted to meet Giacomo, and so I asked Gragnani how it could be arranged.

"Well, there's nothing simpler," Gragnani answered. "Of course, sometimes he fancies hiding behind the curtain of his superiority, but there are times when our own sense of inferiority perplexes him, and that sets up barriers between you and him. Just say to him *'Buon giorno, Maestro,'* and he'll answer as though he has known you since his childhood. A large number of people write him flowery letters, but they only provoke him, and he wonders what they are after. If you want to see him, just go right up to him. If I am not mistaken, he is sitting on the terrace overlooking the lake, listening to the quacking of the ducks in the marshes."

Arnaldo spoke so convincingly that I walked up to the terrace.

"Buon giorno, Signor Maestro," I said with all the inflections of a timid school-boy.

He answered my greeting, then asked my name and where I was from. "Quiesa? I know many people from Quiesa. That fellow Raimondo, the taxidermist, he has stuffed many birds for me. And there's Bianchini, the sculptor who has cast me in bronze." He also remembered my father and Don Antonio, and went on to ask when I was going to celebrate my first mass.

"If there was time," he chuckled, "I'd compose a *mottetto*

for you—I used to do things like that when I was at San Martino. Do you know my cousin, Don Roderigo?"

"Yes, Maestro, he was one of my teachers at the seminary."

He was delighted at the thought of the seminary, and he said with a pleased expression, "There was a time when I wore the same kind of cassock you are wearing."

Then I reminded him of the day when he was lying at the bottom of the boat at La Piaggetta with a broken leg, and how he shouted at me and called me "Gonnellone."

"Yes, yes," he roared with laughter. "I baptized you Gonnellone, and now you'll always be Gonnellone." His face clouded. "I'll have to go to work now. You see, I'm a machine for composing operas. At this very moment the machine is in full pursuit of a young lady called Butterfly." Leaning on his cane, he limped toward the house.

"May I help you, Signor Maestro?"

"Not now. Maybe when we get to the stairs . . ."

He began to talk of the opera he was working on.

"You know, I went to London in 1900 to see *Tosca* at Covent Garden. One night I was taken to see a play called *Butterfly*. It was absolutely irresistible. The strange thing is that I could follow it, though I don't know a word of English. It was written by David Belasco, who had come over from New York especially to see its first production in England. He wasn't sure the play would be successful with an English audience, so he didn't dare to enter the theater until the beginning of the third act. When he heard the applause, he knew he could go in."

All the time I was watching him—the sinewy neck, the wide forehead, the soft eyes, one eye half closed and the other

wide open, and the hint of sadness at the corners of the mouth, the sadness increasing when he smiled. It was impossible not to watch every movement he made.

"Well, David Belasco entered the theater," he went on, "and slipped into the front row of the stalls. There was tremendous excitement at the end of the play, and he had to go on and take a bow. Afterwards I went backstage with tears in my eyes and embraced him, and I begged him to let me use *Butterfly* in an opera."

By this time we had reached the studio. He limped to a photograph of Belasco and showed it to me. There was the inevitable affectionate inscription, but what was curious was that Belasco wore a Roman collar.

"Was he a priest?" I exclaimed, puzzled.

"No, but there's a very interesting story attached to the collar. He was a very poor boy in San Francisco. He made it a habit to stand outside the doors of a Jesuit school. He hoped someone would notice him, hoped someone would give him an education. And at last it happened. The rector paused outside the school, had a good look at the boy and asked him very kindly, very paternally, why he came every morning to the school. Belasco said he wanted education—he wanted that above everything else. The rector pointed to the school doors and said they were open for him—for *him!* He was overjoyed, became a model student and vowed that for the rest of his life, in memory of the generosity of a Jesuit father, he would wear a Roman collar."

Shortly afterwards I left him. His last word to me was: "Good-by, Gonnellone. Come and see me again." As I walked

away, he was already back at the piano, shaping some passages for *Butterfly*.

My difficulties had only just begun. A week later, when I returned to the seminary, the director of studies was waiting for me in an immense bare room with a massive desk and a huge crucifix behind it. He asked me what I had been doing during the holidays. What books had I read? How far had I progressed in religion? Had I pursued my studies in music?

I answered these questions as well as I was able. While I was talking about my musical studies, I found myself talking about the new opera.

The director laid his pen down on the desk, and smiled grimly.

"Who has been putting all this mischief into your head?" he said.

"No, the maestro is a great master," I exclaimed. "Signor Direttore, all the world has heard of him."

"Perhaps so. I, too, have heard of *La Bohème* and *Tosca*. I have no wish to hear more. As for you, my dear boy, it is time to put operas aside and learn theology. Of what use can secular music be to a priest?"

I pleaded for a while, but it was no use. The director was determined to show me that the maestro had reached the depths of degradation.

"As if it were not bad enough that he was himself loose-living," the director roared at me, "there is the fact that in *Tosca* he has put the most sacred *Te Deum* side by side with his profane songs; and this might be understandable if Tosca were a religious woman, but she is nothing more than an actress . . ."

I tried to remind the director that Don Antonio, no stranger to ecclesiastical practices, delighted in the master's music. But he would have none of it.

"You are incorrigible!" he shouted. "Go to your room, and study theology—that is, if you want to be admitted into the order of the Subdiaconate. And not another word about *La Bohème* or *Tosca,* or that loose-living Puccini, that sinner, that—"

I heard no more. I walked sadly away. It seemed to me that music which could be sung by the poor peasants and fishermen of Quiesa, Bozzano and Torre del Lago was not sinful. I remembered the words of Baudelaire: "It is at once by poetry and through poetry, by music and through music that the soul catches a glimpse of the splendor lying beyond the grave." I remember I prayed earnestly before the crucifix, and in the end I came to the conclusion that I must allow Giacomo the benefit of every doubt, for assuredly he was in his own way above many of us in spiritual feeling.

As always, Giacomo worked slowly, and *Madama Butterfly* was not finished for three years. It was performed at La Scala for the first time on February 17, 1904. The audience was hostile. There were hoots, whistles, catcalls. At the end of Butterfly's aria "*Spira sul mare,*" a voice from the balcony, two from the orchestra and several from the mezzanine shouted: "Old stuff . . . Old stuff. . . . We've heard it before." Then there came from various parts of the theater the wounding cry: "Thief, you've taken it from Mascagni!"

The place was in an uproar. Rosina Storchio, who played Cio-Cio-San, was so humiliated by the catcalls which greeted her entrance that she broke down and wept, and refused to

go on. Giacomo sat in his box, muttering curses at anyone who insulted his opera, smoking furiously and saying, "They can say what they like—it is still the best opera I have ever composed." Ricordi commented that the performance of the audience was excessively well organized. It was Mascagni who said the truest thing that night. "The opera has fallen, but it will rise again."

With the braying and the catcalls, which had ruined Butterfly's last scene with her son, in his ears, Giacomo wandered home alone. He felt desperately lonely, his nerves on edge, so sickened and discouraged that he did not leave his house for two weeks. The morning newspapers announced: "Puccini's fiasco" in large headlines. Rosina Storchio still refused to sing the part of Cio-Cio-San. He wrote to her: "You must never be discouraged. Your art is so majestic, so true, that one day the public will atone for its errors. Together we shall march to victory. Today Butterfly is prostrate, but she is still very much alive and soon she will rise triumphantly." Some time later he sent her a signed photograph with the inscription: "Why abandon Butterfly? If you go, the best part of my work goes with you."

Rosina replied: "I will sing Butterfly anywhere but in Italy." She kept her promise. She never sang the part in Italy, but she sang it repeatedly in other countries.

Giacomo was inconsolable, but an incident which happened a few days after the fiasco pleased him. A Milanese, who admired his work, came before the Board of Health to register the birth of a daughter. He was asked the name of his daughter. He answered: "Butterfly." Everyone was against him. His wife said there was no record of the name in the Calendar of

Saints, and besides it was difficult to pronounce. The registrar demanded why any father in his right senses should name a beautiful child after so deplorable a play. Still, the father insisted that she should be called Butterfly and there was an end to the matter.

When Giacomo heard the story, he asked to see Butterfly and her father. Some days later the father arrived, accompanied by his whole family which included an amazing brood of relatives. There were brothers, sisters, cousins, uncles, aunts, and all their neighbors, and all of them were intent on paying their respects to the maestro. It was like the scene in the first act of *Madama Butterfly,* when huge cohorts of Butterfly's relatives come to witness the marriage with the American lieutenant. Giacomo was delighted.

First there were speeches. Afterwards he presented a gift to the *bambina,* while Elvira rewarded the proud father. To the father Giacomo said, "Thank you, dear friend. Now I am convinced there is at least one other person in Italy who has as much faith in *Madama Butterfly* as I have. I hope the baby will develop a fine soprano voice and will one day sing in my operas." Startled by the deep voice of the composer, the baby began to yell. Giacomo said softly, "See, she is rehearsing already."

He returned to Torre del Lago. He was now at last legally married to Elvira. Gemignani was dead. Quite suddenly, Giacomo decided that their union should be blessed by the Church. On January 3, 1904, at 10 o'clock in the evening they were married by Father Michelucci, and all the time Giacomo was afraid the old prankster Ferruccio Pagni would hear of it and call heaven to witness that a furious joke was

being played. "Please, Father, have curtains over the church windows," Giacomo implored, in the hope that the marriage would pass unobserved. There was a brief ceremony. At the end Giacomo slipped a generous offering into the hands of the old country priest, saying: This is to thank you, for you have made me very happy.

Father Michelucci wrote in the church records, when the ceremony was over:

> Maestro Giacomo Puccini, son of Michele and Albina Magi, and Elvira Bonturi widow of Narciso Gemignani, born in Lucca and resident in this village, having obtained the dispensation of the three canonical banns, being free of the impediment of crime and with no canonical impediment now existing against the valid and lawful celebration of their marriage, having been questioned *in facie Ecclesiae* and their constant *per verba de praesenti* having been received, were by me here, subscribed the third of January 1904, united in the holy bonds of Matrimony in the presence of the two witnesses, Dr. Rodolfo Giacchi and Giuseppe Razzi.

The work on *Madama Butterfly* went on. He began to hammer it into shape, changing the music and the libretto, reconstructing certain scenes, providing three acts instead of the original two. When it was presented at Brescia, it was a triumphant success.

For the next three years Puccini was continually traveling. There were journeys to Paris, Nice and London, constant visits to Milan to consult managers and directors about the production of his operas. In the intervals he returned to Torre del Lago, to breathe again the clear windswept air of the lake.

Nearly always Elvira accompanied him on his journeys. She insisted on going with him. As she grew older and fatter, her

possessiveness increased. Partly it was Giacomo's fault: he boasted of his easy conquests. She trusted none of the women who came flocking round him at the theater. She was suspicious of the singers who wrote ardent sentimental love-letters and enclosed signed photographs with tender inscriptions. There would be passionate quotations from arias, or else they wrote: "From your Mimi." Elvira was shocked. "Why can't they leave Giacomo in peace?" she demanded. "It is absolutely outrageous and shameless the way they pursue him!" Sometimes she confided her fears to Vandini who acted as her husband's business manager. She wrote in one of her letters to him: "You know, my suspicions are not in the least groundless. Miss X. arrived at Viareggio on Wednesday evening at 11 o'clock; she left at the same hour the following morning. I am very seldom wrong in my suspicions."

She was rarely wrong. She was a woman without pretentions, but her fierce possessiveness made her miserable. Sometimes she would talk of Giacomo's *affaires* in front of Ferruccio Pagni and the other accomplices of Giacomo's midnight adventures. She would talk with fury and passion, saying that Giacomo was misbehaving again, forgetting that her audience included men who took delight in misbehavior; and when they laughed, she walked out of the room with her head high, in a towering rage.

She was genuinely in love with Giacomo. She had not married him to pursue social ambitions. She had no desire to meet the great people of the world. Prior to their marriage, she cooked and mended for him as loyally as if they had been man and wife. She made every lira do the work of three. She never interfered with his art. But as his fame in-

creased, Giacomo depended less and less on her. At fifty he was handsomer than he had been as a young man. Success became him. At fifty-five Elvira was already a haggard old woman, bitterly resentful whenever she caught sight of Giacomo's soft brown eyes glowing in the presence of another woman.

Yet there was a bond between them—their son Tonio, who was studying in Milan. At one time Giacomo had intended him to be a musician, gave him a violin and looked forward to the day when Tonio would play the music of the operas. But on the day when the violin was solemnly presented to Tonio, Giacomo chanced to look out of the window. Tonio was floating the new violin on the lake, as though it were a ship. Tonio was reproved. He took lessons. Some time later the brothers Tommasi, both painters, came to call at the studio. One of them was a reputable violinist. He borrowed Tonio's violin, and offered to tune it. Instead, he very carefully loosened the strings a little. Tonio was ordered to go upstairs and practice, but shortly afterwards hair-raising sounds floated down. "*Per carità*," Giacomo screamed. "For God's sake, stop! You make my teeth grit!" And that was the end of Tonio's brief career as a musician.

Though the work went on, Giacomo was restless. He kept wandering from place to place. He thought the lonely Roman Maremma would suit him ideally: he would be able to work in peace and do some hunting. He bought the Roccatagliata castle, but in this immense estate he found no peace. He wrote: "I am in a cemetery. The air is poor, the dogs are sick and in all my hunting I have caught only one pheasant."

Chiatri, Abetone, Roccatagliata, and Viareggio—all these

represent stages in his pursuit of a calm life. It was all carefully worked out. When the lowlands of Torre del Lago were too hot, he would go to Chiatri, thirteen hundred feet up. When Chiatri was too hot, he would go still higher, to Abetone. So he made the rounds, until Torre del Lago summoned him back again.

Now the strange pattern of Giacomo's life entered into the still stranger pattern of Gabriele D'Annunzio's life. They were to meet, cherish one another, work together for a while, then separate forever.

At this time D'Annunzio was living in perpetual fear of blindness. Ill and restless, he took comfort from music. He was delighted when the musicians came begging for librettos. Debussy had scored his *San Sebastiano*. Mascagni, Franchetti, Pizzetti, Zandonai were all in full cry after the celebrated poet whose temper, rarely under control, would flare up unaccountably. D'Annunzio wrote the libretto for Franchetti's *Figlia di Iorio*. When Giacomo heard of the opera, he laid a finger against his nose and said shrewdly: "The box-office will decide." The box-office did.

One of Giacomo's oldest friends was Paolo Tosti, the composer of sentimental songs, singer, violinist, teacher of *bel canto* and favorite of the royal families of Europe. He had been a particular favorite of Queen Victoria and now enjoyed the friendship of Queen Alexandra; and it was at Paolo Tosti's suggestion that Giacomo later dedicated *The Girl of the Golden West* to her. It was Tosti who introduced Giacomo to Gabriele D'Annunzio in the belief that the collaboration between the greatest living Italian poet and the greatest living Italian composer would produce a work of genius.

This belief possessed no foundations, though for years they corresponded, made rough sketches of librettos together, were enthusiastic or pretended to be enthusiastic over each other's work. D'Annunzio came to Abetone with the manuscript of the play *Rose of Cyprus*. A reading of the play took place under the trees in the garden. In his clear high-pitched voice, D'Annunzio read the verses with a perfect flair for drama. Giacomo listened, enthralled by the beginning of the play, less enthralled as it went on, until finally he felt that the story had become meaningless. It left him cold, and with his instinct for the theater he knew that it would leave an audience cold. When he had finished reading, the bald poet with the pale blue eyes and the blond beard turned to Giacomo and smiled.

"Well, I'll think it over," Giacomo said. "You know, a libretto is like a suit of clothes. When it comes from the tailor, it's perfect, but you put it on, you find—well—you have to take in a bit here and let out a bit there."

D'Annunzio's head dropped; he gazed at the earth; and then muttered something about rarely allowing anyone to edit his verses. Giacomo exclaimed that the collaborator of an opera must sometimes make changes for technical reasons—even major operations were occasionally necessary. D'Annunzio was bitterly offended. By mutual consent it was decided to postpone the collaboration indefinitely.

But this was not the end of the friendship between them—a strange friendship. Not long afterwards D'Annunzio came to live in Viareggio, and frequently came on visits to Torre del Lago, and there I would see them standing together on the little pier overlooking the lake, one elegant, ugly, with his precise little mannerisms, the other beautiful and coarse, as though woven out of the earth itself.

I would see them standing together while the light faded around them, and it seemed to me that there could never be any greater differences in character. I like to think of Giacomo as a peasant, with a peasant's earthiness, a peasant's sense of dignity, a peasant's delight in simple food. I remember him going to a fashionable restaurant with d'Annunzio, and roaring out against the food they provided:

"Why, Elvira can do it better! Why don't they learn how to cook beans. It's simple—no trick to it. I've done it a hundred times myself. First put the beans in a pot, then add a reasonable quantity of cold water, then throw in some sage leaves, two or three cloves of garlic, some salt and pepper, then let them boil gently on a fire for about an hour. When the hour is over they will be only half cooked. Now add a little oil and let the boiling go on for another hour. By this time the beans are tender, and there are only three or four spoonfuls of liquid left. That's the way we cook beans in Lucca!"

I have seen him sitting down in front of a large dish of red beans cooked with tuna fish and onions. He preferred a spoon to a fork: the spoon allowed him to eat more rapidly and so enjoy the full flavor of the dish. Like all Tuscans, he retained a taste for savory soups seasoned with herbs, onions and garlic, roast beef dressed in oil and pepper, with beans and fish on fast days. Gala occasions were marked with a plump pullet in a pot, or with wild duck or quail roasting on a spit over a charcoal fire. While the meal was being cooked he would stroll out to the kitchen and stand there sniffing, with the dogs at his heels. His demands were simple: as long as there was plenty of olive oil and some wine he was content.

In all this Giacomo was the direct opposite of D'Annunzio, who scented himself and wore jewelry and spent money os-

tentatiously, and was rarely out of debt. Giacomo spent frugally; he hated to owe money, and was constantly bickering with Elvira on the amount of money spent for food. He insisted he was the better buyer, especially when it came to fish.

"If D'Annunzio weren't a great writer," Giacomo said, "I'd think he was crazy."

He had proof of D'Annunzio's craziness when he visited the house at Cervignano where D'Annunzio lived in state. Now Cervignano lies on the border between Italy and Austria. Its inhabitants, like the Tuscans, vaunt their collection of stuffed birds. D'Annunzio was horrified to find taxidermist specimens in his house. To hide the birds he erected an ornate eighteenth-century screen. Giacomo asked permission to look at the birds. D'Annunzio was startled. He pointed out that a man of Giacomo's good taste would leave stuffed birds alone—admire the screen, how delicate the carving, how beautiful it was, with what exquisite artistry it was contrived. Giacomo was still wondering about the birds when he left.

"D'Annunzio is crazy," he said. "Yes, he's a queer duck, he doesn't have his feet on the ground. Why? I don't understand. It seems to me a poet should be as real as the people who will read his verses."

Though he still worried about the next libretto, the year passed pleasantly enough: there was hunting, driving, long hours spent in composition in the studio. But in November there was a stir in the air. Mysterious rumors began to circulate in Torre del Lago. What had happened? No one quite knew. Was it a new opera? Or a rift between Mascagni and Puccini? Finally we learned the truth—Giacomo was leaving immediately for America.

The Maestro insistently asks Vandini to find some Latin sequences for *Tosca*.

Puccini's last message to the author.

Puccini in a pensive mood.

Puccini in his studio
at Torre del Lago.

Elvira, the Maestro, and son Tonio
in the garden at Torre del Lago.

Puccini, the "Sportsman."

