

MANON LESCAUT

Puccini

Act I

A wide square near the Paris Gate, at Amiens.

Students court the girls as they stroll light-heart-edly up and down. The young René Des Grieux is attracted by the beautiful young Manon Lescaut, as she gets off the stagecoach with her brother Lescaut, a sergeant of the king's guards, and Geronte de Ravoir, an elderly and wealthy treasurer-general. Noticing that the maiden is momentarily unaccompanied, Des Grieux approaches her. The girl reveals to him that her father has arranged for her to enter a convent the following day. Des Grieux is so struck by her beauty that he promises to impede her father's wishes. Geronte, too, has taken a fancy to Manon and has ordered a carriage with which to abduct her as soon as darkness falls. Informed of this scheme, Des Grieux takes advantage of Lescaut's absence at the gaming tables, to elope with Manon in the carriage ordered by Geronte. When the roué realizes he has been duped, he flies into a rage. But Lescaut calms him; he knows his sister's weaknesses and reassures Geronte that she won't be long in dropping the student, for she prefers a luxurious and spoilt life to one of poverty and hardship.

Act II

In Paris. A sumptuous salon at Geronte's house.

Having abandoned Des Grieux for the ease and affluence of Parisian high life, Manon is now living in the lap of luxury with Geronte. Nevertheless the girl yearns for her ardent young lover, and asks her brother for news of him. Lescaut informs her that he has convinced Des Grieux to try his luck at gambling. If he wins enough money, he will be able to live with Manon again. After a morning taken up, as usual, by madrigals and dancing lessons, attended by admiring guests, Manon receives an unexpected visit from Des Grieux. At first the student reproaches her for having jilted him. But again he succumbs to her charm and falls into her arms. When Geronte discovers her betrayal, he has no hesitation in reporting Manon to the police. The girl's desire to take away gold and jewellery prevents her from escaping in time and, much to Geronte's satisfaction, she is arrested. Lescaut and Des Grieux manage to get away.

Act III

Le Havre. An open square near the port.

Manon has been condemned to deportation and is in prison awaiting departure. Thanks to a sentry bribed by Lescaut, Des Grieux informs his beloved that her brother has organized a plan of escape. But it is thwarted and Manon is led off with the other women deportees to board the ship for America. After attempting in vain to rescue his beloved from her fate, Des Grieux implores the ship's captain to take him on board too, so that he can stay with Manon.

Act IV

In America, A vast plain on the borders of New Orleans.

Manon and Des Grieux have fled New Orleans. Exhausted and dying of thirst, the girl collapses. While Des Grieux goes off in search of help, Manon re-lives her past as in a nightmare. When her beloved returns, she dies in his arms.