Illica, the librettist, and the Maestro.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Tragedy

In Torre del Lago we were heartbroken, for we wondered whether he would ever return. No one wanted him to go except those who had relatives in Brazil and Argentina, and were under the delusion that Giacomo could absent himself from New York for an hour or so to give them the latest news about Lucca. He was going to *America del Nord.* It was fantastic. Until that time, very few Lucchesi had gone there. But after all, it was only to be expected. As the local newspaper stated: "America could not have expected a better ambassador of the Italian soul. Although we are proud that Giacomo Puccini was born in our city, we do not forget that he belongs to the world."

We crowded round him at the railway station, sent flowers and little devotional verses, and returned sadly to our own affairs. Elvira was accompanying him, but it pleased us that Tonio would be left behind to continue his studies at the engineering school in Milan.

The ship was late in reaching New York. For two days the S.S. *Kaiserin Augusta Victoria* was delayed in a heavy fog.

Giacomo paced the deck restlessly, smoked incessantly and hurled terrible Tuscan imprecations at the weather, at the ship, at the sea, at the fate which destined him to be late for the opening of his own opera. But when he arrived at the Metropolitan Opera House after the first act of *Manon*, the orchestra saluted him with a fanfare, and there were no more imprecations. Sitting in the director's box, he was at the height of his fame, applauded at every turn. He said later, "Every time there was applause I had to get up and sit down I don't know how many times—I felt like one of those puppets you see in a circus." He wrote to a friend in London: "A magnificent evening—an immense success. Caruso was amazing. Cavalieri was competent as an artist, and superb in her beauty."

He was ideally happy in New York. It was not only that America pleased him; he was delighted to be staying at the Hotel Astor with Caruso as a companion. Caruso, Giacomo and Elvira were inseparable. They joked together. Caruso took revenge for the many practical jokes which Giacomo had played on him at Torre del Lago. Caruso had no interest in sports: Giacomo was perpetually egging him on, saying what a magnificent hunter he would make, playing with him very much as he had played with his brother-in-law when he invented the "antilisca." Nothing amused him more than to see Caruso wading knee-deep in mud with a gun in his hand, returning an hour later with an insignificant little quail as the reward for his indomitable courage.

"This Caruso is a fine tenor but a damned poor shot," Giacomo was accustomed to say, and sometimes he would tell the story of how he first came face to face with Caruso.

It happened at Torre del Lago. Caruso was then virtually unknown, a young singer grateful for the opportunity of earning a few lire. He wanted a recommendation from Puccini for the lead tenor part of Rodolfo in the forthcoming production of *La Bohème* at Livorno. Earlier he had sung the baritone role of Marcello in the same opera at Milan. Perhaps he knew that Giacomo hated to pass judgment on voices. Under duress he could sometimes be made to express an opinion about a male voice, but he was everlastingly afraid to pass judgment on a woman's voice, for fear of jeopardizing his reputation. He would say sadly, "How can one disappoint a beautiful girl who barks like a dog?"

One day Manfredi, the handyman, announced that a singer was waiting to see the maestro and hoped to be heard by him.

"Well, what kind of man is he?" Puccini asked.

"I'd say he was a Neapolitan by the way he speaks. A short, squat little fellow with a little mustache, and he wears a derby tilted on one side."

"Tell him I'm busy."

"He looks as if he's determined to see you—"

"One of those Neapolitans, eh? One of those *scugnizzi* who cling to you like leeches. What kind of singer?"

"He says he's a tenor and the best one in the world."

"They all say that."

Giacomo laid aside the book he was reading and went to the door. *"Chi é lei?*—Who are you?" he shouted. Caruso smiled and with his full-throated voice answered with the words of Rodolfo in *La Bohème: "Chi son? Sono un poeta*—Who am I? I am a poet."

It was enough. Giacomo threw his arms around the young man, and said: "Rodolfo is yours."

So Caruso went to Livorno, and there fell in love with Ada Giachetti who played the role of Mimi; shortly afterwards he married her and in time became the father of two children called Rodolfo and Mimi.

Meanwhile they were playing pranks on each other at the Hotel Astor. Neither Elvira nor Giacomo knew any English; Caruso knew at most a few words. To Caruso's amazement, Giacomo became the object of the attentions of a young lady connected with the Metropolitan Opera Company. Her connection gave her many opportunities to be alone with him. Caruso was so delighted that he immediately ran to share his knowledge with Elvira.

"You wouldn't believe it," he exclaimed. "That devil of a Giacomo is at it again. My God, how does he do it? She doesn't know a word of Italian, they speak in French and I assure you, his French is as flavorless as American cooking. What a man he is! I wish I knew how he did it!"

Caruso was treading on dangerous ground. Just two months before, he himself had been the center of a scandal. There had been the much-publicized "monkey-house episode." According to the gossips, Caruso had been seen annoying a woman in the monkey-house in Central Park. His enthusiastic reception at the Metropolitan did much to take the sting from the rumors, but they rankled. It was therefore surprising that Caruso should go to such pains to make Giacomo's life intolerable.

Probably he could not help himself. Most singers and musicians are *fredduristi,* tellers of corny tales, inciters to vio-

lence. The general tone of their jokes is risqué, the teasing which goes on backstage is usually coarse, though seldom cruel. While playing a poker game between the acts they are only too ready to launch their *freddura.*

Prodded by Caruso, Elvira began to watch her husband like a hawk. She began to attend rehearsals. One day during a rehearsal of *Madama Butterfly,* sitting beside Giacomo in the middle of the front row, she saw he was not wearing his diamond ring. Instantly she was alarmed. She whispered hotly, "Where's your ring?" Giacomo shook his head, frowned and said, "Keep quiet. They're rehearsing." Elvira refused to be quieted. "Giacomo, what have you done with it?" she exclaimed.

When he saw it was impossible to take her mind from the subject and just as impossible to make her stop talking about it, he pretended to discover that he had lost the ring.

"My God!" he cried. "I had it a moment ago—"

"Did you have it when you left the hotel?"

"Yes, of course. Just give me time to think."

But Elvira gave him no time to think. She threw a searching glance around the Opera House, and her glance disclosed the figure of a young lady seated in one of the boxes. Her quick suspicious mind had already arrived at a plausible conclusion.

"Go and look for it," she told Giacomo. "You know where you have been, and whom you have been with."

"All right, after the rehearsal is over," Giacomo replied.

"No, get it now. Either you go and get it, or I will!"

As she said this her voice rose menacingly until it was as high as the voice of the soprano on the stage.

Muttering under his breath, Giacomo rose and went down the aisle until he was out of sight. Elvira made a pretense of giving her full attention to what was happening on the stage, but from the corner of her eye she could see that someone was moving into the box occupied by a pretty girl. Presently Giacomo returned. He held out his hand, so that she could see the ring blazing on his finger.

"Satisfied?" he whispered. "You see what it is to be a good Catholic. While you were scolding me I said a prayer to St. Anthony, and the saint came to my help. I found the ring under the chair where I was sitting some time ago."

"Bravo, Giacomo. We must remember to make a special offering to St. Anthony," Elvira said.

At the end of the act, when Giacomo left her in order to confer with the stage manager and the conductor, Elvira quietly made her way up the aisle to the box where Giacomo's pretty friend was still sitting. Smiling and holding out her hand, Elvira went up to her.

"Dear signora," Elvira said, "I thank you and Saint Anthony for having helped my husband to find his ring."

It was no wonder that Giacomo frequently exclaimed against Elvira's occult powers. By a kind of black magic she knew where he was and what he was doing at every hour of the day. A reception was being held shortly before their departure. Elvira was ill, and could not attend. She had sworn to Caruso that she would not let Giacomo out of her sight, but Giacomo was the guest of honor at the reception and attended it without her, having promised faithfully to return early.

Surrounded by the artists of the Metropolitan Opera House, Giacomo was in his element at the party which followed the

reception. No one received the impression that he was unduly worried about the absence of Elvira. He danced, sang, joked and continued his flirtation with the young lady to whom he had once offered his ring. It was dawn when he returned and let himself stealthily into his suite at the Astor. He undressed and slipped quietly under the sheets. There was no sound from Elvira. Contented, he dropped off to sleep. The moment she heard his quiet breathing Elvira slipped out of bed and began her tour of inspection. She searched everywhere—in the pockets of his greatcoat, his trousers, his coat, his waistcoat. Finally she searched his silk hat, and her curious fingers wandered inside the inner hatband. There she discovered what she had been looking for—a small folded note. It was a note from the girl requesting a secret meeting with Giacomo the next day.

He told the story himself many times and nearly always in the same way. He would say: "From that moment I believed in telepathy, spiritualism, necromancy, mind-reading and every kind of occult art. Don't tell me Elvira is not a medium, for otherwise how could her eyes see through that hatband? Yes, she's a witch, nothing but a witch!"

In all these matters Giacomo was exceedingly talkative, far too talkative. Partly it was the fault of Ferruccio Pagni, who kept writing to America and asking details of his conquests. With incredible innocence Giacomo always replied to these letters at great length. Giacomo asked that these letters should be treated as confidential, but Ferruccio Pagni usually succeeded in surrounding himself with a host of listeners when he read the letters aloud on the pier. He had the audacity to sell the letters to the highest bidder, with the result that all

Lucca knew what was happening in New York; and the news of Giacomo's amours penetrated the seminary.

At last Giacomo and Elvira returned to Torre del Lago to face a barrage of proffered librettos.

There was, for example, the libretto of *Conchita*, written by Maurice Vaucaire on the basis of a Pierre Louÿs novel. Pierre Louÿs announced that he was a famous French writer, that Ricordi was in favor of Vaucaire's efforts to put the novel in the shape of a libretto, and this was certainly the best libretto ever written for the composer. Giacomo showed only perfunctory interest in the libretto. As for the accompanying letter, he said, "This Frenchman talks too much and too big."

Then there was the libretto for *Marie Antoinette*. The subject pleased him. Illica worked hard on the libretto, which originally contained fourteen scenes. These were whittled down every time composer and librettist got together. Eleven of the original scenes were discarded; a prison scene was added. Two of the remaining four scenes were abandoned. Illica was confused and angry, and relations between them were almost at the breaking point when Illica finally decided to proceed no further.

Marie Antoinette was jettisoned in favor of Belasco's play, *The Girl of the Golden West*, which Giacomo had brought with him from New York. On the recommendation of Giulio Ricordi, the poet Zangarini was offered the task of composing the libretto. Everything went well. Composer and librettist became close friends, and they were inseparable. Zangarini stayed with Giacomo at Torre del Lago, then at Abetone, finally at Chiatri. But as always the beginning of a new opera was accompanied by a new love affair. "It is possible to write

a march after drinking a pail of wine," Giacomo said in mitigation of these *affaires,* "but to write a love duet you must have a warm heart and a cool head."

The servant problem at the Villa Puccini was acute. There were many reasons, and all centered around the character of Elvira, who grew increasingly suspicious and dictatorial as she grew older. Gnicche the handyman was a permanent fixture, able to weather all storms. He would shrug off Elvira's threats of dismissal as a duck shrugs water from its back: he knew the maestro would never let him go. But it was the fate of the women servants to be at the mercy of Elvira, who sent them packing with monotonous regularity. Unless they were aged, ugly and hopelessly submissive, they stayed only a few days. When a village girl timidly applied for the position of maid and expressed herself willing to perform the most menial tasks, Elvira decided that it would be worth while to put up with her, but she was not at all happy to have a young girl in the house.

Doria Manfredi was sixteen, gentle in manner and voice, obedient and easy to please. Her reputation was beyond reproach. Giacomo knew her family: they were modest people of integrity, and they were not pleased by Doria's decision to become a maid-servant. They warned her that she would be lowering her social standing in the community, and lessening her chances of making a good marriage. To their objections Doria replied that she was willing to forego a possible husband for the sake of being a member of the Puccini household. Living there, she would meet famous singers like Titta Ruffo, Scotti, Tetrazzini, Galli-Curci, and Cavalieri. Then there was the great Caruso, who returned to Italy every summer to spend

some weeks at Viareggio with his wife and children: he would often drive over to Torre del Lago to play scopa with Giacomo and Ferruccio Pagni and the other bohemians of the place. She told herself she would meet the great writers like Guido da Verona, Matilde Serao, Zangarini and the legendary D'Annunzio. Why, to be even a lowly member of that household would be an education in itself. She would have the privilege of opening the maestro's door to great impresarios, senators, diplomats, even royalty.

Her parents and her brother admitted the truth of these assertions, but they added: "Everybody knows what a terribly sharp temper Donna Elvira has. You'll be between the devil and the deep sea. A husband who pursues every pretty woman in sight, and a jealous wife. Think carefully what you are doing!"

Doria replied she was perfectly aware of the pitfalls, and she intended to be extremely cautious.

"The maestro is always making trips abroad," she explained. "Donna Elvira used to go with him, though she is not a good traveller. When they went to America, she was very ill there and nearly died. She says she will never go again unless she takes with her a maid she can trust and who will look after her. Think what an opportunity this is for me."

With the hard-won consent of her family, Doria entered into the life of the Villa Puccini.

For weeks Giacomo and Elvira rejoiced in their good fortune. In all the years they had lived at Torre del Lago they were never so comfortable, so well looked-after. Doria performed her duties with a constant willingness to please. She moved about the house so softly that Giacomo, absorbed in

The Girl of the Golden West, was scarcely aware of her presence. The studio where he worked late at night was always clean and full of fresh flowers picked by Doria. The birds in the aviary were fed and tended as never before. All the visitors were amazed at the new regime and loud in their praises of Doria.

This went on through the late spring and summer. During the summer Gatti-Casazza and Toscanini came to Torre del Lago. Toscanini of course is well known, but something should be said here of Gatti-Casazza. For eight years now this extraordinary man had been director of La Scala. Through him the old opera house had seen its prestige restored; he had even succeeded in making it financially profitable. A friend of Giacomo since the day when they had first met at Ferrara, where Giacomo spent a few weeks when working on *Manon,* he genuinely believed in the future of Giacomo's operas, and even the fiasco which accompanied the première of *Madama Butterfly* did not shake his belief. Now he was leaving La Scala to assume the position of director of the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. He had already engaged Toscanini. Together they planned to produce opera more splendidly in New York than it had ever been produced before. During the first season Gatti-Casazza planned to produce all of Giacomo's operas, even the long-forgotten *Le Villi.* In particular, he wanted to produce the opera which Giacomo was still working on.

To all these plans Giacomo gave his consent, and it seemed perfectly appropriate to him that *The Girl of the Golden West* should first be performed in the new world, and he saw nothing strange in the fact that it would be sung in Italian. He

played some of the arias to Toscanini who admired them so enthusiastically that Giacomo went to work on the remaining pages of the opera with a furious concentration.

Giacomo's habit was to compose during the evening and to throw the studio wide open during the day, so that the Villa Puccini took on the airs of the Club Bohème. You would generally find a game of cards going on. Sometimes Giacomo would take a hand in the game, or else he would sit down at the piano and play some tentative tunes, always watching for their effect on his friends. His composing hours were from eleven at night to one or two o'clock in the morning. Then, sipping coffee from the *espresso* which stood permanently on the piano, with vast quantities of cigarettes and pencils within reach, and notebooks scattered everywhere, he did his real work, always severe with himself, rewriting each scene ten or twelve times, sending his music to Ricordi only when he was satisfied that nothing further could be done to it, a perfectionist who was content to spend years over a single opera. He worked at night because he believed that "the weariness which comes with sunset stirs the imagination and the mind."

Everyone in the household and all his intimate friends knew his habits, and so left him alone and undisturbed after half past ten. At that hour Tonio would wander off and Elvira would go to bed. Even the dogs recognized their master's need for silence and solitude.

On those hot nights only one other person besides Giacomo was awake in the house. This was Doria, who chose these late hours to do the ironing.

Elvira wondered why Doria chose to do her work so late.

"Why don't you do the ironing in the morning?" she asked.

"It would mean getting up a little earlier, but there is no harm in that. You ought to go out and spend your evenings with the young people of the village . . ."

Doria explained she had no desire to seek the company of the young people, especially those of Torre del Lago. She preferred to do the ironing at night when there was a cool breeze from the lake, and she was sure there would be no interruptions.

Elvira accepted the explanation until it occurred to her to wonder why there was so much linen being ironed. Of course Doria was conscientious in her duties, but a quite fabulous amount of linen was being ironed every night. Was she becoming interested in Giacomo? Worse still, was Giacomo in love with Doria? Elvira knew the symptoms. *"Sono sempre innamorato quando scrivo,"* Giacomo was fond of saying. "I am always in love when I am composing." Perhaps that was it: certainly with Giacomo anything was possible.

As usual Elvira resolved her doubts in her own way. She gave strict orders that the ironing must be done during the day, and in the evenings Doria must take herself out of the house or go to bed. She was young, pretty, affectionate, easy to please, and at the same time she was gentle and obedient. When Elvira explained that the noise of the iron would annoy Giacomo, and it would be better to do the ironing when he was out of the house, boating in the lake or motoring to Viareggio, she seemed to understand. For a few evenings no ironing was done downstairs.

One evening Elvira awoke and heard the thump, thump, thump of the pressing iron coming from the room below, like the beat of a contrabass echoing the softer notes of the piano.

It was midnight. Elvira frowned and determined to reprimand the maidservant the next day. The girl was sharply rebuked, and for several nights there was no sound of ironing.

Once again Elvira awoke early to hear the piano in the studio and the thump of the iron. This time she did not go to sleep again. She reviewed in her mind all Giacomo's praises of Doria, the little kindnesses he showed her, and her suspicions kindled. It was past midnight. The sound came clear and loud: evidently the maid-servant was ironing vigorously. Suddenly the thumping noise ceased. Elvira waited several minutes, but there was no resumption of the sound. Had Doria finished her work? Then she would soon be tiptoeing upstairs to bed. Elvira listened acutely. The sound of the piano stopped abruptly, and in all the house there was only silence.

Elvira crept out of bed, made her way to the head of the stairs and listened. The house was quiet and dark. Nothing stirred. Suspicious, all her senses alert, Elvira crept downstairs to the darkened studio. She switched on the electric light at the exact moment when Giacomo and Doria were stepping over the threshold of the door leading to the garden.

In her nightdress, her long graying hair flowing over her shoulders, her face contorted with rage, Elvira resembled one of the furies in a Greek tragedy.

"Now you'll be punished!" she screamed at Giacomo. She turned toward Doria. "Foul little slut!" she shouted. "Defiler of my house! Do you hear? You're beastly and filthy—" There followed a flood of invective, and Doria burst into hot tears.

A little while later, her face white and tear-stained, all her possessions gathered together and stuffed into a small hand-

bag, Doria made her way to her own home. Her mother was still up, mending an old suit. She gazed at Doria in consternation.

"What's the matter, Doria?" the mother asked. "I did not expect you, daughter, at this hour."

"I don't feel well," Doria answered, her lips trembling.

"*Bambina mia,* have some rest. We all know you're working too hard for those people—you'll feel better after a night in your own bed."

As Doria carried her bag upstairs, her mother called after her: "Are you going back to the villa in the morning?"

There was no reply. As quietly as she had entered the house, Doria slipped upstairs.

Doria behaved quietly and with dignity. Elvira behaved without dignity, with a blazing anger and a loud violence and a terrible unreasonableness. She could think only of "the ingratitude of that girl" and her utter disobedience. As she raged against Doria, her mind began to give way under the strain. The more Giacomo protested his relations with Doria were innocent, the more furious she became.

"I stopped believing in anything you say a long time ago," she screamed at her husband. "Yes, Doria is evil, thoroughly evil! All that sweet and charming exterior of hers is a disguise—underneath it all she is a whore! Well, it's time the world should hear of it. She has no right to go on deceiving the world. Yes, she should be punished. It's time she was punished instead of being petted and loved. Let her have what's coming to her!"

Elvira saw that her version of the affair traveled over the

village. She was determined to make everyone in the village believe that Doria was a whore.

Some days later Doria went on a visit to her relatives, the Boccias, who lived next door to Villa Puccini. It may be that she was curious to see what was going on at the villa, and perhaps she even hoped to meet Giacomo and Elvira, to hear from their lips that the incident was closed. As she was walking past the tall iron fence which encircled the garden Elvira set eyes on her, and immediately strode across the garden and flung open the gate. She barred the girl's path and shouted insults which could be heard across the village. Doria turned and fled.

Doria refused now to leave her parents' home. Everyone in the village was talking about her. Many agreed with Elvira; others protested that the girl was the innocent victim of an old woman's incurable jealousy; still others, remembering Giacomo's love-affairs in the past, proclaimed that he had seduced her. The elderly village lawyer was the leader of the faction which said Giacomo was guilty. Within a week the rumors had encircled Lake Massaciuccoli, the source of hundreds of conversations in the wine-shops. The rumors reached Lucca.

Giacomo continued his work. It was his only refuge—to hide in his studio and throw himself with complete abandon into the task of composition. On all previous occasions when Elvira had hurled insults at him, he buried himself in his music. But now the ordinary measures no longer availed against Elvira's fury and her desire for revenge. October and November passed. One would have thought her fury would have abated, but it only increased. All her thoughts were centered on the maddening sight she had witnessed in the studio;

and to all appearances she thirsted with an insane desire to destroy Giacomo and Doria. The least she would do would be to drive Doria from the village.

There came a time when Giacomo could no longer compose. The score of *The Girl of the Golden West* lay on the desk in the disordered studio, gathering dust. He spent his days duck-hunting, his evenings playing scopa with his friends. He shrugged off Elvira's infuriating accusations as long as he could: in the opinion of Ferruccio Pagni he tolerated them longer than any mortal man could be expected to tolerate them. Meanwhile there came repeated telegrams from Giulio Ricordi: "Where is *The Girl*?"

In despair of finishing the opera, Giacomo suddenly pulled up his stakes and departed for Rome, where the performance of one of his operas was scheduled. Torre del Lago was no longer a haven: the gossips were everywhere. When he walked in the street, he was aware of whispered comments, poison in the air, the long shadow falling across the lake.

It was worse for Doria. She could neither eat nor sleep. She lacked the courage to walk through the village and show herself. She prayed fervently and pitifully, but there were no answers to her prayers. She had to bear the suspicions of her own family. Elvira had made a special visit to the girl's mother, telling her about the vampire she had brought into the world. She had even gone to the parish priest with her story.

One day late in January, soon after Giacomo left for Rome, Doria felt that she could bear her existence no longer. She went to the pharmacy and bought tablets of corrosive sublimate, which were sold as a disinfectant in a glass tube marked

"Poison." She took two tablets. Soon she was lying on the floor with stomach cramps, and her mother was about to call a doctor when Doria confessed to having taken poison. The priest was summoned. The doctor pumped her stomach and administered emetics, but in vain. She died the next day. Before her death she said, "I took poison because there were so many lies, and I am innocent."

That afternoon the tolling of the church-bells broke the calm of Torre del Lago. At first the bells rang softly, then more loudly, until at last they were deafening. The women appeared at their doors, asking, "Who is dead?" The farmers in the fields laid aside their hoes and listened to the tolling of the bells, shaking their heads. They did not know who had died. Perhaps it was Tomaso del Tofanelli, who had been sick for a long time now. But no, he was better yesterday. Then perhaps it was Rosa del Chiappa, who had not recovered from childbirth. Well, *pazienza.* May her soul rest in peace.

Soon enough they heard that Doria lay dead, and then indignation spread like a flame through the village. Doria's brother swore vengeance: so did her cousins and her uncle. Everyone was murmuring against Elvira and Giacomo. A little crowd gathered outside the barred gates of the villa, raising their fists and shouting: "Murderers, you should be punished!" The shadow which crept over the lake now darkened the whole valley.

Giacomo was in Rome when he received news of Doria's death; and together with the letter from Torre del Lago there came headlines in the newspapers. He withdrew completely into himself, seeing no one except Paolo Tosti and his family.

Doria's family denounced Elvira to the authorities as the

direct cause of the girl's suicide. It was generally agreed that Elvira had made life intolerable for the girl. An autopsy was ordered. It was performed by Dr. Giacchi, who pronounced that Doria had died a virgin. Though Giacomo was now exonerated, Elvira became all the more culpable, for had she not driven an innocent girl to suicide? Doria's family vowed to make Elvira pay. But this was not so shocking to Elvira as the letter she received from Giacomo, saying he would never return to live with her. He demanded a separation to be followed by a divorce.

"I've suffered too much from her," he told his friend Fanelli. "It can't go on any more. This is the last time I will suffer agony at her hands."

Ferruccio Pagni observed, "Well, I knew you would leave her sooner or later. Given time, she would have broken you completely."

On the day of the poisoning Elvira left for Milan. There she remained, while the Doria family instituted a lawsuit against her for defamation of character.

Giacomo returned to the villa, but he could not work. The rumors were everywhere. He felt utterly ashamed. His pride was wounded. He was deaf to Elvira's continual letters and telegrams, begging for forgiveness and a reconciliation. He told himself that he would never see her again. Though the doctor had exonerated him from any blame, the scandalmongers still blamed him and believed he had actually seduced her; and his enemies in the musical world were not averse to repeating slanders.

Elvira wrote to him:

Giacomo, *ritorna.* Believe me. I am so desolate over what has happened. I think always of the happy hours we have spent together at Torre del Lago. Though we have gone through sad times, we held together. Even now we should surely cling to one another. Please write to me and be good to me.

Giacomo replied:

I cannot work any more. I am weighted down with misery. You have accused me of something that never happened. You have spread infamous lies. No one ever saw me give Doria even the most innocent caress. I feel very strongly that it is best for us to part. Between us stands a corpse.

But a living being also stood between them—their son Tonio. He was then about twenty. He had been away at school. He loved them both, and they loved him. It was Tonio who eventually brought about a reconciliation. After Giacomo had listened to his son's pleading, he said, "I must punish her, and she must be made to suffer for what she has done. It's the only way. But I shall not punish her indefinitely."

Elvira was not in court when sentence was pronounced: the sentence consisted of imprisonment for five months and five days, a fine of 700 lire, and she was made to pay the legal expenses of the case. In addition she was convicted of contempt of court. Giacomo was touched. He thought the punishment too severe. After all, he said, justice should be tempered with mercy. He asked that the case should be taken to the Court of Appeals, and through some of his friends he approached Doria's family, proposing that the action be withdrawn on payment of 12,000 lire. The proposal was accepted, and with the money Doria's family built a house near the lake.

Though there had been a private settlement, the case went

to the Court of Appeals. Elvira was defended by three of Italy's most eminent lawyers. They were Carlo Nasi, who was known for his prodigious oratorical gifts; Enrico Ferri, the criminologist; Salvatore Barzilai, who was a parliamentary deputy and an admirer of Puccini's works. Elvira was acquitted. A humble and repentant woman she joined Giacomo and Tonio at Bagni di Lucca. Now, after a long interval, Giacomo went to work again on *The Girl of the Golden West.*

A few weeks later, exactly a year after the night when Elvira came down the dark stairway and surprised Giacomo and Doria on their way to the garden, the villa was reopened. The garden walks were swept by Gnicche, the faithful handyman. The iron table and the chairs were set out under the trees. As he worked, Gnicche talked to the dogs.

"Well, cheer up!" he said. "The maestro is coming back. The sun is breaking through the clouds, and soon there will be music again." And he murmured some lines from the new opera:

Il mio cane
Mi ravviserà?
O mia casa al rivo accanto!

My old dog,
Will he know me?
O my home by the water's edge!

Now life resumed its accustomed progress, with Giacomo playing on the piano every evening and Elvira going about her affairs. Every year on the anniversary of Doria's death a wreath of flowers was laid on the tomb of "the little butterfly." Whenever he spoke to me about her, Giacomo always used

these words. It was as though Doria had been caught up into the world of the maestro's operas. Her brother, too, who was named after one of the characters of *La Bohème,* thought of her in the same way. Once, when he was telling me about Doria's death, he said, "Do you remember *The Girl of the Golden West*? There's a passage where the girl utters some words to the man she loves, and sometimes I think Doria must have uttered them; and if she did not utter them aloud, then her heart murmured them. You see, Giacomo was composing the opera during the time he knew her."

I knew the words Doria may have spoken. They come in a charming love-song:

> I am only an ignorant little creature
> Obscure and good for nothing.
> You talked to me in new and wonderful language
> Beyond my understanding.
> I cannot explain,
> But deep in my heart I feel discontented
> That I should be so little.
> I feel a longing to lift myself to you.
> High as the stars
> I long to be near you.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Man of the World

Arnaldo Gragnani was the major-domo in Villa Puccini. Everyone knew him, and everyone knew he had Giacomo's complete confidence. So it often happened that I would row two or three kilometers across the lake and spend an hour or two with the good fisherman. I was nineteen, but he called me "Don Dante." At that time I was not even ordained into the priesthood. I wore the gonnella, and this was enough for Arnaldo, who knew how I had earned the nickname "Gonnellone." Arnaldo lived in one of the houses across the piazza from Villa Puccini. Nearly every day Giacomo would saunter out of the studio and make his way into the garden and then climb onto the pier. Arnaldo had a way of watching that glass-paneled door, and sometimes he would go to the doorway and watch whether the master was composing. Giacomo usually detested eavesdroppers, but he was very friendly to Arnaldo and allowed the fisherman to come and go as he pleased. Sometimes when great impresarios or conductors came to Torre del Lago, and asked about the next opera, Giacomo would say, "It's a good opera, and I know it is good, be-

cause Arnaldo likes it." Or else he would say, "I'm not satisfied with this passage. I tried it out with Arnaldo, and he wasn't pleased."

If he was asked why he put so much trust in Arnaldo's judgment he would say, "If I can make him sing it when he is drying his nets or working in his garden, then I know I have written something the whole world will listen to."

Giacomo was very conscious of his audience. He would say, "When I am composing I see people. I know what they want to say, I follow their psychological moods, and when I see they are distracted or bored, I know the proper medicine to give them—a great melody!"

He had the greatest contempt for critics. He said once: "They are absolutely useless, and they do so much harm. It is very amusing to hear them telling me how to compose. I write as my heart dictates. If I do not produce the music that pleases them, then it is either because I do not want to produce that music or because I am incapable of producing it. I must express my own ideas—nothing else matters."

All these are scraps I heard when I visited Villa Puccini and talked to Arnaldo in the days following the Doria tragedy. At that time Arnaldo was still bitter. The reporters came in crowds to ferret out details of the tragedy. He hated them all. He hated Giacomo's friends because they did not come running to the maestro's rescue. He despised the Manfredi family because, he thought, they were capitalizing on a girl's death. He did not forgive Elvira, because he believed her hysterical jealousy was the cause of all the trouble.

One afternoon I was singing Rodolfo's aria to Mimi for Arnaldo. We were in his garden in the little piazza. Suddenly

he got up, and with a warning glance bade me be still. Then he tiptoed to the studio of the Villa, peered through the door and returned, shaking his head mysteriously. There was something stealthy about all his movements and I knew the time had not yet come to see the maestro. He whispered conspiratorially, "Rodolfo's aria is all right—you sang it very well—but there are more fish in the sea than have ever been taken out of it. I'll sing you a song known only to Giacomo and me." Thereupon with an eye cocked on the house across the piazza, and with the air of someone perpetually wary of eavesdroppers, he sang *sotto voce* the most haunting melody I have ever heard. It was the aria *"Ch'ella mi creda libero e lontano"* from *The Girl of the Golden West.*

"What do you make of it?" he exclaimed when he had finished. "Good, isn't it?"

Even when he said things like these, he was imitating the maestro's voice and gestures.

"It's from the new opera," Arnaldo continued. "It's different from anything he wrote before, isn't it? And do you know why? He has been studying the development of modern music. He has been examining the writings of European composers. He has discovered Debussy. Now he is continually thinking of Debussy. You'll see that *The Girl of the Golden West* is different from anything he has composed before." Saying this, Arnaldo began to hum again: *"Ch'ella mi creda libero e lontano."*

At last Giacomo completed the new opera and gave it to Gatti-Casazza, who left Italy to take up his appointment at the Metropolitan Opera House in the autumn of 1908.

"We'll go along later," Giacomo told Elvira. "The première

will not take place for a while, and there are a thousand things to get ready."

"I have no intention of going," Elvira answered firmly, but without any display of hysteria. "This time I'll stay at home. Once was enough."

So it was arranged that Giacomo should go accompanied by his son Tonio, who was becoming more and more a companion to his father. With them went Tito Ricordi, the son of old Giulio, who had died and left his business to this son who bore not the slightest resemblance to the great publisher. Tito was young and arrogant. He never deferred to his composers: he gave orders. There were times when Giulio and Giacomo disagreed among themselves, but there was always harmony between them; there was little enough harmony between Tito and Giacomo. Yet it was Tito, who managed the foreign business of the company, who had done most to build up Giacomo's foreign reputation.

All this was well known to Giacomo. He could not help remembering the past. Giulio Ricordi had been more than a brilliant editor; he had been a friend. Giacomo was heartbroken when he died. He knew that never again would he have the wise counsel he received in the past, and he remembered with gratitude that Giulio had been the fourth of the great quadrumvirate which included the dramatist Giacosa, the poet Illica and the composer Puccini. Together they had produced *Manon, La Bohème, Tosca* and *Madama Butterfly.*

Those days were over. There was now only the sharp-featured young publisher who used American methods and seemed to be given over to a vast flair for publicity. Giacomo objected to the publicity. He objected particularly to Tito's

desire that the composer should show himself in fashionable places. Tito kept saying: "Forget you are a peasant from Lucca. Remember you're a great international figure." Yet sometimes Tito, scenting publicity, could be as determined to avoid fashionable gatherings as Giacomo himself. When they arrived in New York, a reception was prepared for them by a group of important stockholders in the opera company. Said Tito stiffly: "Gentlemen, we have not come to attend ceremonies. We have a lot of work to do." Then, grasping Giacomo by the arm, Tito hurried away, chuckling about how he dismayed the American millionaires—"I'll remember to the end of my life how I ruined the complexions of those people," he observed, and all the time Giacomo quivered with a mounting wrath. He began to hate Tito, saying he was a bluffer, neurotic, incapable of understanding the mind of a composer.

But though the relations of Tito and Giacomo went from bad to worse, the première of *The Girl of the Golden West* was a resounding success. It was written for America, its theme was America and the composer had come expressly to America to see the first performance. Gatti-Casazza had done everything to make the opera the most fashionable event of the season, the seats were sold at fabulous prices and the entire house was sold out weeks in advance. There were thunderous ovations and fifty-five curtain calls. When it was over, Giacomo knew that America had taken him to her heart.

Unlike Tito, Giacomo had no desire to be rude to the people who entertained him. He was swept into a round of social activities. It delighted him that Tonio was received everywhere. Giacomo was not always at his ease at receptions: he preferred a small company of intimate friends.

Caruso played the tenor role in the opera; they caroused and amused themselves together. But afterwards Giacomo decided that what pleased him most of all was a motorboat he saw in a Fifth Avenue window. He gazed at it avidly. It was entirely beautiful, and cost three thousand dollars.

Every day Giacomo returned to Fifth Avenue and gaped at the boat with the eyes of a lover. Sometimes Tonio accompanied him. "Why don't you get it?" Tonio asked. "Think how wonderful it will be to skim across the lake like a bird . . ." It was the voice of the tempter.

Next to music, beautiful women, and the Tuscan earth, Giacomo loved speed. But he was thrifty by nature, and the thought of spending 15,000 lire on a boat which might founder on the rocks shocked and terrified him. Much better to invest the money in land or gilt-edged securities. He put the temptation behind him.

One evening at a dinner-party given by the Vanderbilts in his honor, he was approached by a well-known banker. The banker, who was also a considerable patron of the arts, expressed a desire to own an original Puccini score. He said his favorite passage of music was Musetta's waltz in *La Bohème*. He was prepared to pay handsomely to have a copy of this in the maestro's handwriting.

"Would you pay three thousand dollars for the manuscript?" Giacomo asked.

"Yes," replied the banker.

"Then you shall have it. I will write it out and bring it to you tomorrow."

Two days later he bought the boat of his dream.

The boat, christened Minnie, after his heroine in *The Girl*

of the Golden West, gave him endless pleasure. The peasants were as startled by the motor-boat as they had been startled by his automobiles ten years before. The tremendous explosion of the engines brought the villagers to their doors. The excited put-put-put as the boat skimmed across the lake startled the birds from the marshy hedges. Tonio adored it, and Giacomo loved nothing better than to order Gnicche to get the boat ready; then he would go speeding across Lake Massaciuccoli's calm blue waters to Viareggio by way of the canal of Burlamacca.

Occasionally he was foolhardy. Once his motor-boat collided with a row boat which carried some of his relatives. Both boats were damaged and began to fill rapidly. Fortunately no one was hurt, for some fishermen saw the collision and came to their rescue.

Giacomo had returned from America in triumph, and the city of Lucca was determined to honor its favorite son. A solemn reception was planned. Giacomo absolutely declined to take part in anything so ceremonial. He said he would come to Lucca on condition there were no formal ceremonies, nothing but the simplest kind of meeting. His answer pleased the city councilors who wrote: "Our city cannot but admire the exquisite delicacy of the Maestro, for whom our admiration grows ever stronger and deeper. The welcome prepared for you will be of the most intimate character."

It was hardly that, but Giacomo no longer cared. He was pleased with their sentiments and with the idea of arranging the ceremonies around a performance of *The Girl of the Golden West.* At the end of the first act he received ten curtain calls. At the end of the second a commemorative tablet

was placed on the walls of the theater. At the end of the third there was a deafening hurricane of applause. Giacomo was thereupon taken to the Pacini Institute for a grand reunion with his friends. The genuine friendliness of these people awed him. The next day he telegraphed from Torre del Lago: "With my heart deeply moved and overflowing with love for my city, I beg you to interpret my sentiments of gratitude to all for the unforgettable welcome of last night." It was perfectly clear that he meant it. However, Puccini's heart was not always overflowing with love for his city. It happened once that the Lucchesi turned down his proposals for local performances of his operas, pleading lack of funds. "Then what are you going to do with all your money, O rich peasants of my city?" he cried bitterly. "Believe me, I shall never set foot on Lucca again. I am ashamed of you . . ." Needless to say, at the first opportunity he paid a visit to Lucca.

Life now flowed smoothly at the Villa Puccini. Elvira was a chastened woman, more tolerant of her husband's ways. Once she upbraided him for refusing to receive two Englishwomen, admirers of his work. They had come to Torre del Lago with unimpeachable letters of introduction, and took lodgings in a house across the piazza. Giacomo refused to see them, shut himself up in the studio and was pleased when the Englishwomen left a week later. When Elvira scolded him, he answered, "They were just a couple of old maids. If they had been young and pretty, no doubt I would have acted differently."

"No doubt," said Elvira acidly.

"But if they were pretty," Giacomo replied, "you wouldn't have been so eager to have me play the part of a cavalier."

Meanwhile he was searching for the libretto of the opera which would follow *The Girl of the Golden West.* About this time he conceived the idea of locating all his operas in different countries. He realized that this had been happening all along. *Le Villi* was laid in Germany, *Edgar* in England, *Manon* and *La Bohème* in France, *Tosca* in Italy, *Madama Butterfly* in Japan and *The Girl of the Golden West* in the United States. In what country would he place the new opera?

At first he thought it might be Africa. He saw all kinds of operatic possibilities in a libretto prepared by Tristan Bernard which described how some European explorers marooned in Africa saved their lives by imitating the natives in wild primitive dances. Then for a while he was obsessed with the thought of making an opera out of Washington Irving's *Rip Van Winkle.* He particularly delighted in the game of ninepins played by the gnomes. He commiserated with Rip, the victim of a nagging wife, the friend of hunters and dogs. But soon his enthusiasm weakened and he thought once more of D'Annunzio, who was then living in exile in France. D'Annunzio had recently written a popular novel called *Il Fuoco,* which described his own passionate love affair with Eleonora Duse. With this novel D'Annunzio had offended the taste of many of his warmest admirers. But Giacomo still respected him highly. He visited him at his villa on the Riviera and discussed a libretto based upon the Children's Crusade. D'Annunzio was delighted with the idea and promised to work on the libretto. His labors were woefully inadequate. When the libretto arrived, Giacomo announced that it was "a

weak, shapeless monstrosity, without a spark of life and written to make me mad."

Enthusiasm followed by disillusionment: so it had always been. He would leap to the skies and fall suddenly and unaccountably to the earth. In the interval between completing *The Girl of the Golden West* and the outbreak of the war, he wandered over Europe like a lonely ghost. The English writer Thomas Burke set eyes on him one day in Gordon Square. Giacomo was in London to attend one of his operas. Burke saw a slim, melancholy and detached person with his hat cocked on one side of his head, and on his face a smile of cynical amusement and utter boredom. Burke was seized with the impulse to run after the maestro and to assure him that the world was still worth living in. Giacomo was gradually becoming a hypochrondriac. He said of himself that he was like the Leaning Tower of Pisa, "which is so remarkably undecisive." Always there was that infernal search for a libretto.

During this period he chose Giuseppe Adami as his librettist. Mercifully Adami was wonderfully level-headed, and possessed a calming influence on him.

One evening in 1914 when the composer and the librettist were standing together on Emilio's pier at Torre del Lago, Giacomo's thoughts turned to Louise de la Ramée, the writer known to the world as Ouida.

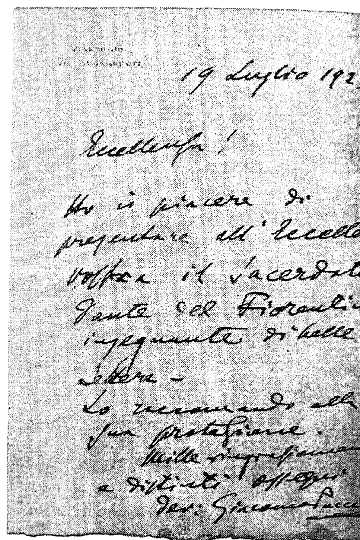
Ouida was a legend among the Lucchesi. In 1908 she had arrived in the nearby village of Massarosa to live out her declining years. Though her novels with their handsome guardsmen were still enormously popular and were translated in a dozen languages, she had squandered most of her money before she came to our shore. Old, impoverished and disillu-

:ccini, his chauffeur,
l his Buire.

.e Maestro complains
ıt the donkey is not
ɔd and the cart is a
e of junk. (See page 100.)

ıccini requests blood
ıdding sausages, salami,
d *soppressata,* which he
tends to send to Illica.
ee page 72.)

Puccini in sartorial splendor.



19 Luglio 192

Eccellenza!

Ho il piacere di
presentare all'Eccelle
vostra il sacerdote
Dante del Fiorentin
insegnante di belle
lettere –
Lo raccomando alla
sua protezione.
Mille ringraziamen
e distinti ossequi.
dev. Giacomo Pucci

A letter of introductior
to the Italian Ambassac
in Washington, given l
Puccini to the author.

Puccini in his motor-boat.

Mascagni, Franchetti, Puccini.

amous quartet: Gatti-Casazza, Belasco, Toscanini, Puccini.

Ecce Sacerdos: A few bars of religious music.

A musical motif by Catalani.

sioned, she lived in a small house surrounded by a high garden wall together with the twenty dogs she had rescued from the vivisectionists, wretched mongrels whose howling was the despair of the neighboring villagers. Peasants were kept running to market to buy food for the dogs, while Ouida lived on scraps. She rarely wandered abroad, and then only to pay a visit to the British Consulate at Viareggio.

This extraordinary woman would prepare herself for the journey by swathing herself in a multitude of dark cloaks and veils. Then a special carriage was summoned. This carriage resembled an immense black box with a driver's seat at one end and a door at the other, with some steps leading to the door. The same carriage was employed by the Mother Superior and the sisters of the convent when they went visiting the religious houses or when they went to the railway station. This black box on wheels would back into Ouida's courtyard until it came to her door; then, invisible, she would slip through the door and hide in the box.

To Giacomo and to everyone else at Torre del Lago, Ouida's strange behavior remained inexplicable. The wildest stories were circulated about her. No one had ever been inside her closely shuttered house. In a strange way we were all afraid of her. Our paths would never have crossed had it not been that the local postmaster one day received a letter in English from London, and asked me to translate it for him. The letter, from the editor of an English newspaper, said that Ouida was known to be living in great poverty in Massarosa and they were prepared to pay the sum of five pounds sterling for a brief account of her life together with a photograph. Five pounds sterling was approximately 125 lire. We therefore ar-

ranged to go into partnership. The young seminarian would provide copy about the famous novelist while the postmaster dispatched the story to London.

"They say they want a photograph," the postmaster complained. "I have a camera. There must be some way of taking a picture of her, but what on earth can we do with a mad Englishwoman who secludes herself like a cloistered nun?"

We thought for a while. Finally we decided to bribe the driver of the carriage. He would tell us the next time Ouida engaged him to take her to Viareggio. That afternoon, the postmaster left his post-office and hid with his camera behind some trees where the road turns just outside the village while I hid with my bicycle some distance away.

The plot was admirably simple. As soon as I heard the carriage coming down the road, I was to mount my bicycle and ride full tilt in the path of the horse. This I did. The horse reared. I heard the driver shouting and brandishing his whip, and the carriage began to tip over. Just as we had expected Ouida threw open the door and peered out to see what was happening. Then the postmaster took his photograph while I picked myself and my bicycle up from under the horse's feet, then dusted off my gonnella and (for this was part of the plot) berated the driver for being an incompetent fool running down an innocent cyclist.

Afterwards we retired to the post-office to develop the film. The result was everything the London editor could have hoped for. Ouida's English admirers, who wept profusely over the sufferings endured by her guardsmen at the hands of viragoes, were treated to photographs depicting a withered, ashen-faced, terror-stricken old woman framed in black drap-

eries, leaning out of what appeared to be a coffin on wheels.

On that October evening in 1914 Giacomo was gazing pensively across the lake in the direction of Massarosa where glowing lights shimmered in the darkness. "In this village," he mused, "Ouida died five years ago. Now in the darkness those lights remind me of tapers surrounding a catafalque."

"She was a strange woman," Giacomo was saying to Adami. "For some reason those flickering lamps have kindled in me a desire to write an opera on a story of hers called *I Due Zoccoletti*—The Two Wooden Shoes. You know the story? Well then, have the goodness to write for me a libretto based on it."

Adami agreed to write the libretto, and then they began wondering about the inheritance rights. Who, in fact, owned the story? Did Ouida have any heirs? If so, who were they?

Giacomo began to make inquiries. He learned that Ouida had died in extreme poverty amid the howls of her starving dogs. She left innumerable creditors. The butcher, the baker, the landlord, a host of merchants were attempting to collect. They were the heirs. So Giacomo consulted the *praetor* of Viareggio who pondered the matter for a while and then announced that the copyright of the book would be sold at auction. He gathered the creditors together and announced that they would almost certainly be paid in full because the maestro was going to buy the book.

The news fell into the hands of the press. It was soon common knowledge that Puccini was working on a new opera to be called *The Two Wooden Shoes*. The news reached Vienna. A Viennese firm offered to buy the opera outright. Then it was rumored that Mascagni had expressed the desire to write

an opera on the same theme. Amid these complications the praetor ordered the auction to take place. All the creditors were present at the auction, and Giacomo arrived accompanied by his friend Giovacchino Forzano, a librettist selected by the judge to attend in the role of expert.

Giacomo made the opening bid of one thousand lire. Forzano said, "The book is worth more," and then winked at Giacomo.

The butcher raised the bid to two thousand lire, the landlord to three thousand five hundred. All the time the landlord was murmuring under his breath: "I hope the maestro will raise the bid, otherwise my goose is cooked. What on earth should I do with a book?"

At that moment a voice from the crowd said: "I have studied the case, I am convinced that the author's rights have expired and are no longer valid, nevertheless I am disposed to offer four thousand lire."

A murmur spread through the crowd. No one recognized the newcomer. It was surmised that he might be buying the book on behalf of Mascagni, or perhaps for some other and more mysterious source. Giacomo was shocked. The book had slipped out of his hands.

While the creditors were gleefully rubbing their hands the newcomer walked straight up to Giacomo.

"You have no need to worry, maestro," he said. "The book is yours. I was instructed to buy it by Ricordi. All he asks is that you make no agreement with Vienna and that you work well."

Shortly afterwards a certain Herr Willner arrived at Torre del Lago from Vienna. He presented an attractive contract

and a still more attractive check, and both of these were placed on the maestro's piano. The check, signed by the publishers Einsenschitz and Berte, was so large that at any other time Giacomo would probably have accepted it without a moment's hesitation, but now he smiled wryly, pushed the check back to Herr Willner and said, "If I compose this opera, it will be for Ricordi."

But this was not the end of the matter. When Giacomo went to Vienna to take part in a performance of *Tosca,* accompanied by one of Ricordi's agents named Carlo Clausetti, the long bitterness between the publisher and the composer came to a head. Young Tito Ricordi displayed an alarming absence of tact. He was then in Naples. He had good reason to be in Naples, for he was preparing to stage Riccardo Zandonai's opera *Francesca da Rimini,* which was based on one of D'Annunzio's dramas. The libretto had been written by Tito Ricordi himself.

Some difficulties arose with Zandonai's opera. Confronted with these difficulties, Tito wrote to Clausetti ordering him to leave Vienna and hurry to Naples. Giacomo was wounded to the quick. The message to Clausetti clearly meant that Tito preferred Zandonai to Puccini, *Francesca da Rimini* to *Tosca.* The situation was quite clear, and Giacomo knew exactly how to combat it. He ordered Clausetti to stay by his side. He would write to Tito explaining that he was needed in Vienna.

Clausetti did as he was told. Tito's reply was swift, brief and peremptory. It said simply: "I command you to return immediately to Naples." Since Tito was the head of the firm and Clausetti merely an employee, he had no alternative and

left for Naples by the next train. The performance of *Tosca* was not impaired by Clausetti's absence, but Giacomo burned with resentment. He knew the name of his enemy.

The Viennese publishers saw their opportunity. Assuring him that *Tosca* was superb and all Vienna was at his feet, they begged for a new opera. "Not even an opera—something light and lilting will do." They offered him a fortune in return for his music.

Giacomo was determined upon revenge. He asked them to explain exactly what they wanted of him.

"All we need is eight or nine songs," they replied. "The songs can be incorporated in a short operatic piece—"

"Very well, I agree on condition that my work is presented in Vienna and in South America. The plot must be approved by me, and I must be allowed the right to choose my own librettist."

The publishers agreed to these conditions and drew up a contract. *The Two Wooden Shoes* was abandoned. Adami was called in to work on the new libretto. In sixteen scenes he told the story of Magda, the mistress of a Parisian banker. The new opera was called *La Rondine*—The Swallow. But *The Two Wooden Shoes* was not forgotten: under the title of *Lodoletta* the opera was written by Mascagni after all. It was not a good opera and brought no additional glory to the composer of *Cavalleria Rusticana.*

The news that Giacomo was composing an opera for a Viennese publisher reached Paris. Immediately there was uproar, for France was then at war with the Central Powers. The Opéra Comique banned the maestro's operas. Leon Daudet spearheaded the venomous attacks which began to

appear in *Action Française*. The French newspapers announced that "French culture has nothing to lose and everything to gain by banning Puccini's works." There was much more in a similar style. These attacks came to the ears of the good people of Lucca, who remembered that the city coat of arms bore the heraldic device of a panther. The editor of *Gazzetta* announced: "The man whom the French press once exalted as a god, because he brought crowds into their theaters, is now relegated to the last place among the clarinetists of the boulevards." As for Torre del Lago, it was on the verge of declaring war against Paris.

While the battle raged Giacomo remained in his villa, putting the finishing touches to *La Rondine*. He was working quickly. The usual period of gestation had been three or four years: he was determined to put an end to the rumors that his creative vein was drying up. He was still working on the opera when, like a thunderclap, there came the news that Italy had entered the war on the side of the Allies. The peace of our hills, our valleys and our lake was rent by violent discussions on the war.

I was visiting Arnaldo when the news arrived. We dashed to Giacomo's house. He was alone in his studio. He too had heard the news. The piano was closed, and the score of *La Rondine* had been put away.

"War . . . War . . ." he muttered. "It's the end of civilization, the worst imaginable calamity. What's the use of killing people? The worst I do is to kill a bird, and often I am so filled with remorse that I lose all the pleasure I might otherwise derive from hunting. I cannot take sides with anybody. No one can be right in a war. I live with and for my art—nothing

else. When all the fires have died down, when all the loss of property and human lives has been reckoned, then I suppose everyone will be sorry except the profiteers. It seems to me that if all men were artists there would be no wars."

The newspapers came out with headlines two inches high: WAR BEGUN. D'ANNUNZIO TO COMMAND SQUADRON OF AIRPLANES. NEW CLASSES CALLED UP. Giacomo shook his head sadly. "I shall write the funeral march for all humanity," he said.

Elvira appeared in the studio with a telegram in her hands. Wordlessly she handed it to her husband. It read: "Am enrolling in motor corps. Tonic."

Giacomo read the telegram aloud several times. Then he said, "My poor music—my poor son . . ."

Tonio went to the front. *La Rondine* lay in a drawer to await the end of the war.

CHAPTER NINE

The Maestro's Curate

The time came for me to be ordained into the priesthood. The long years of preparation and meditation behind the seminary walls came to an end shortly before the outbreak of the war: henceforward I would be granted the power to say Mass and forgive human sins in the name of God.

The ordination took place in the Cathedral of San Martino in Lucca where for centuries the Puccinis, Giacomo included, had played the majestic organ which hangs over a huge balcony. Trembling I entered the chancel with the other candidates for ordination. I was dressed in a flowing white linen robe. The Bishop pronounced the words: "Are they worthy?" Then we heard the Archdeacon saying we were worthy enough according to his frail knowledge. I lay motionless in the chancel, stretched out on the stones, chanting the litanies. Then I walked to the Bishop who placed the stole over my right shoulder and invested me with the chasuble and anointed my hands. When the ceremonies were over the Bishop demanded a final pledge of obedience: "Will you

promise me and my successors reverence and obedience?" Loudly and dramatically we answered: "I do."

We did not know that an age was passing. We saw the old faces of our friends and relatives, men like Don Antonio who had grown feeble with years, for he was past seventy. We must have guessed that the orderly ways of the past would never return. It was Don Antonio who offered to play the organ when I celebrated my first Mass in my parish church of San Michele in Quiesa. I eagerly accepted the offer of the old man whose eyes came blazing to life only when he spoke of music.

That day the church was crowded. As I entered the chancel and approached the altar a quartet was singing an *Ecce Sacerdos,* which had been scribbled on a sheet of ordinary paper by Giacomo Puccini. The organ came to life. Out of that ancient and wheezing instrument there came such a flood of jubilant chords and arpeggios, such diapasons, crescendos and *mancandos* that the statue of San Rocco with a dog at his feet carved by the sculptor Zizzania seemed to smile benignly. Never had the church resounded with such exultant pleading and exultation from the *vox humana,* never had the deep *bourdon* groaned and roared with such heavy accents of warning and pain, and never had the *tuba mirabilis* set up such a sound of trumpeting, so that the old walls began to shake. And then again, when the Mass was over and I had given my blessing to the kneeling throng, what a joyous *tintinnare* resounded from the organ loft. Don Antonio played as though he was young again, with a *saltarella* of skipping notes so gay and summery that the heads of the worshipers were lifted up in broad smiles.

"Thank you very much, dear uncle," I said to Don Antonio, when he was congratulating the exhausted organ pumper in the sacristy. "I fear however that your music was not strictly liturgical," I went on with the pious sophistication of one newly ordained and fresh from the seminary.

Don Antonio's black eyes snapped at me from under shaggy brows.

"Not liturgical? Well, let me tell you, an occasion like this cannot be adequately expressed in the Gregorian manner. The first High Mass should always be a jubilee. If those fusty-minded priests who know nothing of music and sing the mass on one note—and that note off-key—had not removed the trumpets, the cymbals and the timpani, why, I would really have been able to do you justice."

This was not the end of the music. There was more to come during the week, when my family gave a banquet in my honor and the local band played selections from *Tosca,* with the emphasis on the *Te Deum* which occurs in the first act. The feast had begun with rich chicken soup, thick filaments of egg-yolk followed by *mortadella,* lentils and a succulent chicken casserole, followed by two handsome frosted cakes sprinkled with colored candies and sugar confetti. Then my father rose with his wine-glass in his hand, and he was about to make a speech of thanksgiving when there came from outside the deafening chorus from *Manon: "Giovinezza è il nostro nome . . ."* The singers were some amateurs from Quiesa. I cast a glance at Don Antonio who was seated on my left. His head was cocked to one side, his eyes sparkled, and when the chorus was over, tapping out the melody on the table with the fingers of one hand, he started to sing in a

shaky voice from *Cavalleria Rusticana: "Inneggiamo al Signore risorto—"*

"Enough!" I exclaimed. "I must remind you, dear Don Antonio, that today is my day, and only intimate friends are allowed. No more Mascagni—nothing but Puccini!"

Then there was some shouting, and once again we sang the *Te Deum,* but Don Antonio rarely accepted the observations of his nephew and insisted that on such a solemn occasion there was no room for partiality, whereupon he proceeded to intone: *"Viva il vino spumeggiante"* from *Cavalleria Rusticana.* More drinks were served, there was more rejoicing, and late in the afternoon the guests drifted away.

After my ordination the Bishop of Lucca sent me as assistant to the pastor of the small village of Mutigliano, near Lucca. I thought this was nearly the end of what I called my Puccini studies. It was not the end, however, for it was there in Mutigliano I encountered the venerable Canon Roderigo Biagini, Puccini's cousin, a Latinist, a great scholar, author of many books and an excellent student of music. The canon was a permanent guest of my pastor, who loved and admired him. One day, when I thought the canon was away, I penetrated into the room where he kept his grand piano. It was a dark room, very shuttered and quiet. The piano was exquisitely in tune. I played a few chords, then found myself singing *"Recondita Armonia,"* unaware that people on their way to early Mass were passing just outside. I was interrupted by the canon peering through the open doorway.

"Leave your arias, my boy, and go to church," he said, and then paused, with a smile playing about his lips. "But after Mass you will come and play for me *"Un bel dì vedremo"*

from *Madama Butterfly*. Don't forget. And there's another thing—no playing on the organ. There was a young organist who stole four lead pipes to buy himself cigarettes, remember?"

Life went on pleasantly at Mutigliano until the war came and I was drafted into the army.

I decided to make one last visit to Torre del Lago, to say good-by to Puccini.

Arnaldo was there, making light conversation, deliberately joking. Giacomo was overwhelmed with sadness. He came out to bid me farewell, an old man, gray, taciturn, plunged in thought, the prey to sorrows. I stood there, holding my round beaver hat, overcome with the yearning to say many things to him, but he looked so overburdened that no words came to my lips. He nodded sadly, waved his hand gracefully and began to pace up and down the garden engrossed in his own thoughts. He looked as lonely as a grave.

Afterwards, for a while I even forgot Giacomo. He belonged to another world. He was music, and there was no music in the war. Our unit moved up to the Austrian front. We had penetrated Austrian territory, and found ourselves in a village near Cormons. One morning the Colonel sent for me. He asked if I had noticed the villagers' dislike of us. Yes, I had noticed it; after all, they were Austrians. "But we've got to live among them for some time," the Colonel said. "It's not good for our soldiers to be treated like that. Now these Austrians are Catholics, even if they are enemies, and you as a priest in uniform ought to be able to do something to make them more friendly." He went on to explain that the most important family in the village was that of Dr. L——, and it would be best to begin with them.

I spent the rest of the day pondering the problem. The sons and husbands of these people were our mortal enemies. I could not see myself marching up to the doctor's door, lifting the polished brass knocker and demanding in the name of the Colonel that our officers be permitted to pay their respects. I made a few discreet inquiries and learned that the doctor was a great music-lover and his wife an accomplished pianist.

Several nights later I climbed the wall of the doctor's garden, accompanied only by Guido Monterastelle, a Tuscan and a guitarist. In the darkness we crept as close to the house as we dared, then Guido struck a chord and I began to sing Cavaradossi's song, *"Recondita Armonia,"* from *Tosca.* The Colonel had offered me two weeks' leave if I could open the doctor's doors. No one therefore could have sung in that garden with more feeling and more earnest desire to win the hearts of his listeners.

"Go on," Guido whispered. "I've just seen a light behind the shutters."

So I went on with *Tosca,* singing *"E lucevan le stelle"* and then *"E mio padre morì,"* and when Guido whispered again, I told him I was growing hoarse; but he said, "We're doing well. Carry on." I continued with *"O dolci mani, mansuete e pure,"* and then a shutter opened and a voice said: "Bravo, if you come inside, you'll find a piano."

I made my plea to the *gnädige Frau Doktor* on behalf of the lonely officers of my regiment, assuring her we were gentlemen of culture whose company she and her husband would enjoy. I told her that though we were political enemies, we were also Christians who ought to be able to meet on friendly terms. An hour later I was the messenger of an invitation to

the Colonel to drink coffee the next day with the doctor and his accomplished wife. Shortly afterwards I went home to Quiesa on two weeks' leave.

I crossed the lake to Torre del Lago to visit the maestro, but found he had gone to Pisa to attend a performance of *Madama Butterfly*. There I sought him out, to tell him how his music had brought peace in an obscure Austrian village and how it kept up our courage in the fighting. He was the same simple-minded, generous, understanding person I had known before. The tenor who was playing Pinkerton suffered from stage fright. Hoping to steady his nerves, the conductor had told him that the maestro would be there, but this had the effect of making the tenor still more nervous. During the love duet his voice gave out completely. Giacomo went to see him during the intermission. To the tenor's astonishment he was greeted warmly, told not to be afraid, and above all he must not punish himself with regrets.

"Una stecca non è la fine del mondo," Giacomo said, throwing his arm round the unfortunate tenor. "One flat note doesn't bring about the end of the world. You'll do better next time. You'll see. This kind of thing happens to everyone who is serious about his art, and nothing gives me so much pleasure as to see one of the 'gods' taking an occasional tumble."

Then the reporters pressed forward with their absurd questions. "What is the right kind of music for people? What is going to happen after the war? What kind of mood will the people have?"

Giacomo shrugged his shoulders. He was accustomed to these questions, and knew no answers. He beckoned to me, and said, "You tell them, Gonnellone."

"All I know," I said, "is that they like your music. It's the same with the soldiers. Sometimes they like their music gay, and then at other times they like music with deep religious feelings."

It was not much of an answer, but Giacomo seized upon it.

"You see, it's all there, gentlemen," he exclaimed. "The important thing is that human emotions are not changed by the wars. Life is fundamentally simple, and so is my music. The wars pay attention to frontiers, but people don't."

It was not quite true. There were frontiers which Giacomo had been studying earnestly during the war years—the frontiers between life and death. It was during this time that he wrote the operas which came to be known as the Triptych—*Il Trittico*. They were *Il Tabarro, Gianni Schicchi* and *Suor Angelica*. Together they can be described as the triptych of death.

Il Tabarro tells the story of a lover strangled to death, *Suor Angelica* tells of a nun who takes poison and, at the moment of her death, is forgiven by the Virgin. *Gianni Schicchi* describes a mad spirit who enters briefly into Dante's *Inferno* and who impersonates a dead man. Death is everywhere in these plays: in the *grand guignol* of *Il Tabarro,* in the morbid purity of *Suor Angelica,* in the gay nonchalance of *Gianni Schicchi.* Of these three plays Giacomo liked best *Suor Angelica,* which sprang out of his love and understanding of the Church.

While composing the play he paid many visits to his sister Iginia. He would make his way to the convent at Vicopelago, where his sister was the Mother Superior, admiring the cypresses and the silvery olive-trees. When he reached the door with its small grilled window he would pull the tasseled rope

and wait until he heard the muffled bell ringing inside. After the sleepy bell there would come the sound of swishing skirts and rustling rosaries, the little grilled window would open and a thin birdlike voice would pipe: *"Deo gratias."* To this Giacomo would answer: "I am the brother of the Mother Superior. May I speak with her?"

This ceremony was always repeated in exactly the same way. There was always the embrace between brother and sister, and then Giacomo would offer gifts—a new altar cloth or a carpet or a basket of food—and afterwards one or another of the sisters hovering near would say: "You are so good and kind to the Mother Superior, now please be good and kind to us. The piano is a little out of tune—" Then Giacomo would excuse himself, saying his sister played better, but in the end after much coaxing he would agree to play for them. Usually he played from *Suor Angelica,* and when he came to the heart-rending song of the poor nun who mourns the child's death, he would look up to find all the sisters weeping. And then—here too it was as though they were following a precise formula—his sister would say, "God has forgiven Suor Angelica. So be it." *"Senza mamma, O bimbo, tu sei morto—* Without a mother, O little one, you have died" sounded like the tolling of a bell in the solitude of the convent.

Though *Il Trittico* was concerned with death it was also concerned with life, and it was not brought to birth without the inevitable love affair on Giacomo's part.

This time the lady was the wife of a German captain. She was living in Switzerland, and there Giacomo went to visit her so frequently that the authorities began to wonder whether he was a spy. The Italian Ambassador to Switzerland

warned him not to cross the border again under penalty of imprisonment. Giacomo solved this problem by bringing the lady to Torre del Lago. Elvira was in Milan, *la Tedesca* was installed in the villa, and the villagers began to regard her as a permanent addition to the household.

When la Tedesca received a telegram announcing the death of her husband on the Western Front, Giacomo behaved so tenderly to her, offered her such a wealth of sympathy and was so demonstrative in his affections that the villagers quite reasonably came to the conclusion that the *affaire* had reached a serious stage and would not be lightly broken. Elvira, however, was of another mind. She suddenly appeared at Torre del Lago, entering by the front door at the very moment when la Tedesca was hurried out of the back. There was no other suitable lodging for la Tedesca at Torre del Lago. Giacomo secured accommodations for her in a hotel at Caralecchio di Reno, a small village in the outskirts of Bologna, where her presence became immedately known to everyone in the village. The parish priest inquired into the matter. He was told that the poor widow was being supported by the kindness of Puccini, who was a friend of her late husband. When the priest heard that the lady was not comporting herself with the necessary grief of a widow, he wrote to Giacomo and went to some length in explaining that in spite of the "benefactions" of the Maestro, the gossip was widespread that she had become the mistress of a captain in an Italian regiment. Giacomo made inquiries. The accusation was found to be true, and his relations with her came to an end.

This was not quite the end, however. From time to time desperate appeals for money came from her. After the war,

when I became a daily visitor to the villa, the thought of her still preyed on his mind. One evening, when he was sitting at the piano, he suddenly pulled la Tedesca's latest letter from his pocket and asked me to read it.

"Yes, please read it, Gonnellone. I want your advice," he said, and for perhaps three minutes he remained there with his hands resting quietly on the keys, without looking up.

In the letter she asked for 10,000 lire to open a hotel in Bologna.

"Shall I send it to her?" he asked.

"No," I said. "What good will it do?"

For the moment he was convinced. He began to play again, and then when he came to a tender passage, his fingers hovered motionless and he wheeled around in his chair.

"When I think of the beautiful moments she gave me," he said, "then it seems to me that I have no right to be deaf to her plea. You see, she asks for ten thousand lire and promises to return it when her business grows successful. She asks for a loan, but I don't believe in such things, and anyway it is highly unlikely that she will make a success of her hotel. So I shall lose the investment. Gonnellone, I think the best thing is to send her five thousand lire as a gift, and then I won't have to think about the money any more."

And this is exactly what he did.

In those days shortly after the war I saw a great deal of him. I returned to Lucca, trading my green military uniform for a black cassock. Lucca had changed. Many old faces had disappeared, including my great-uncle Don Antonio. He died maintaining to the end that all this destruction of human life was no more than to be expected from the generation which

had produced Wagner, *flagellum musicae.* My mother was dead, my father was old, embittered and dejected: an unbearable sadness invaded our home. I was glad when the Bishop summoned me. I hoped he would send me to some distant parish, away from my home and away from my memories. Instead he said, "I shall appoint you assistant to the church at Torre del Lago."

I was overjoyed. It was the fulfillment of a long-cherished dream, something I had never dared to hope. Now I would be able to see Puccini every day. I would see him strolling in his garden or sauntering across the piazza, I would even see him coming up the aisles of the church. Or else, if I did not always see him, I would at least hear him whistling to Arnaldo whenever he wanted to go out on the lake. All these things occurred to me, but I did not tell them to my superior and it is unlikely that he surmised them. If he had known why I desired to go there, he would not have sent me to Torre del Lago. He would have sent me to some parish far away from the enchanted lake, high in the mountains, where I would receive a lesson in asceticism and self-mortification.

Spring: the almond-trees turning a dusky pink against the gray of the mountains and olive-groves, the blue and scarlet anemones opening their sooty centers and the sun warming the earth, the pine-groves alive with birds and the horn-owl, the *assiolo,* singing mournfully at night.

It was the first spring after the war. Life was beginning again. The young men back from the army were getting out the boats and repairing the eel-pots. The women and girls sang as they mended the nets. The mimosa trees inside the iron fence of Villa Puccini were hung with sweet-smelling

golden tassels and there was scattered pollen on the stone-paved walk. Old Gnicche, grumbling a little, swept it away every day.

When I came back to Torre del Lago as *cappellano,* Arnaldo Gragnani heaped wine upon me and shouted to his wife to open the cupboard and bring out the little dry sweet anise-flavored cakes which are the perfect accompaniment to chianti. He talked endlessly about the maestro.

"So there you are, and you'll want to see him again. Well, things are better. The *Trittico* babies have been weaned, and I wouldn't be surprised if there was a new birth coming soon. Musicians are like women, eh? They have to make new life, or their nerves play them tricks and they go mad."

I complained that the maestro had not appeared at Mass.

Arnaldo shrugged his shoulders. "Well, maybe you're expecting too much of an artist. They're funny people. They've got their own way of doing things—even their own way of doing good."

"Yes, of course."

"Besides he has never been wicked, whatever anyone says of him. Of course they talk about the poor girl—they say he shouldn't have gone to Rome. It was the going to Rome which did it, because Donna Elvira took the opportunity to spread all the gossip while he was away. You know, there are some people who say she has the *iettatura*—the evil eye. What do you think of that?"

"I think it is a sin, Arnaldo. One should never condemn another; and to continue to believe in another's sin is to deny the power of God's forgiveness."

"Yes, yes, that's right," Arnaldo agreed, and then he said, "Do you consider the maestro a religious man?"

"In his own way, yes," I said. "He often talks about the forgiveness of sins, and never better than in the marvelous song in *The Girl of the Golden West*, where Minnie reads from the Bible to the miners and suddenly launches out in praise of holiness." I began singing:

> Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.
> Create in me a clean heart,
> O God, and renew a right spirit
> Within me—
>
> And that means, you boys, that all throughout
> The wide wide world there is no sinner
> Who cannot find a way to be redeemed;
> For surely we all know in our hearts
> The best and highest teaching of love.

Arnaldo was shaking his head slowly from side to side, and smiling to himself.

"Well, yes, perhaps you are right," he said. "The way I think of it, the maestro preaches a good sermon now and then, and for that he should be forgiven a few sins, eh? It seems to me that if it wasn't for a few peccadilloes, he would be too far removed from the rest of us."

He went on: "You are young, Cappellano, and we have all heard that you are very learned. They say you have been a student at Pisa and you write beautiful articles for the newspapers which none of us can understand, but I am much older than you and I know things that don't come from books. I watch the earth and see the seasons pass, and I study the

ways of birds and of men and women. And I tell you this: there is much even an educated man and a priest like yourself can learn from the maestro. I cannot tell you how he got his wisdom any more than I can tell you why the wisteria over his gate pours out its perfume. You have only to be with the maestro, it seems to me, to know he is wonderful and true and different from all other men."

There were many occasions when I discovered how wonderful Giacomo could be.

I remember one Holy Thursday when I went on my rounds for the Pascal ritual of blessing the houses. As Lent moves toward the drama of Palm Sunday in Tuscany, the villages change their appearance. To prepare the houses and all that is in them for the coming of the priest who blesses them, what scrubbing, sweeping, scouring and polishing! What dressing of the beds with the best linens and the tables with the finest embroidered cloths! And so because my superior was an old man, the task of blessing the houses was delegated to me, and I wandered round the village with two altar-boys, each carrying a large basket to receive from the appreciative faithful the Easter offerings of new-laid eggs.

Though it was early in the morning everyone was dressed and ready for my visit. At nearly every gate someone was standing, waiting to see whether the priest would skip any of the houses; if he did the inference would be drawn that the householder was not in a state of grace. Such rare people kept their doors closed and made no appearance; the priest tacitly assumed they had no desire for blessing.

At nine in the morning when the sun was beginning to be very warm and the altar-boys had already made a succession

of visits to the rectory to empty the baskets, our little procession emerged from Arnaldo's house, opposite to Villa Puccini.

"You're not going to the maestro's house, Cappellano?" one of the altar-boys asked. "We never go there!"

"Why not?"

"He's an unbeliever."

I frowned and shook my head. In my black gonnella and snow-white, lace-trimmed surplice, with a gold brocade stole about my neck, I proceeded slowly across the piazza. The gate was open, and I saw Gnicche standing there.

"Do you think the maestro would like to have his house blessed?" I asked.

"I'll go and see," Gnicche said. "The maestro is still in bed." He went into the house and returned a few minutes later, all smiling. "The maestro is delighted that you have come," Gnicche said with an inviting bow.

I sprinkled holy water in the large room which was at once dining room, study and music room. Gnicche led the way, while two hunting dogs, Lea and Scarpia, joined the procession. We passed from room to room, and all the time I recited the ancient prayers which summon down blessings on the house and all who are in it. At the foot of the stairs I paused and looked questioningly at Gnicche, but he only nodded and motioned to me to go up. I was halfway up when I was startled by a deep baritone voice shouting, "Hey, Cappellano, come along in!"

I opened the door at the head of the stairs. It led to a large bedroom, the windows thrown wide open to the sun, the lake and the mountains. In one corner stood an enormous bed:

the maestro was lying propped up among a vast number of pillows. Books were scattered everywhere.

"Greetings, Cappellano. Arnaldo tells me you have been appointed curate here. That's good, but what about your music? Still an enthusiast, eh?"

I confessed that though my enthusiasm remained, my musical activities were limited. In fact, the last time I saw an opera was two years previously at the Teatro Comunale in Pisa. There I had seen him for an instant as he comforted a tenor. Now he looked at me sharply from under his drooping lids.

"That's right," he said. "You were a soldier then, and now who would ever dream I would be calling you *mio cappellano?*"

"Not *'cappellano,'* " I reminded him. "Here my name is Gonnellone."

"So it is!" he exclaimed. "So it is, and so it always will be! Now get on with your work. Do a good job with your holy water sprinkler and intercede for me in your prayers. Bless everything—the bed, the dogs, the sleepy lazy bones of Puccini. A few drops of holy water on my music won't hurt. Only spare the piano. The next room is my wife's—I advise you not to waste any holy water on her! She is really the most wicked creature!" He began to shout: "Elvira, Elvira, wake up! The cappellano is here. Gonnellone has come to bless you. Get a good dose of holy water. You need it."

I did not go into Donna Elvira's room; instead I reached with the sprinkler through a slight opening in the door and released a glittering shower of holy water across the bed. When I returned to the maestro's room, he was in a more serious mood.

"I am just a poor Christian, Gonnellone," he said. "I need your prayers. Whatever my sins have been, I never lacked respect for the faith of my mother. I never joined any anti-religious organizations, and so far I have remained free, in a country bitter with rivalries, parties and sects. Strangely enough I have been mixed up with priests all my life. There were my clerical teachers at San Martino and my cousin Roderigo Biagini, and then there was Father Panichelli and now there is you, Gonnellone. But I am afraid I haven't any eggs for you. All I can give you is a small offering for your church."

He laid a folded banknote in my hand, and as I thanked him and turned to go, his eyes lit upon the wide-eyed altar-boy.

"Are you going to be a priest, too?" he asked the boy.

"No, I'm going to play the trumpet," the altar-boy answered, and then the maestro laughed as though he would never stop.

"Come again, Gonnellone," he roared down the stairs.

After that I went often. For a while I went every day, stirred by the thought of learning from him who so gratefully accepted the tribute of a younger man's devotion. Was I not Gonnellone? In a sense I was one of his own creations, shaped and moulded by him. Had he not breathed into me some of his own astonishing vitality?

I would try to think what it was that made him so great in my eyes, and always I came to the same conclusion. He was so direct, so human, so spontaneous, so childlike and so averse to all shame and pretense that he was like the sun of Tuscany

which searches out every corner and cranny of the earth and warms it, not by intent, but with unconscious majesty.

"What do you talk about when you go to see him?" Don Marchetti, the curate at Quiesa, would ask me; and then it would occur to him to warn me against him, or rather against annoying him. Don Marchetti was of the opinion that there were some things one should never talk about with Giacomo.

"Never tell him he is a great musician—he knows it well enough. Tell him he is a good shot—that's what pleases him. Every time I praise his marksmanship, he links his arms in mine, and then takes me to a small room where he keeps his guns and his hunting boots. Then he will talk for hours about his guns, and he certainly has one of the best collections in Europe."

I knew a great deal about Don Marchetti's love of hunting. After offering Mass at the church at Quiesa, he liked to row across the lake in a borrowed boat (he had no qualms against borrowing), and then he would present himself at Giacomo's gate. If Gnicche was anywhere around, Don Marchetti would say conspiratorially, "How is the maestro today? In a good mood, eh?" If Gnicche's answer was encouraging Don Marchetti would proceed to unlatch the gate and ring the doorbell, and when the maidservant brought him into the maestro's presence Don Marchetti would say politely, "Signor Maestro, have you any objection if I fire a couple of shots over the lake?" This was necessary, because Giacomo was the owner of the concession. Always Giacomo gravely nodded his assent, but when the requests became frequent it would amuse him to mimic the old priest, saying before Don Marchetti had

opened his mouth, "Have you any objection if I fire a couple of shots over the lake?"

The lake was Giacomo's passion. Every morning he would leap out of bed and walk to the wooden pier as if to satisfy himself that the lake had not disappeared during the night. Sometimes he would grumble against the lake and say, "It would be more accurate to call it a pond than a lake," but the calm blue expanse of Lake Massaciuccoli always pleased him. He would look around, listen to the ducks quacking in the marshes, hum a little, and, pronto, he would be shouting to Gnicche: "*Ehi!* Start the motor-boat, and hurry!" Shortly afterwards there would be a deafening volley of explosions: whereupon all the Torredellaghesi knew the maestro was awake.

With his passion for his lake went his passion for his motor-boat. This boat, fantastically decorated with flowers and lanterns, always took part in the water carnivals, those nights of *festa* when the lake suddenly sprouted Venetian gondolas, Neapolitan barques and a host of harlequins, columbines and pagan goddesses. On these occasions he sat with the judges in the little summer house on the pier, applauding everyone and paying particular attention to the burly fisherman who took the part of Neptune, a giant of a man with a flowing beard, silver trident and a hairy chest adorned with seaweed and flowers. Then there were the saints' days with festivities in the villages. The band invariably gave a concert from his operas, and he would sit in his car around a corner from the crowded square, listening and enjoying the sights without being too much in the public eye, his pockets full of coins he would scatter to the children to buy *buccellato* and *spumoni.*

One day when Quiesa was celebrating the feast of St. Rocco, he invited me to go with him in the car to see the procession and the fireworks. On the way we recalled how the statue of Volto Santo, the Holy Face, the guardian protector of Lucca, once showered blessings on a poor wandering minstrel called Jenois. The story ran that Jenois had sworn not to break his fast until by singing on his lute he merited his meal. One Sunday he sang to many thousands, but no one gave him a centesimo. Discouraged, he entered the chapel of the Volto Santo and saw the crucifix. Christ's hands were pierced with nails, blood was flowing down His side. One of the worshipers was kneeling in the chapel, and Jenois asked him: "Who is this man so sore afflicted? Where has he been wounded? In what battle? Is he dead or alive?"

"Brother, you are talking nonsense," the worshiper answered. "The crucifix has never been a creature of flesh and blood. It is a statue fashioned in the land of Palestine by one of Christ's disciples to show what God has suffered for the world."

Jenois was moved with compassion, and he began to sing before the crucifix. Then the Holy Ghost descended from Heaven and caused the statue to move and to speak, whereupon Christ extended one foot and kicked His gold and silver shoe, studded with precious stones, toward Jenois. The minstrel was delighted. "Now I shall have my supper," he exclaimed. The bystanders however were scandalized and implored him to put the shoe back again. Jenois obeyed. Then once again the statue of the Volto Santo kicked off the shoe and a voice could be heard saying: "Keep it until you have been well paid." The bystanders filled the shoe with gold, and

all this was given to Jenois, who thereupon invited all the poor of Lucca to attend a sumptuous banquet. The moral of the legend, according to Giacomo, was that God loves all poor musicians.

When we arrived at the piazza in Quiesa the festa was in full swing. People were crowding round the booths to buy drinks of anise and water, the traditional *buccellato, bomboloni,* rock candy, filbert necklaces and gaily colored mint sticks.

"Let's take a look at the statue of San Rocco—it was carved by my old friend Zizzania," the maestro said as he led the way into the church. St. Rocco's niche was ablaze with the light of candles. As a dog-fancier Giacomo paid special attention to the figure of the faithful animal at the side of the saint. "Now, Gonnellone, if San Rocco only had a shotgun in place of a pilgrim's staff, he could be taken for me. Eh?"

As we emerged from the church someone caught sight of the maestro, and the murmur ran through the crowd: "Here he is! Here's Puccini!" Then the crowd began to press forward. With a wave of his large hand to one or two familiar friends the maestro hurried to the waiting car. He had time, however, for a word with Smeriglio, one of the Torrelaghesi who had rowed across the lake that afternoon to take part in the festa. Smeriglio had an interesting history. He was once a prisoner at the Military Penal Colony at Torre del Lago: he had committed a serious crime—no one knew what it was—and he was sentenced to many years' imprisonment. He was a Neapolitan, and like all the Neapolitans he sang. One night, when Puccini was composing, he heard Smeriglio singing a Neapolitan song. He asked one of the guards who he was.

The guard told him he was Smeriglio, whereupon the maestro asked, "How is it possible that a man with such a magnificently tender voice can be guilty of a crime?" He wrote to Queen Elena and implored her to do what she could to free him. When Smeriglio was freed, he remained at Torre del Lago, married and had a large family; and Giacomo delighted in buying spumoni and sugar-coated almonds for them.

Giacomo could be mean when he wanted to, but nearly always he was generous. There came a time when we needed a new bell for the church tower. Some members of the committee warned me not to approach the maestro—it would be a waste of time, they said. However, I remembered that Giacomo had a sentimental attachment to bells and often included them in his music. I was not surprised when he immediately offered 500 lire as his contribution to the new bell.

He delighted in bells, and he delighted in all the sounds of the country. In *Madama Butterfly* you can hear the robins making their nests, an effect which he produces by a succession of seconds, played by the oboes and flutes, and followed by muted violins, *con sordina,* in octaves. In *The Girl of the Golden West,* when Harry tells the story of how David killed Goliath with the jawbone of an ass, then as the instruments leap from one high note to another you can hear the braying of the ass. It is the same in *Il Tabarro* where Frugola extols the beauty of the Persian cat—the oboes provide the meowing of the cat. In *Suor Angelica* he imitates the bleating of the lamb, in *Gianni Schicchi* a whole orchestra of birds, and in *Madama Butterfly* you hear the frogs croaking as the maestro heard them along the Burlamacca Canal between Lake Massaciuccoli and the sea.

There was something essentially childlike in all this. He loved the sounds of nature and of children, and he could even tolerate the sounds made by the village idiot, though not for long. Giacomo liked to laugh; he had a broad sense of humor and he was convulsed when Ferruccio Pagni once made a bet that he could jump over a ditch and instead landed on his back in the mud. But he never laughed at the village idiot. Fedele walked like a drunken man, his eyes were crossed and his toothless mouth slobbered over his protruding chin. Everyone in Torre del Lago teased Fedele, except Giacomo. And Fedele, who was appreciative of the least act of kindness, used to murmur: "Yes, Puccini is a good man." The reason was simple. Occasionally the idiot would make his way to the villa, ring the bell and ask to see Giacomo. Someone had taught him a few bars from *Tosca,* and at the sight of the maestro Fedele would start to shout them in his raucous falsetto.

"Fedele," Giacomo would say tenderly, in a hushed voice, "I will give you a lira if you stop singing."

Whenever Fedele felt the need of a lira he knew he had only to treat Giacomo to a taste of his own music. As for Gnicche, he had orders never to drive Fedele away.

CHAPTER TEN

The Last Days

With the end of the war a change came over Giacomo. He was still gay, still delightful, but sometimes we detected the somber flames burning underneath.

As usual he spent the winter months in Milan, leaving Torre del Lago to its loneliness, its melancholy and its whispering reeds, the mountains in the background covered with mist. The peasants and the fishermen refused to understand why Giacomo deserted them: what was there in Milan to attract him?" they asked. In fact, he lived in Milan for many reasons. There he could see the new plays and operas and consort with the best writers—men like Giacosa, Rovetta, Praga, Antona-Traversi and Bertolazzi, who might one day provide him with a libretto. In Milan the hunt for a libretto was pursued anxiously, ferociously. Giacomo came to believe that a libretto was as indispensable to his music as insulin to his diabetes; and while working on one libretto, he was continually searching for another. To friends who sent him the presents he was accustomed to receive—ties, scented soap, perfumes, razors, scarves, pipes and cigarettes—he would answer,

"I would give all these for the title of one good book." His perpetual lament, as he lay in bed, surrounded by books and plays, was: "I cannot find it, I cannot find it . . ."

There was something mystical and obsessive in his attitude toward the characters who rose out of his imagination, those characters who came to birth in him, though they owed their conception to the poets who wrote the librettos. Wide awake, sitting motionless before a piano, he would spend the night threatening and pleading, murmuring, "Yes, yes, I understand you—I understand your loves and hatreds, your laughter and your joys, your victories and defeats. Come to me. In the silence of my studio let me come to know you, and I will give you a place in the world of the theater." But the dark moods passed, and when spring came again, he looked like someone magically brought back to life, for with the spring he returned to Torre del Lago, and once again there were those long meditations with himself as he strolled round the garden or wandered in the pine woods. In the spring the operas were born.

It was strange to watch him composing. He would sit in front of a piano with his music sheets and a huge collection of pencils near by, his hands caressing the keyboard, searching for a friendly chord. He would jot down a few notes, then play again, jot down more notes, start whistling and singing, then nod and scratch his head and talk to himself or to the invisible author of the libretto, then get up, then sit down, then stand and stretch his arms, and suddenly it would occur to him to go and take a walk in the garden. As he walked he gave the appearance of a man simultaneously frowning and smiling.

I remember one afternoon when he invited me into the

studio to hear a new composition. As he sang and played at the same time, the music was so infectiously gay that I could not sit still. He was pleased. Looking over his shoulder, he said, "That's when I know the music is good—when your legs are restless."

He began to talk about odds and ends. He said: "I poured my best music into *Edgar*. As for *La Rondine,* the feeble swallow flew only a short distance—it was stupid from the beginning, and I curse the day when I signed a contract for it." He spoke about the great operatic stars, and laughed. "I don't care for them. Why should I? The stars are in heaven, not behind the footlights, eh, Gonnellone?"

About this time I presented him with a libretto, for he had spoken often enough of his need for a libretto, and besides it seemed to me that nothing was easier than to compose some words to be set to music. I concocted a simple melodramatic plot: there was the heroine, her aged parents who dwelt in a forest, a hunter, an illegitimate child, a murder and a tempest. What more could he want? I laid the manuscript on his desk, hoping he would see it when he returned from a hunting trip in Migliarino, but no word came. I called on him late one night.

"You have come for your libretto?"

"Yes, maestro. Please give me your candid opinion—"

"My dear fellow, I think it is the kind of libretto I can put to immediate use. It's a cold night, and paper goes well on a fire. Remember how Rodolfo burns his manuscript in *La Bohème?*"

I remembered only too well, but I confess I was thunderstruck and could not believe my ears.

"Surely," I cried, "it is not as bad as all that?"

"Never mind," he said. "Write another one . . ."

I wrote another. It concerned a small boy, the nephew of Count Ugolino—that same Ugolino who is sent to Hell by Dante—and how he was sentenced to death for no greater crime than being related to a traitor. He was not executed: he escaped from Pisa in a laundry-basket. In this libretto I thought I saw qualities of drama and passion which could not fail to appeal to Giacomo. He read it carefully, then handed it back with the comment, "Gianni Schicchi went to Hell—that's enough for one lifetime. No more borrowings from the *Inferno*. Besides, it's all hurdy-gurdy stuff!"

I showed my libretto to a friend of mine, Pizzetti's pupil who possessed the kindness of heart and the musical immaturity to set the libretto to music. A year later the work was completed. It even appeared on the stage. The critics unanimously agreed that the opera was a fiasco. Moreover, they disagreed as to whether the libretto or the music was worse. Giacomo commented kindly: "How do you know that the next barrel won't hold chianti?"

One day, shortly after the death of his favorite sister, Iginia, I went to console him. He looked older than ever, worn out, sick at heart. I tried to talk about the great wealth in his work, how many people he had helped, what magnificent musical discoveries he had made. He dismissed all this with a wave of his hand.

"Yes, perhaps you are right," he said, "but I cannot conceal from you that I am assailed with melancholy, and would like to die. People say I am rich, healthy, famous. 'There goes a happy man,' they say. But how wrong they are! Success—so-

called success—only deepens the sorrow and sadness of the spirit.

"Let me tell you what happened once in Germany. They were playing *Tosca* at Hamburg. Clearly it was a great triumph. My box was filled with flowers and every imaginable gift. I was the cynosure of all eyes, overwhelmed with affection and adoration, and all the time I was utterly miserable. I left the theater and wandered aimlessly through the streets. There was a dense fog. I could not see across the street, but I was aware of being in a dark alley not far from the port. I could hear the sailors carousing in the smoky taverns, and in the light of a lamp-post I saw a small boy shivering with his nose pressed against a shop window. Inside the shop the sausages were streaming; there was warmth, comfort, rich food inside. And then I saw there was a basket full of stucchini, little statues of cats and goddesses and dolls, at the boy's feet. Then I knew he came from Tuscany, yes, from my part of Tuscany.

" 'What are you doing here, *bimbo?*' I asked.

"He was surprised by my accent, swung round and said, 'I'm trying to sell—'

" 'Were you successful?'

" 'I go round all the shops and houses, but they only look at them, handle them and break them."

"The boy was trembling with cold and hunger. I said something about not staying out on a cold night. He said: 'I daren't go back. My master will whip me, because I've earned hardly anything at all.'

"Then I poured some money into his hands. He was almost hysterically happy. We went along to a pastry-shop. He

bought himself a big dish of pastry. He said he was from Coreglia, which is not far from Lucca. His parents gave him in apprenticeship to his present master, who rewarded him only with blows and scraps of food. You know, he chattered as though he would never stop, and then he asked me my name. Was I a sea-captain? Yes, I said, I was like a sea-captain, used to sailing in stormy weather. Then when I left him I gave him a kiss, and somehow I felt *Gesu Bambino* watching over me."

When Giacomo finished the story he was silent for a little while. He had been very excited as he told the story, and now he excused himself for his display of emotion and asked me to say a prayer for Iginia.

"I am becoming an old man," he sighed, "and still I behave like a child. You see how restless I am. Elvira calls me *piangione*—and perhaps it is true I whine a bit. An old grumbler—"

He went to the piano and then wandered listlessly to the door, gazing for a while at Gnicche who was working in the garden. Then he caught sight of Elvira, asked her irritably what she was doing there and, as often before, there ensued the old worn-out argument between them. It began with Giacomo sighing, "*Quanta pazienza colle donne*—What a lot of patience you women demand of me . . ."

"I'm going shopping, and you're coming with me," Elvira said.

"No, no. Go alone. Mind, don't buy any more of that cheese we had yesterday. Get some *baccalà* and some good coffee, and drop in at Pardini's and see if my shoes are ready. Then get my prescription at Leoni's. Yes, and you might stop at Cerlesi and see if my letters have come—"

"All that?"

"Yes, why not? It's not much, is it?"

"Not much? If you expect to get all those things done, you'll have to do the work yourself. Come along. Change your coat, take off your boots, put on your new hat."

"All right. Don't yell so much. You'll scare the ducks off the lake with that ugly voice of yours."

"You're no Caruso yourself," Elvira said with an air of finality. When Filiberto, the chauffeur, came to tell her the car was ready, Giacomo said quickly, "Don't you dare to go without me. Just wait five minutes."

"Five minutes!" Elvira exploded. "We'll be lucky if we get off in half an hour."

Though Giacomo was often angry with her, he always made up to her. They would go off to Viareggio together, but once there they would separate, and Giacomo would go in search of his letters and stop for a while at the Caffé Gianni Schicchi, hoping to come across Viani the painter or Pea the poet, glad to be away from Elvira. Finally he would stroll back to the waiting car, to find Elvira already there, her temper mounting.

"How long do you think I have waited for you?" she would complain. "You're so late—I very nearly went back without you. What have you been doing? Chasing women, as usual?"

"*Pazienza, pazienza,*" Giacomo would say. "Have faith in me once in a while."

Then Elvira would smile and say, "Believe me, if I didn't have faith in you, do you think I would have stood your silly moods all these years?"

It was nearly always like this: the grumbling, the weary

recriminations, then the sudden smile. And sometimes there were long visits away from home, and at such times he seemed to escape from the grinding pressure of his loneliness, his melancholy, the quarrels with his wife.

He went to Rome to attend the première of *Il Trittico*. He was feted. He was told that the new opera was a masterpiece. A dinner was held at the Grand Hotel, presided over by Prince Prospero Colonna. At the dinner his friends came to congratulate him. The prince suggested that a new national hymn was needed, and who could compose the hymn better than Giacomo? What kind of hymn? Well, it might draw its inspiration from the hymn written by Horace for the Emperor Augustus—it should rival the great *Carmen Saeculare*. Giacomo promised to do his best, and an agreement between them was sealed with a fraternal kiss.

The composition of the hymn did not come easily. For days Giacomo was absorbed in what seemed to be a hopeless problem. A majestic granite-like music was demanded. Prince Colonna suggested that the words should be written by the poet Fausto Salvatori. Giacomo returned to Torre del Lago to work on the hymn, and wrote to the prince asking him to send the poet to Tuscany. It would be better if they worked together. But though Salvatori admired solitude, adored the pine woods and the lake, and was extremely fond of Giacomo, he was mortally afraid of mosquitoes. He had heard that mosquitoes infested the lake. He refused to come. He offered to collaborate by correspondence. Annoyed, Giacomo went to work, sending letter after letter to Rome, receiving letter after letter in reply.

When the Hymn to Rome was completed, the prince ar-

ranged that the first performance should take place in one of the great Roman squares in the presence of the royal family. The chorus and the orchestra were assembled. Giacomo was about to be received by the King. The prince was encouraging him, and telling him what a marvelous melody he had invented. Then the royal carriage drawn by four white horses turned the corner, and at the same moment the conductor shouted: "Air for the trumpets!"

At the moment when the first notes of the hymn sounded over the square, a storm hit Rome. Rain came down in torrents; lightning flashed; thunder echoed against the Roman hills; and the trumpets filled with water. The King, the royal family, the chorus, the orchestra and the audience scurried for shelter. Magically, the sky cleared. Everyone resumed his place in the square. Once again the conductor lifted his baton, and once again the storm broke loose. This time there was no reprieve. All the elements of nature were evidently determined to wreck the hymn, and when Giacomo returned to Torre del Lago, he said ruefully, "I may say that the *Inno a Roma* had an unfortunate beginning and a worse ending. It is quite evident that I am not destined for a public career, and I must say I was surprised to observe that in the capital of the Kingdom the weather was not monarchical at all."

Meanwhile he was working on the last of his operas. This was *Turandot,* a work suggested by Adami and Simoni. They outlined the plot and explained its possibilities, while he wrote down their words hurriedly in his little black notebook.

The story, as originally related by the Venetian dramatist Carlo Gozzi, was concerned with the adventures of a cruel Chinese princess, who never knew the meaning of love until

she learned it from the lips of a slave-girl who preferred to die rather than betray the master she loved. He liked the story for many reasons. It pleased him that the scene was China, a new country, one which had not yet been introduced into his operas. The theme of love confronted by cruelty delighted him. Then there was the little slave-girl, Liu, who was not altogether unlike Madama Butterfly; and perhaps there was more than a hint of Doria in her. He enjoyed the wild romanticism of the story, and for the first time he sat down to compose with an air of contentment.

In the past the gestation of each opera had demanded a new love affair and a new house. For *Tosca* he had retreated to Chiatri. For *Manon* he transplanted Elvira and Tonio to the Alps. For *The Girl of the Golden West* he retired to Abetone. Now as *Turandot* progressed, he began seriously to search for a place where he could write undisturbed.

There were other reasons which demanded a change. The government had recently set up a peat factory on Lake Massaciuccoli. His eyes were offended by the ugly factory, his ears assailed by the noise of dredgers, his noise insulted by the unpleasant smell. He could not bear it. Tuscany was changing rapidly; everywhere there was restlessness, discontent, the repudiation of the old Virgilian ways. Though Mussolini was in power, there was revolution in the air. Once when Giacomo was crossing the lake in his motorboat, a fisherman shook a fist at him, shouting, "It's yours now, soon it will be our turn!" I was with him at the time. At first he did not seem unduly perturbed by the communist threat. "Let us go home," he said quietly. But the lines on his face had suddenly deep-

ened, and that sadness which showed when he was in repose was more intense than I had ever seen it before.

"There's a new spirit strangling Italy," he complained. "There is a mortal sickness spreading through the world, and it has even come to our peaceful Tuscany. I have never intentionally done anyone any harm. I've tried to make people happy. Then why should that man hate me? There was hatred in his voice and in his face . . ."

Shortly after this incident he decided to build a villa at Viareggio. He was tired of the lake.

"I shall have pine woods round the villa," he explained. "Why? Because they have always brought me good luck. It was the same at Torre del Lago, at Chiatri, and now at Viareggio. I must hear the soughing of the pines and the soft lapping of the sea—in all nature there are no more beautiful sounds."

He took full charge of the building of the new villa, suggested alterations and improvements, and constituted himself chief foreman of the workmen. He complained: "The villa takes more labor than an opera." Tonio suggested they should have a radio. Giacomo had always possessed a childish enthusiasm for scientific inventions. He immediately agreed. One day we were standing in the garden looking at some workmen erecting the tall black pole to support the aerial. Seeing the pole protruding from the roof, Giacomo looked dejected and nervous. Finally he could stand it no longer. "Throw it down and put it somewhere else," he said. "It pierces my heart . . ." It was as though he had had a vision of the future.

The melancholy which had settled upon him became

greater in Viareggio. For the first time the sea entered his music, but he felt none of the intimacy with his surroundings which he had known in Torre del Lago. Viareggio was frivolous, given over to social life, a watering place crowded with visitors who wanted to see the composer and had to be kept at bay. Interviewers, photographers, sightseers—he hated them all. Yet he enjoyed the company of his friends, men like Pea and Viani, bohemians like Ferruccio Pagni who commuted every day from Torre del Lago, librettists like Adami and Simoni. With them he talked rarely of music: he cracked jokes, made terrible puns, spoke the salty *patois* of Tuscany. Most of all he liked to talk about hunting.

He gave himself a new name: henceforth he was "the hermit of the marshes." As the days passed he withdrew more and more into the memories of his youth. He talked often of death, saying he hoped to live long enough to see the villa at Viareggio as he wanted it to be, and above all he hoped to finish *Turandot.*

It was at this time that he wrote a sad little poem which he gave to Tonio:

Non ho un amico
mi sento solo,
anche la musica
triste mi fa.
Quando la morte
verrà a trovarmi
sarò felice di riposarmi . . .

I have no friend,
And I feel alone:
Even my music
Fills me with melancholy.

And when death comes
I shall be happy
To take my rest . . .

Death fascinated and tormented him. He paid little attention to death before: now he made it a habit to bring flowers and lay them on the tombs of his ancestors who were gathered together in the cemetery at Lucca. And once he made a pilgrimage to the mountain village where the Puccini family originated.

He reached the hills on horseback in autumn, when the rough mule-path was thick with a carpet of golden chestnut leaves. The good villagers lined the way and gave him the welcome usually reserved for a king. All the time he was bowing right and left, acknowledging their *vivas* and their smiles, calling to some by name, overwhelmed by their simple goodness of heart, especially pleased when he came upon the triumphal arch crowned with the word *Evviva* spelled out in immense letters. Then, too, there were posters nailed to the chestnut trees: they purported to describe his own spiritual pilgrimage. There were posters showing him as a boy, others showing him at work on his first compositions, others showing scenes from his operas. As he saw them he broke out into tears.

There was a time when he had laughed at death. Once, when he was a much younger man, the newspapers had announced his death. He received the news at seven o'clock one evening as he was about to go to dinner. The mistake had arisen because a laborer bearing the same name had died. As he told the story, he gave way to hilarious laughter.

"You know," he said, hooting with happiness, "I was absolutely certain there was a mistake, if only because I felt very

hungry. Then it occurred to me that I might be mistaken, and so I consulted my dinner guests, but all agreed that I was very much alive. Reassured, I plunged into my meal like any ordinary hungry person. Was I ill? Was I indisposed? Not at all. I didn't even have a slight cold. What effect did dying have on me? Well, I came to the conclusion that there should be more suffering in dying. My death cost me only a few lire spent in tips for the many telegrams addressed to my wife. My brother-in-law, the Mayor of Lucca, conveyed to her the sense of his grief. Perhaps he was thinking of a will. And then there was one telegram which read incomprehensibly: Many happy returns of the day . . ."

But that was long ago. Giacomo had changed, and the world had changed with him. At sixty-five he was becoming a very serious man. Sometimes cheerfulness broke through, but often it was a melancholy cheerfulness. He said once, after completing a phrase of *Turandot*, "My Liu sings so well I had to weep for joy."

Sometimes among friends he would say, "No more talk about music—it's a melancholy subject," but still he liked to talk about music. His opinions were always extreme. A concert of Arnold Schoenberg he dismissed as "a shipwreck in a tonal storm," but he praised Stravinsky and Debussy. Of Stravinsky's *Petrouchka* he said it was worth traveling a thousand miles to see: it was a magnificent portrayal of a peasant *festa,* the puppets and the people in the crowd all wonderfully interwoven and alive. Of Debussy he said, "He has the soul of an artist capable of the rarest and most subtle perceptions. In order to express himself, he employed new harmonic schemes which seemed at first to reveal vast new landscapes

of music. Today, when I hear Debussyism discussed as a system to be followed or not to be followed, then I feel like telling those young musicians that I know a great deal about the doubts and perplexities which assailed Debussy in his old age. Those harmonic processes, which seemed so dazzling when they were first revealed, which seemed to possess immense reserves of unexplored beauty, have less and less effect upon us after the first wonderful surprise, until the time comes when they surprise no more. Even to Debussy himself the field was closed at the end. I know how persistently he desired to find the way out."

He admired Debussy's technique, but he came to the conclusion that Debussy's world was too unreal, the colors too diaphanous, the figures of Pelléas and Mélisande too ethereal. He said of them: "They are wrapped up in Franciscan habits." He missed in them the *pane e vino*. "I admired Debussy intensely," he said, "and I remember how anxiously I waited to see how Debussy would overcome Debussyism. Now I shall never know. His death made it impossible for us to guess the outcome of the inevitable conflict."

There were others to whom he paid homage. He particularly admired the Abbé Perosi, the director of the Sistine Chapel, a man who possessed remarkable dramatic gifts until he suffered a nervous breakdown, the result of overwork and religious scruples. The Abbé lost consciousness of his own identity. He dubbed himself "Piotti," and showed other signs of mental aberration. When the Abbé improved, Puccini said: "Good. The world needs priests and musicians like him." Giacomo had invited him to rest at Torre del Lago, but the

Abbé was already in the hands of the doctors when the invitation was received.

He had a great liking, too, for Giovanni Pascoli the poet, who left Romagna on the death of his fathe· and came to live in Castelvecchio di Barga. He was a humble and modest man: the small things of life pleased him. Occasionally he would appear at Torre del Lago, but though Giacomo venerated him, they were always shy together. Sometimes they met at Caselli's Buon Gusto Caffé in Lucca, under the watchful eye of the thickset, red-haired Carluccio. Pascoli was asked to write an epitaph in verse for the ancestral plot of the Puccinis at Lucca, but nothing came of it. And for Giacomo he began but never finished a libretto called *The Year One Thousand,* which described the threatened end of the world at the millennium, the rage of the prophets, and the determination of the sybarites to enjoy themselves, come what may. At the end of the first act there was a simple cradle song from the mother, which Giacomo particularly admired. "The world will never end," sings the mother. "Close your eyes and do not fear."

Ninna nanna, ninna nanna,
Chiudi gli occhi e non temere.

Giacomo had a passion for such cradle songs. Not all of them appeared in his operas. One of the most beautiful was written by his friend Renato Fucini, a novelist and a fine hunter. It read:

The little bird sings in the tree.
Little red lips, sleep peacefully.
Little blond head, droop now and rest
Upon your mother's loving breast.
High on the bough the little bird sings.

> Later you shall learn many wonderful things.
> The little bird sings in the deep blue sky.
> Sleep, my treasure, sleep close to me.

Fucini also wrote the verses for Giacomo's *Avanti Urania,* his hymn to the sea. They were inseparable companions, given to telling risqué stories to one another, and sometimes if I was present Giacomo would raise his hand and say, "No, Renato, we simply mustn't talk like that—Gonnellone is here."

There was no end to the visitors: often they came unannounced, or they announced themselves in the strangest ways. There was Titta Ruffo, a baker who became a great singer, with whom Giacomo delighted to play poker. He would hide himself in the shrubbery in the garden and suddenly burst out singing until Giacomo could bear it no longer and stuck his head out of the window, shouting, "Shut up, you baker!" Or else his visitors came disguised, determined to perplex him. One afternoon when we were sipping a *bibita fresca* at the Club Schicchi, a young woman came and sat unannounced at our table.

"I am Pellerossa from New York," she said simply.

"Pellerossa" means "red-skin." It was evident that the young lady, though she was sun-tanned, had no Red Indian blood.

"My father is a Red Indian chief," she went on with mock seriousness.

"That's fine," Giacomo murmured, without enthusiasm.

"I am Pellerossa," she repeated. "I am making my debut in one of your operas. I can't remember the title . . ."

"Let us hope you will remember the music," Giacomo said dryly.

"Thank you, Maestro, for your deep interest. I am Pellerossa . . ."

It went on indefinitely. Giacomo was unimpressed, bored, incredulous. Who was this person who kept talking about Red-skins? She was certainly beautiful. Also, he had the curious feeling that he had seen her before. Suddenly he realized that she was playing with him, as a fisherman plays a fish.

"Who the devil are you?" he demanded at last.

She said she was Rosa Ponselle, and he was immediately captivated. The idiotic game was over.

His son Tonio arrived at that moment.

"Tonio can smell the presence of a woman the way a hunter smells game," Giacomo said. "He's a good boy, though. I don't know what he is going to do to earn a living."

Pea said, "He'll be so busy spending his father's money he won't have time to earn a living."

"You know," said Giacomo, "it's a strange thing, but when Ricordi sends me my royalty statements, the most exotic geographical names on them. Some of the places where my operas are given are not even shown on the maps. Last week I tried out Tonio's knowledge of geography. Neither of us could find Helsingfors. Do you think this place exists? To think of all the money I spent on Tonio's education!"

At that point he turned sharply to Tonio and said, "You're no good at geography. Then what the devil are you good at? Pretty girls, I suppose."

"Like father like son," said Tonio softly.

There was a great bond between them. Giacomo loved the boy, though he was always complaining of his lack of knowledge. It was not only that Tonio knew nothing about geography. According to Giacomo he could not even add or subtract, with the result that when Tonio was presented with

royalty statements and asked to make some sense of them, he would produce strange results. After going to several schools, Tonio received a diploma in engineering. He was a good mechanic, and had his father's passion for driving automobiles. Sometimes there were feuds between them, little sharp bursts of anger and impatience, but they died down soon enough.

Leoncavallo would come to Villa Puccini like some ancient relic of the past, an old man with a large head, a squat body, and short legs. He wore a mustache like the Kaiser's. His glory had faded. He was poor, and lived in lodgings in Viareggio. Everyone was aware of his great humility. Once when he was asked to play an *Ave Maria* of his own composition in a small church at Viareggio, he accepted as though a great honor had been bestowed on him. "I'm as excited as a boy!" he told me, and then looking down at his legs, "You know, Don Dante, I have only once in my life played a harmonium with foot pedals. I wonder whether these old sticks will stand it!" Puccini said of him, "He has the head of a lion, the body of a horse, and the honest heart of a boy."

Then there was Toscanini. They loved one another and quarreled continually. Giacomo's respect and admiration for Toscanini never wavered, though occasionally he would exclaim, "The man's a pig!" When Toscanini conducted one of Catalani's operas with superb mastery, Giacomo said with a touch of envy, "That pig always loved Catalani more than me. But then when I think how he conducted the première of *La Bohème* at Turin and *The Girl of the Golden West* in New York, then it seems I must forgive him all his sins. But he is a pig nevertheless!"

For a while a bitter feud raged between them. It was Gia-

como's habit to send gifts of holiday bread, called *panettone,* to his friends at Christmas. He would make out a list and send it to his baker, or else simply tell the baker to send the *panettoni* to the people who got them the previous year. Occasionally he revised the list. One Christmas, when the feud with Toscanini was raging bitterly, he was reminded that he had forgotten to strike the conductor's name from the list. Giacomo was chagrined. He tried to countermand the order, but the panettone had been sent. This was too much! He sent Toscanini a telegram: "PANETTONE SENT BY MISTAKE. PUCCINI." The reply came promptly: "PANETTONE EATEN BY MISTAKE. TOSCANINI." He never forgave Toscanini for failing to send a message of condolence after the death of his sister Iginia. When the newspaper *Secolo* reviewed one of his operas unfavorably, a mischievous friend suggested that the culprit was Toscanini. Giacomo exploded. "He's a pig!" he thundered. "I'll tell Ricordi never to allow him to conduct any more of my operas!" But immediately afterwards he would sigh, remembering the magic which flowed from the conductor's baton. "Oh, he's a pig all right, but such a great pig! Yes, he's a god, and he knows it—that's the trouble. Besides he comes from Milan, which has never given me my due. Listen. With all his faults Toscanini is the greatest of all conductors. Mugnone is good in some operas, but in others he is flabby and he drags the tempo too much. Panizza is coming along well. But it will be a long, long time before the world sees another Toscanini."

On February 2, 1923, after the gala performance of *Manon* at La Scala, arranged to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the first production, the maestro wrote to Toscanini:

Dear Arturo,

You have given me the biggest thrill of my life. Your interpretation of *Manon* far surpasses my fondest dreams of those distant days. You have given voice to my music with poetry, *souplesse* and a passionate texture that I thought impossible of attaining. Last evening I felt profoundly the depth of your immense soul and the love for your old friend and former companion. I am happy because you more than anyone else have fully grasped my youthful ardent spirit of thirty years ago. Dear creature of my heart in Arturo Toscanini's hands.

Thank you from the depths of my heart.

Giacomo

Though the shadows were falling, Giacomo was still full of enthusiasms. He went to Vienna to hear Maria Jeritza sing in *Tosca,* and returned enthralled. He placed the portrait of the golden-haired singer on his piano in the place of honor next to the adorable Cavalieri. There were more journeys to Berlin, Paris and London; the royal family came to visit him; Mussolini made him a Senator—"No, I am not a *Senatore,*" he would complain. "I am a *Sonatore*—someone who sounds out, a player, a good-for-nothing." Once he approached Mussolini in the hope that the dictator would reform the theater in Italy, but the dictator showed no interest and Giacomo came away, sadly shaking his head. "Mussolini is a mountebank," he said, and shrugged his shoulders.

Giacomo was beginning to show his age. The work on *Turandot* progressed slowly, with the usual revisions, substitutions, endless emendations, so that he would say he wished he had never embarked on the opera. He talked of making a journey to China to gather inspiration: it came to nothing. He worried about his health. The old enemy, diabetes, was

still with him. He developed a scratchy cough and a persistent irritation in the throat. Advised not to smoke, he obeyed at first, only to discover that the attendant nervousness was worse than the irritation in the throat. He worried about his diet, cut his cigarettes in half and attempted to prolong the intervals between puffs. He began to take a deep interest in medical books. In a state of chronic restlessness and melancholy, he talked of going to Vienna to consult Dr. Voronoff, the miracle-worker. He spoke of trying a new insulin treatment. When he did go to Vienna, driven by Tonio in the new eight-cylinder Lancia, he forgot the doctors and attended the opera instead. He wrote: "*Tosca* with Jeritza was sublime. More than fifty curtain calls. A real delirium. I'm well for the present. No Kaiser's doctor for me. Perhaps in September . . ."

Turandot still baffled him. He talked of putting it aside, saying that he did not feel equal to the anxieties and the excitement of a première.

He would say, "I don't want to get into it yet. Not this year. With all the work I've done I have the right to enjoy a bit of leisurely life. I am not young any more, and I feel I should take advantage of the last rays of my sunset. Maybe I shall go to Scandinavia, and next winter I intend to go where I have never been—to India. I'm told Ceylon is a marvelous place. Perhaps I shall find inspiration there."

Very early in his life he had considered writing an opera around the life of Buddha. The idea recurred from time to time, and he woud say, "I'll do it some day." Now he added: "*Turandot* is not finished yet. I could finish it in a couple of days if I wanted to, but I am not interested."

He spoke about America.

"Do you know what I would do in your place?" he said to me. "I'd cross the ocean. I'd go to the Golden West. You don't have to remain long there, but it would do you good. You can't stay in Italy without noticing the tremendous influence of America. Look at Torre del Lago. There are two classes of houses—the hovels and the decent dwellings. The decent dwellings all belong to those who have returned from America. Yes, America is a healthy nation. It's young, it's not static. They have adopted D'Annunzio's motto: 'Live dangerously.' "

He would talk endlessly about America, and now he warmed to the subject.

"Yes, go there. You'll find that in America life flows as in a movie. Of course, I see America through New York—the subway with its great boiling movement underground, the streets flowing with traffic, and great skyscrapers piercing the heavens. Everything is alive! Then there is another thing—the Americans are grateful and generous to artists. They never lose respect for a great artist, even when he is no longer at his best. That's not true here. Here, when an artist is in decline, he succumbs to ridicule. Look at poor Leoncavallo! Go to America—the future of opera lies there. Soon every large city in America will have its own opera company, and our singers will have to go there to get experience."

"Maestro," I explained timidly, "I am not an opera-singer. Why should I go there?"

"Hum, hum. But the Catholic Church is there. Yes, my dear boy, there is even a Catholic Church in America. And there's another thing—the priests in America wear pants!"

He laughed happily. He had kept faith with America, and it pleased him to talk about New York at great length. He

planted the seed. I went to see my Bishop. "Yes," he said, "perhaps America is what you need. From living among bohemians you have acquired too much of the habits of a gypsy. I grant you permission to go. Give my greetings to the Statue of Liberty, and if you can spare a few prayers, offer them for your Bishop." I knelt and kissed the pastoral ring, and he gave me his blessing. I received the sanction of the Sacred Congregation a week later in Rome, and shortly afterwards sailed to New York on the *Conte di Savoia.*

From the great liner I descended to a boarding house in Mulberry Street. Soon homesickness overcame me. I was haunted with the strains of Johnson's song of yearning from *The Girl of the Golden West:*

E passeranno i giorni,
E passeranno i giorni,
Ed io non tornerò . . .

The days will pass away,
The days will pass away,
And I shall not return . . .

One day I heard a waltz being played. I recognized the music —a terrible distortion of one of Giacomo's beautiful themes. Indignant, I went to protest at the New York office of Ricordi. The clerk, a young girl, had difficulty understanding me, but in the end she convinced me that I had no recourse but to take my protest to a lawyer.

"What lawyer, signorina?"

"Cohen, Cohen and Cohen."

I shook my head. Was this like the *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus?* I went away, puzzled. Out of a melancholy heart I wrote a long letter to Giacomo:

. . . I am afraid of life here, where everything is titanic. I hope to be assigned as curate in an Italian-American church, but I shall have to wait for a vacancy. An elderly woman who publishes a newspaper for Italian immigrants has asked me to help her at the newspaper office every evening. I suspect the real reason she desires my company has nothing to do with my literary ability. She is afraid of the enormous rats which run along the greasy linotype in her dingy editorial office. Last night they devoured our supper—two slices of salami between two crusts of bread. Tell me, should I abandon the woman to the rats and return to the birds and the bohemians of Torre del Lago?

The answer was prompt and painfully abrupt:

You are worse than Manon in the desert of New Orleans—lonely, forsaken and abandoned to shame. You are there, and must stay there. If you are homesick, I am far from well. Each one has his troubles.

Shamed by him, I determined to stay, even to prolong my stay indefinitely, but within a year I was back in Viareggio. It was the summer of 1924. He was terribly changed. His letters, never long or detailed, but always pungent, had done nothing to prepare me for the change. I buttonholed Tonio. No, there was nothing wrong, only a perpetual sore throat and a vast amount of coughing. The doctors could provide no explanation. It might, of course, be diabetes, nothing worse than that, or it might be worry over *Turandot*. "He used to be able to forget his worries," Tonio said, "but not now. He would go duck-hunting or just sit in the little thatched summer house on Gragnani's pier, watching the birds on the lake. But it does him no good now. If he goes out, he coughs. He still goes to Torre del Lago in search of relaxation, but he can't find it."

At that moment Giacomo came back from a hunting-spree on the lake.

"I'm no good at all," he complained. "I think my eyes are failing."

We thought he was being unnecessarily alarmed, but it was no more than the truth. Diabetes, aggravated by the condition of his throat, was slowly impairing his vision, and one eye was already useless.

"Your eyes are all right," one of his friends was saying. "You might as well confess—you just didn't shoot straight."

Gnicche knew what was wrong. He would arrange to invite Giacomo to a hunting-party: whenever they saw Giacomo aiming at a bird, someone else would surreptitiously aim at the same bird at exactly the same moment. Credit for the successful shots would be given to Giacomo. Seeing the game he brought down, he would say, "There's life in the old veins yet." The trick, however, could not be repeated too often without danger of being discovered.

One morning I met him in front of the village post-office. It was several days since I had seen him. He looked worse than ever, pale, with no animation in his face, no expression.

"How are you, Maestro?" I asked.

He was about to answer when an attack of coughing seized him. His face grew purple. When the coughing ceased, he explained there was some obstruction in his throat. He took a piece of paper from his pocket and asked me for a pencil. Placing the paper against a tree-trunk, he began to draw a diagram of the interior of a mouth. He pointed to the place where there was "a tiny little pimple trying to strangle me."

He paused for a moment.

"The doctors say its nothing," he went on, "but I'm going to see a throat specialist in Florence. The thing is getting on my nerves."

With a wave of his hand and a whispered, "So long, Gonnellone," he signaled the faithful Filiberto to drive him back to Viareggio.

Now we all knew he was sick, perhaps dying. The rumor ran through all the towns and villages of Lucchesia. Torre del Lago sent the news to Quiesa, Quiesa passed it on to Maggiano, Sant' Anna, Mutigliano, a hundred other places. People would stop me in the street: "Is it true the maestro has a tumor?" I would shake my head, not daring to tell what I knew; for Tonio had told me, after Giacomo went to visit the specialist in Florence, that the pimple was a cancer.

"Can nothing be done?" I asked Tonio.

Tonio could only reply that the doctors were saying it was too late for an operation.

"Then there is no hope?"

"Professor Gradenigo of Naples believes radium treatment may help. They say there is a Dr. Ledoux at Brussels who has cured many cases of cancer."

Elvira was not well. Neither she nor Giacomo was informed of the nature of the illness.

"Will he go to Brussels?" I asked.

"He says he will do anything to get rid of that coughing. We have told him he has some kind of infection due to excessive smoking, or perhaps its due to an old injury in his throat when he swallowed a duck-bone."

I went to see Giacomo.

"Well, I'm not so stupid as to underestimate the seriousness

of the affair," he said. "If only I can finish *Turandot!* Yes, God's will be done! I'll go to Brussels. I'll try anything the doctors recommend. I've summoned Toscanini. I want to talk to him about *Turandot*. He is its custodian and godfather. Now all that remains unfinished is the last duet and the finale."

Like someone intent on revealing the springs of his life, he said:

"Until recently I have always been a musician of small things, but now *Turandot* threatens to burst through the frame—it is large, grandiose. I say that, but then I remind myself there is always little Liu, who is delicate and feminine like so many of my characters. I have worked slowly in my own way, but deliberately and always with a broad outlook on things. I have tried to write for the people. I would have written for the Negroes if I had known them better. . . . They have accused me of being sentimental, saying that sentimentality is a sign of weakness. Well, I prefer it that way—I am incapable of creating anything that does not come from the heart. I love tranquillity and silence. Hunting intrigues me, but I have no taste for the delights of fame. I loathe banquets and receptions. I cannot live without creating music. It is my mode of living, of enjoyment, my way of exalting myself. I have always borne a burden of melancholy. I have always had professional enemies, but I think I have done honor to Italy and to my Lucca, so dear to my heart."

He showed me a letter he had sent that morning to the Mayor of Lucca. The letter was in reply to an invitation to take part in the reorganization of the Giglio Theater.

I must say I am in perfect accord with your plan concerning the Giglio Theater. Lucca is in need of a great whiff of theatrical air. I have been preaching the same thing for a long time. Something, too, must be done for the band and the Cappella Choir, for these are institutions dear to the Lucchesi and worthy of their traditions. Do not begrudge the money you spend on the education of the public.

When I think of these institutions, I remember those days when my passion for art was kindled in the Cappella Choir. Those performances, which touched me so deeply, reverberate in my heart. I feel the excitement of my youth, and then I remember once again, and this time with real regret, my escapades and the slaps I received from the venerable Angeloni.

Depend upon my fervent support for your enterprises, my dear Mayor.

I remember the last day he spent in Viareggio. It was twilight, and the people were going down to the beach to watch the ceremony of sunset. A breeze stirred the palms along the promenade. The bells of San Paolino, San Andrea and San Francesco filled the perfumed air: the scent of the flowers, the scent of the pine-groves. The small boats were gliding past the lighthouse far out at sea. The Caffé Schicchi was bustling with life. Pea, Vianni, Nomellini, Magrini—they were all waiting for the maestro, but Giacomo was in his villa with Toscanini. He was playing *Turandot* on the piano. He looked desperately ill. At the end of the first act he called to Elvira to bring him coffee, then he sipped the black liquid gratefully and went on playing.

"Here Turandot sings," Giacomo said excitedly, and then turned to Tonio: "Put a cigarette between my lips."

Tonio lit a cigarette and put it between his father's lips.

Giacomo went on playing. Toscanini was following the score. Giacomo was looking up edgewise to see the expression on the conductor's face. There were tears in Toscanini's eyes. Giacomo winked at me and whispered, "Eh, boy, do you see that? This music must be good if it makes *testa piccina* (tiny head) cry."

One by one the lights in the villa went out. The little group, which had gathered together to hear the first reading of *Turandot,* rode through the night to the railway station, moving in darkness like mourners at a funeral. Only Elvira, at the doctor's orders, remained behind. We were going to put Giacomo on the Rome-Paris express. Tonio joined his father in the train. Giacomo lowered a window of the *wagon-lit* and leaned out, saying his farewells to the group standing forlornly on the platform. His last words were to Toscanini:

"Arturo, if anything happens to me, do not abandon my dear beautiful princess, my *Turandot*—"

Then he withdrew hastily: the excitement had brought on a hemorrhage of the throat.

The train began to move away, the wheels turning with a sobbing rhythm. Someone remarked that Verdi had been inspired by the movement of train-wheels to compose the accompaniment of the *"Miserere"* in *Il Trovatore:*

Miserere di un anima già vicina alla partenza che non ha ritorno.

Pity the soul which is nearing the place whence there is no return.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Curtain Falls

Giacomo wrote from his hotel in Brussels:

I like to listen to the bells. They are very impressive—these carillons, very musical, but I find myself dreaming of the humble little bell at Torre del Lago. When the wind blew from the sea, I could hear it distinctly in my house. "Don Don" . . . And I used to say: "Gonnellone is saying mass now."

There were other letters written in the brief space when he rested at the hotel, visiting the Institut de la Couronne every morning, then spending the afternoons strolling in the streets, happy among crowds. In one letter he wrote:

I went to the movies today. This evening I'll go to the Théâtre de la Monnaie, and see *Madama Butterfly*. Brussels is a great city with a unique architecture, but truly I am interested in only one thing: my health. You may say I am selfish, but I cannot help it.

A few days later he was in the Institute, where Dr. Louis Ledoux began a long complicated treatment: first, an external application of radium, then a rest for about a week, then an internal application by means of glass needles. So that Gia-

como could breathe when the glass needles were inserted through the mouth, an incision was made in his throat. The maestro scribbled on pieces of paper what he wanted to say to Tonio: "How long shall I keep these needles?" . . . "Did you write to Mama?" . . . "I don't think I have any fever today" . . . "How is the house at Viareggio?" . . .

Tonio was given a room at the Institute, to be near his father. Fosca, Giacomo's stepdaughter, came to join him. Only Elvira still remained at Milan, ill with pneumonia.

Bulletins reached Torre del Lago from Brussels. We learned that Dr. Ledoux had not given up hope. Giacomo was desperately ill, but according to the doctor there was always the possibility of recovery. "The external application of radium has checked the hemorrhage," Tonio wrote. "Everyone is encouraged. He is allowed to smoke a cigarette, and today we left the Institute together to have lunch in town."

The news was wonderful. Though it was now November, the time of storms, mist and sadness, suddenly it seemed as though spring had miraculously come to the lake. The sun broke through the clouds, the lake changed from a dull leaden color to a perfect heavenly blue, and the first blanket of snow glistened on the Peak of the Eagles.

I sent off a telegram, congratulating him on his splendid fight against illness and assuring him of my ardent prayers. He replied on the back of a visiting card, writing in the familiar loose inky scrawl which was the despair of the copyists. On November 22, St. Cecilia's day, I sent him flowers, according to a long-standing custom. Two days later Dr. Ledoux performed an operation on his throat. The ordeal lasted three hours and forty minutes: no general anesthetic

could be given, and he received only a local anesthetic. We heard from Tonio:

> He has survived the operation, and though he is pitifully thin, everyone is amazed at his strength. He cannot speak, but he smiles at us. The young Sister of Charity, who came in a while ago with your flowers, prays for his recovery. She looks like Suor Angelica. There was an older nun who would always come into the sickroom with a preliminary rattling of rosary beads. Papa liked her, but he preferred someone young and pretty. So the Mother Superior has assigned Soeur Marie to him. This little nun walks so slightly she seems to float in and out of the room like an angel.
>
> After three terrible days the fever has subsided. Fortunately his heart is strong. The doctors say he does not suffer pain now. It is only his nerves. The needles are still in his throat and he has to be fed through the nose, but he reads the newspapers. Tomorrow he will be allowed to sit up in the armchair. In a few days they will remove the needles. Dr. Ledoux is radiant. He said: "Puccini will pull through."

When this news reached Torre del Lago, we prepared for his return, which could not be long delayed. We assumed he would pass his convalescence among us. Arnaldo and Gnicche held long conferences on how to make him comfortable. It was agreed that the villa by the lake was infinitely preferable to Viareggio.

I was staying at Quiesa, and decided to take the train to Viareggio where Leonardi, the husband of Fosca, was staying. God knows why I took the train. Everyone was talking about Giacomo. The carriage was thick with rumors, stories, quotations from the newspapers. Some said he was dying; others that he was on the road to perfect recovery. Leonardi was

waiting for me at the station, but he paid no attention to me. There was a telegram in his hand. As I hurried toward him, I watched him reading it nervously, then he turned up the collar of his coat and hurried to the car.

I half knew what had happened. At the villa I found Filiberto, the chauffeur, walking sadly in the wind-blown garden.

"What has happened?"

"Nothing, nothing, but—"

"Well?"

"I tell you, I have a feeling of foreboding. Imagine, he was on the operating table for three hours. Can a man stand such a strain? Look about you, Cappellano. Everyone is melancholy. I can't sleep at night. Sometimes I swear I hear the sound of his piano. You may say it is just a fantasy, for after all he is a long way away in a hospital—"

Soon afterwards, in that wild garden, I learned that he was dead.

It had happened the previous afternoon that Giacomo collapsed in his armchair. Radium must have put too great a strain on his heart. Dr. Ledoux removed the glass needles from his throat, but it was already too late. All through the night Giacomo fought death valiantly, but the enemy was already within the gates.

Very early that morning Bishop Micara, the Apostolic Nuncio at Paris, was summoned to the bedside. As he entered, all the other occupants of the room retired to the corridor. After the Bishop had spoken privately to Giacomo, they were recalled to witness the blessing and the prayers. A wonderful calm had come over the dying man. He smiled at Tonio kneeling beside the bed, at Fosca and at the little Soeur Marie. He

repeated unfalteringly the mighty litanies of the Church. After the last sudden exclamation, his lips moved again. Tonio leaned up and caught the dying words: "My poor Elvira! My poor wife!"

Then everything was silent in the large hospital where the white-robed nuns floated like gulls. Outside the hospital, life flowed unchecked, and at the corner of the Rue de la Couronne an organ-grinder played a sentimental waltz which seemed, in that dreary wintry afternoon, as sweet and fresh as lilacs. Giacomo lay on a narrow metal bed. His face had the pure features of a boy. He was dressed in a simple black suit, his hands folded as if in prayer. Pain had deepened the cavity of his eyes, but his lips remained unchanged under the graying mustache. Around him were heaped a profusion of flowers. Someone was singing the words of Rance in *The Girl of the Golden West*: "He whom you loved will not return to you."

The body was removed from Brussels to Milan, where it found a resting place in the private mausoleum of Toscanini. At Lucca, Viareggio and elsewhere memorial services were held for him. He left no formal will, only a letter written many years before when he was about to make an automobile journey to Vienna. He had been afraid of accidents ever since his car overturned. In the letter he wrote: "In the event of my death I name my wife as *usufruttuaria* of half of my patrimony and my copyrights with the privilege, if she chooses, of living in one of my three houses at Torre del Lago, Viareggio and Chiatri. And as universal heir of all my estate and my copyrights I name Antonio Puccini who makes his home with me."

Some relatives contested the will on the grounds that there were no formal bequests; and they pointed out that Tonio, who was born before the legal marriage with Elvira, was illegitimate. They had forgotten that the birth of Tonio had been registered officially at Lucca under the name of Tonio Puccini, son of Giacomo. They had forgotten, too, that after the marriage Tonio was legally adopted by royal decree.

The last bequest had been spoken at the railway station: Toscanini reverently accepted it. He arranged with infinite care the first production of *Turandot*. On April 25, 1926, La Scala was filled to overflowing. The great opera house which had given Giacomo his first triumph with *Manon*, had hissed his *Madama Butterfly*, and made amends thirty years later with a magnificent performance of *Manon*, waited for the moment when the conductor lifted his baton. Perhaps never before had Toscanini conducted an opera with such emotional intensity. When he came to the place toward the end of the third act where Liu, the slave-girl, commits suicide, he put down his baton and turned to the audience, saying: "The opera ends here, for the maestro died at this point."

In November of that year *Turandot* was produced at the Metropolitan Opera House with Maria Jeritza as Princess Turandot, and Lauri-Volpi as the Unknown Prince. Under Toscanini's direction the third act was completed by Alfano from the composer's sketches.

Plans went forward for the removal of the body from Milan. Lucca, his birthplace, claimed him. Viareggio contended that he was rightfully theirs, for he had spent the last days of his life there, and had he not composed *Turandot* among them? To all these claims Torre del Lago, speaking in the person of

Gnicche, said simply: "He must come here, because this is where he wished to stay. I remember very well the day when he paced off a stretch of land in his garden. Suddenly he swung on his heel and he said to us: 'Here I must be buried when my time comes. Mind you, I don't want anything elaborate—just a plain stone.' "

So to Torre del Lago his body was taken on November 29, 1926, the second anniversary of his death. The station was draped in black. People crowded from all the villages around. Hundreds of arms were stretched out, begging the honor of carrying his body to the church. A public notice read:

> Today, on the second anniversary of his departure, all that remains of Puccini will rest under the arch of his designation in his house at Torre del Lago, near the things he loved most. The Great One will pass again for the last time along the white road which leads to the lake. His spirit, here present, vibrates like David's harp. Display your best draperies from your balconies, strew your casements with the golden broom which is now in flower and which he loved so well. It is not a funeral which passes. Giacomo Puccini is not dead.

In the church there was a solemn Mass and a blessing of the body. Then an orchestra played from *Le Villi,* from *The Girl of the Golden West* and from *Suor Angelica.* Finally there was the funeral march from *Edgar.* As the cortege moved along the road from the church to the villa, the people wept and crowded the windows and threw carnations, roses and kisses at the horse-drawn carriage.

Today his body reposes under a green sarcophagus in a little chapel close to the room where he worked. The room has been left unchanged. The piano is still cluttered with papers,

photographs, work-sheets, letters. There is a blotter: you can see where he scribbled the words: "Turandot Turandot." On the blotter lie his spectacles. Books are scattered about, and the waste-paper basket is filled with scraps of sheet-music torn to pieces. In his aviary the birds are singing.

Six years after his body was removed to Torre del Lago, a group of friends persuaded the Italian government to sanction a summer repertoire of Puccini's operas to be presented in front of his villa and on the lake. The company was called *Il Carro di Tespi* (The Thespian Cart).

The theater arrived early one afternoon. It was a marvel of ingenuity and modern organization. It had a seating capacity of 3,000 in the stalls and 3,000 more in the gallery: the whole theater was portable. The stage, set on floats in the lake, covered an area of 700 square meters and the proscenium was 27 meters wide. These enormous proportions did not prevent the theater from being moved from city to city in eight trucks with trailers. They carried their own scene-painters, dressing-rooms, dressmakers, their own electric plant and their own lights.

Two hours before the opening, boats of all kinds came from all the surrounding villages to crowd gunwale to gunwale in front of the Cart. Darkness came down on the silent lake; the birds slept; not a sound broke the stillness. Then the great orchestra began the opening of *La Bohème,* and when Beniamino Gigli sang: *"E quì la luna l'abbiamo vicina,"* the moon seemed to hang lower in the sky, closer to the earth. The lake carried his voice to the distant hills, and it seemed to me that Giacomo was present again. I remember looking toward his window in the white-walled villa. Was it some trick of the

moonlight, or did the shutter move? Whose voice sang in my heart: *"Bravi, ragazzi"*? I could have sworn it was Giacomo.

When the performance was over the actors in their stage-costumes came and knelt beside his tomb. Later, with heads bowed and hushed footsteps, they gathered round his piano, and made it play again. There were many in Giacomo's family, Arnaldo, Gnicche, Tonio and others, who felt then that life had triumphed over death.

Many years have passed since that wonderful August night: all Lucchesia was trampled by the feet of marching armies. After the second World War Arnaldo sent me the first news from Torre del Lago. He wrote:

> It would take a month to tell you only a small part of our troubles. We dug refuges in the swamps around the lake where we used to go hunting with Sor Giacomo. The women and children stayed here, but we men had to keep moving all the time through the marshes for fear of being deported by the Germans.
>
> Our little church has suffered a great deal: the belfry was mined. The explosion was so tremendous that all the windows of my house were shattered. Seven grenades fell in our courtyard, one broke through the door and entered the cellar, but it did not explode. When you return to Torre del Lago I'll show it to you. It is still pinned underneath the wall.
>
> The maestro's villa and the museum have no windowpanes. Otherwise the Germans have respected the place. They did not touch anything, but as the proverb goes: "What the Barbarians didn't do, the Barberini did." One sacrilegious souvenir-hunter stole three of the maestro's guns, including the one given to him by Caruso during the first performance of *Tosca* in London.
>
> Tomorrow I shall go down and scrub the inscription over the door of the house. Do you still remember it?

Yes, I remembered the inscription. It read:

> *The people of Torre del Lago place this stone here as proof of their devotion to the house where there were born the innumerable dream creatures of Giacomo Puccini . . .*

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